

**Religious Authority and Pastoral Care
in Tibetan Buddhism:
The Ritual Hierarchies of Lingshed Monastery,
Ladakh**

by

Martin A. Mills

Ph.D

University of Edinburgh

1997



DECLARATION

I, Martin A. Mills, declare that this thesis, which is approximately 100,00 words in length, has been composed by me, and that the work contained herein is my own. Moreover, all photographs and diagrams contained within have been composed by myself, unless explicitly stated otherwise. This work has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Martin A. Mills
16th March 1997.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	vi
A Note on Transliteration	vii
Introduction	1
PART I:	
Chapter One: Buddhism in Ladakh	19
Chapter Two: Kumbum Monastery - Life as a Monk	34
Chapter Three: Kumbum Monastery - Architecture, Space and Economics	54
Chapter Four: Conceptualising Kumbum Monastery	92
PART II:	
Chapter Five: Introduction to Pastoral Care in Lingshed	104
Chapter Six: Tantric Buddhahood and the Divine Feast	127
Chapter Seven: Dharma Protectors and Skangsol Rites	169
Chapter Eight: Sponsorship and Benefit in Skangsol	189
Chapter Nine: Textual Traditions and the Reading of Religion	201
Chapter Ten: Pollution Concerns in Lingshed	214
Chapter Eleven: Purification and Offering	238
Chapter Twelve: Local Gods and the Embodied Person in Lingshed	260
PART III:	
Chapter Thirteen: The Limits of Clerical Monasticism	283
Chapter Fourteen: Yogic Renunciation and the Structure of Gelukpa Monasticism	295
Chapter Fifteen: Sources of Blessing, Sources of Danger - Kumbum's Relationship with Incarnates	318

Chapter Sixteen: Divine Emanation and Local Domains	336
PART IV:	
Conclusion	358
APPENDICES:	
Appendix A: The Ritual Calendar of Kumbum Monastery	365
Appendix B: Texts Used in Lingshed Ritual Practice	373
Appendix C: Glossary of Ladakhi Terms	376
Appendix D: Transliteration of Proper Names	385
Bibliography	388

Acknowledgements

This work simply would not have existed without the kindnesses of more people than it is possible to mention in such a short space. Without doubt however my greatest debt of gratitude must be to the many people of Lingshed Village and of Ladakh whose generosity and patience with my endless clumsy questions will always remain an example to me. They did their very best to explain an iceberg of understanding, of which I struggled to grasp even the tip. Particular mention must of course go to the extraordinary Gyelong Karma Namgyal, who first invited me to Lingshed and who, along with his inestimable family, saw to my every need and forgave my numerous mistakes and unmeant rudenesses.

Thanks must also go to Geshe Ngawang Changchub and the various officers of Kumbum monastery who gave their time and knowledge for interviews and queries during my months there: particularly *lopon* Norbu, the *umdzat*, the *u-chung* Sonam Wangdus, *gyesgus* Tsewang Norbu, and *zurba* Sonam Rinchen. Others who contributed included Tsering Samdrup, Tsewang Jorgyas, Ngawang Jigmet, Eshy Namgyal, Ngawang Tsering, Tsewang Dorje, Tsewang Samdrup and particularly Lobzang Tsedun. Amongst the laity, thanks are also due to the inimitable Thubstop Dorje, to Dechan Gyaltzen, to Sonam Dorje and Sonam Wangdus, and all the people of the Shalatospa, Bandoma and Sharchogspa households.

In the capital Leh, I must extend my gratitude to Gyelong Thubstan Paldan and Mr. Tsering Norbu of the Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy, to Tashi Angchuk and everyone at the Student Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh, the Leh Nutrition Project, the Katar household and T.T. Help and a sense of perspective were provided by Tashi (and family), Mick, Rebecca, Kim and of course Jill and Henk.

In Britain, thanks go to my supervisors Dr. Jonathan Spencer and Dr. Nick Tapp for encouraging me through the wilderness of Buddhist studies, and never giving up on my writing style; Cathy Cantwell, Paul Dundas, Maria Phylactou and Thubstan Chogyal for external support and clarification; and my wife Nick for her encouragement, experience and proof-reading skills. Thanks are also due to the Royal Anthropological Institute's Radcliffe-Brown Prize and the Spalding Trust for their generous funding of this work.

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

(Regulation
3.5.13)

Name of Candidate MARTIN ALWIN MILLS
Address 32, 34 DALMEY STREET, EDINBURGH EH6 8PG
Degree Ph.D. Date 16.3.97
Title of Thesis RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND PASTORAL CARE IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM
THE RITUAL HIERARCHIES OF LINGSHEDE MONASTERY, LADAKH.
No. of words in the main text of Thesis 100,000 (ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND)

The thesis provides an ethnographic and anthropological account of Tibetan Buddhist ritual and monasticism in Lingshed village in Ladakh, North-West India. Two fundamental issues are addressed: firstly, the nature and form of religious and ritual care provided by the monks of Lingshed monastery to those villages in its vicinity which act as its patrons; secondly, the structure and ideology of Tibetan Buddhist notions and practices relating to ritual and religious authority, especially those of the Gelukpa Order of Tibetan Buddhism, of which Lingshed monastery is a part.

Addressing the relationship between local understandings of the purposes and methods of Buddhism, the thesis presents a microscopic analysis of the relationship between ritual practice and indigenous notions concerning the person as ritual actor and the nature of divinity in Tantric Buddhism. It therefore includes an in-depth discussion of a series of ritual practices essential to Tibetan Buddhism in general, and to the monastery at Lingshed in particular, including rites to protector divinities and methods for cleansing ritual pollution. The work particularly highlights the practice of *sangs-sol*, that is offerings to local divinities, as performed by monastic personnel.

As part of characterising the nature of religious authority in Tibetan Buddhism, the thesis discusses two dominant modes of religious and spiritual renunciation: clerical and tantric. The first of these two modes characterises the celibate monastic career of most members of the Gelukpa Order, whilst the second, tantric renunciation, refers to the employment of highly complex ritual techniques aimed at consubstantiating the practitioner with certain tantric deities. Since this latter method classically involves the use of sexual yoga, the thesis explores the manner in which such methods have been integrated into the strict celibate monasticism of the Gelukpa Order. The conclusion arising from this is that the tension between tantric method and monasticism centres real ritual authority within the Gelukpa Order (and other forms of monastic Buddhism in Tibetan areas) onto a select group of 'incarnate lamas', who are therefore essential to the continued survival of the tradition.

Throughout the thesis, considerable attention is given to the issue of territoriality, and to the manner in which Tibetan Buddhist ritual is constantly mediated and constructed through the idiom of territoriality, and people's relationship with places as sacred domains. This in turn is used to discuss Tibetan understandings of personal and communal identity, and the manner in which they are expressed in Tibetan Buddhism.

A Note On Transliteration

Ladakhi is a dialect of Tibetan, sharing the same written form and much of the regularly used religious vocabulary. Nonetheless, the spoken form is very different from Tibetan: even on words that are identically spelt, Ladakhis will pronounce far more of the written consonants. Thus, the word for 'eight', which is usually transliterated from the written as [brgyad] is spoken as *gye* in Central Tibet, *gyed* in Western Tibet, and *rgyad* in Ladakh (only in Baltistan is it pronounced *brgyad*).

Throughout the main body of this text, I have transliterated spoken and written Ladakhi in terms of how I found it to be spoken, rather than written. This dispenses with some of the more complex written consonant structures which remain unmanageable for most Westerners. For Tibetologists, the standard Wylie transliterations are available in appendices C and D.

Introduction

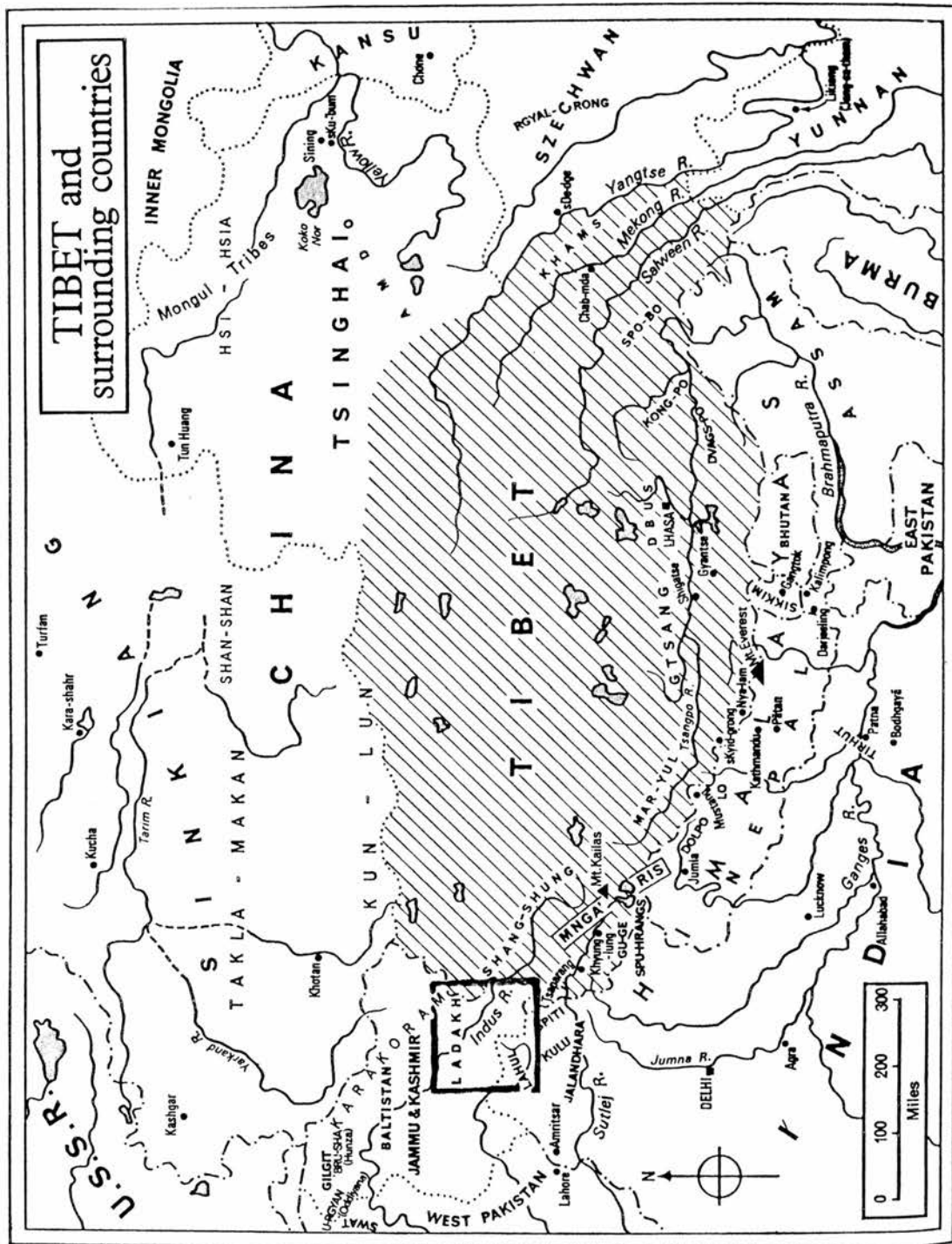


Fig. A: Ladakh (squared) and Tibet. From Snellgrove (1987).

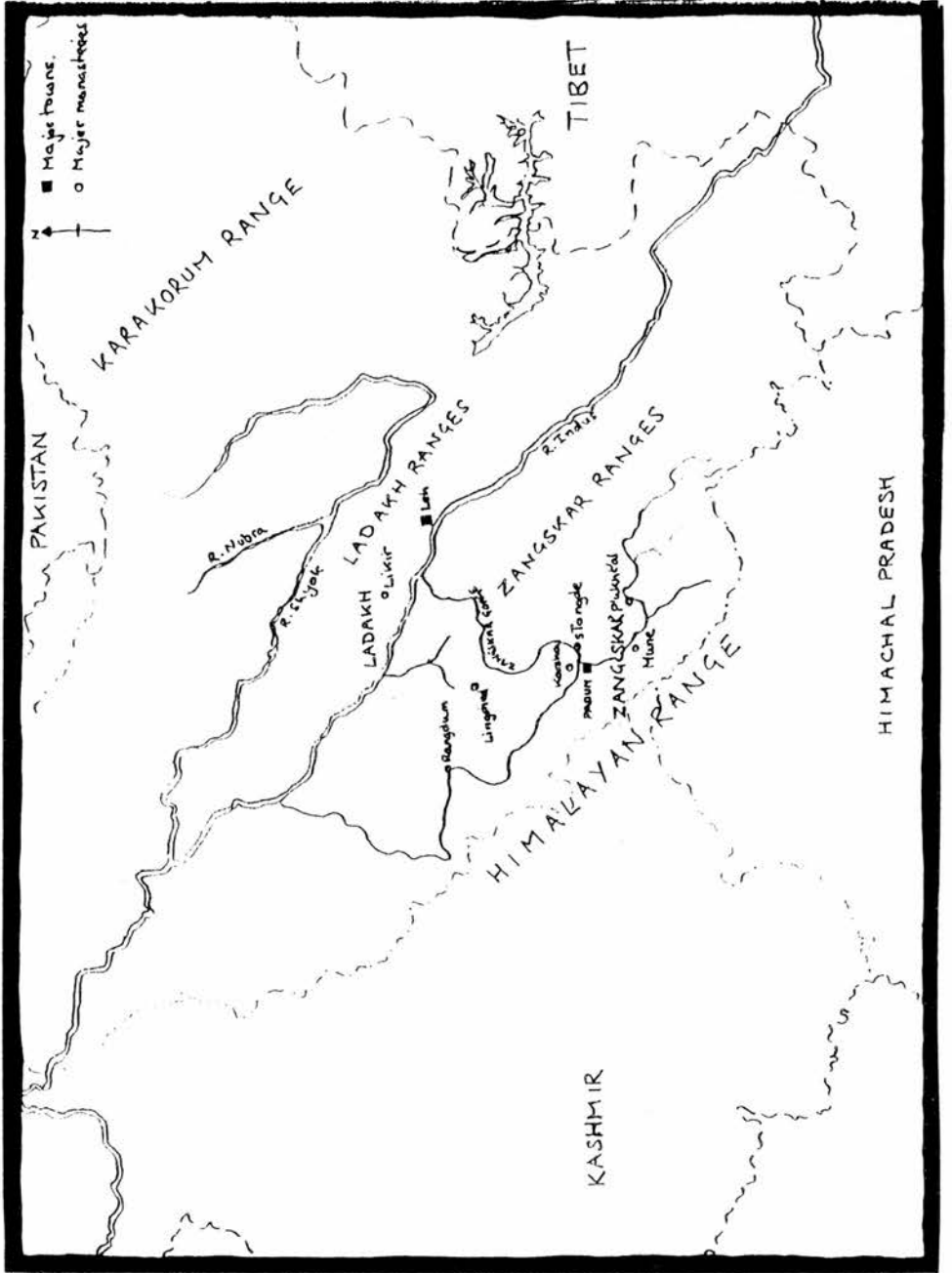


Fig. B: Ladakh and Zangskar, including Lingshed village (centre) and Kumbum's sister monasteries

During sixteen months of fieldwork in the North-West Himalaya, I had the good fortune to spend six months living and working in the remote Tibetan Buddhist monastery of Kumbum (“one hundred thousand images”). Built near the rocky crags above the village of Lingshed on the mountainous southern border of Ladakh, where it meets its sister kingdom Zangskar (See Fig. B), Kumbum is a local monastery of some sixty-five monks, at the bottom end of the ecclesiastical ladder of the Gelukpa Order, until 1959 the dominant religious order in Tibet.

I had gone to Ladakh to research Tibetan Buddhist monasticism, and particularly to develop some understanding of religious authority in the life of the monasteries there. In terms of an anthropological study, this was comparatively new territory: the sociology of Tibetan Buddhist communities remains in its infancy, lacking the theoretical sophistication that characterises the study of Theravadin - or Southern - Buddhism (Gellner 1990: 99; Samuel 1978: 45).¹ There are several reasons for this. The Chinese Invasion of Tibet in 1950, followed by the ill-fated Tibetan Uprising of 1959 and the subsequent flight into exile by the 14th Dalai Lama and over 100,000 Tibetan refugees, effectively closed most Tibetan regions to ethnographic study until the mid-1970s.² Scholars had to depend instead on the work of pre-diaspora researchers such as Richardson, Tucci, Rock, Bell and Eckvall³, or the narrative reconstructions of Tibet provided by Tibetan refugees.⁴

Studying Monasticism:

Besides this dearth of ethnographic study, other representations of Tibetan Buddhism have flourished. The huge quantity of religious literature that Tibetan refugees brought with them into exile as they fled occupied Tibet has provided a wealth of information on the

¹In particular Tambiah (1984; 1976; 1970), Obeyesekere (1982; 1970; 1966; 1963), Carrithers (1983; 1979), Spiro (1970; 1967), Gombrich (1971) and Southwold (1983; 1982; 1975).

²The notable exception to this were the Nepalese Sherpa regions (Furer-Haimendorf 1964; Ortner 1978; Paul 1982; Samuel 1978).

³See Sen (1984) for a review of these sources concerning monasticism.

⁴I refer here particularly to the work of Goldstein (1989; 1973; 1971), and Aziz (1978; 1974).

philosophical, cosmological and ritual aspects of the religion, a resource which has led Buddhologists such as Samuel and (more challengingly) Cantwell to argue for the primacy of such literary sources in the anthropological assessment of Buddhist practice (Samuel 1978; Cantwell 1989; Cantwell 1988).⁵

Such advocates have a point. The study of Tibetan Buddhist communities without reference to the philosophical and doctrinal literature impoverishes ethnography and misleads analysis.⁶ But the tendency to allow literary sources to prevail over ethnographic or other empirical data is similarly suspect (Schopen 1991), especially since the literary sources available to Tibetologists are, by the very circumstances of their availability, largely removed from their established Tibetan cultural context.

Perhaps as a result of this dislocation, a certain picture of Tibetan monasticism has grown up. Largely given over to dealing with the monastic institution as an “ideal type”, this school of thought locates a Buddhist ‘ascetic ideal’ (Ortner 1978: 55) wherein monks are portrayed as removed from the ordinary matrix of embedded social and kin relationships which characterise lay existence. Thus, for example, Goldstein and Tsarong’s description of Kyilung monastery in Central Ladakh argues:

By structurally excising monks from the intimate web of kinship ties and obligations and deflecting them from the development of functionally equivalent intimate groups and relationships in the monastery, the monastery produces and reproduces an atomistic structure based on solitary human isolates. In doing this it allows each monk to pursue his own spiritual and personality development without thought of the needs of others, i.e. without the encumbrance of interlocking sets of obligations and responsibilities to others. (1985: 21)

In this picture, the ideal ordained monk is transposed into a Goffmannian “total institution...that is [an establishment] whose

⁵In the Gelukpa context, see the work of Hopkins (1983), Perdue (1992; 1976) and Jackson (1993).

⁶Cantwell’s critique of Ortner (1978) and Paul (1982) contains a more complete exploration of this point (Cantwell 1989: Introduction; also Samuel 1978: 45).

encompassing and total character signifies a barrier to social discourse with the outside world" (Tambiah 1970: 81). The monk becomes an "individual-out-of-the-world" (Dumont 1970c; see also Gellner 1992a: 341), removed from ordinary worldly goals by the ordination process and his pursuit of enlightenment through karmic soteriology (Grimshaw 1983).

The representation of 'the monastery' as a bounded institution has tended to inform subsequent analysis of both monastic and lay existence: either monasteries are studied as structures whole unto themselves, whose hierarchy of authority is essentially an internal matter, or the monastery is treated as a homogeneous group as far as institutional relations with the laity are concerned. In either case, the internal structure of the monastery is regarded as having little influence in principle upon its external relations with laity. Either of these positions place "monastic Buddhism" in opposition to "lay Buddhism", and automatically predicates the monastic treatment of lay concerns as subsidiary to the 'real' concerns of monks.

Throughout this work, I have endeavoured to turn this agenda around by placing 'monasticism' (and hence certain crucial aspects of Buddhist doctrine) within their ethnographic, ecclesiastical and historic context. As a vehicle, the work will primarily address the issue of characterising the structure of religious and ritual authority in Kumbum monastery, through focusing directly on monks' professional relations with laity. More explicitly, I wish to focus on what makes the actions of certain figures in the Buddhist monastic and non-monastic religious hierarchy more authoritative, more representative of Buddhism, than others, particularly in the sense that their statements and actions become widely accepted as determining subsequent religious and ritual practice. Such an investigation is crucial to determining the interface between doctrine and practice because it represents the socially and historically located moment in which doctrine enters practice.

To this end I have treated 'authority' as constituted primarily through a series of performative acts rather than simply as a reified status. Such acts are not individual (such-and-such a person *has* authority), but communal: an act must be accepted by another or others for it to be treated as 'authoritative'. In this manner, I have defined such acts (as objects of study) as having four principal dimensions:

i) **The nature of the authoritative act itself.** How is it constructed? Is it inherently persuasive?

ii) **The source of the authoritative act.** Who - or what - performs it, and in what capacity? What is the perceived basis of their authority?

iii) **The focus of the authoritative act.** If authority performs, it also transforms - innovating, asserting, and reinforcing particular socio-cultural arrangements or perceptions within certain implicitly or explicitly defined spheres of social process.

iv) **The mechanism of acceptance.** What is the process - either formal or informal, explicit or implicit, consensual or forced - by which the act itself, or its consequences, passes into common practice?

All of these elements in the structure of the analysis interact to a greater or lesser degree, building a single set of arguments about religious authority and monastic structure, rather than a series of relatively independent chapters 'about' Kumbum and Lingshed. Since the question of authority is central to the structure of this thesis, it seems best to introduce the upcoming material through each of these four headings.

The Nature of the Authoritative Act

A large proportion of this thesis (particularly Section 2) is given over to the analysis of the ritual process itself, and the description of a core set of ritual acts performed by the monks of Kumbum and, in certain cases, by related ritual specialists from outside the monastic community. This includes rites which are practised as an essential part of the life of the monastery itself, as well as those performed on behalf of local villagers. This does not include precise translations of ritual transcripts, but rather examines their basic structures, the concepts they employ and accounts of local understandings about them.

The majority of such rites are tantric in nature. Although the philosophy and ritual mechanics of tantric Buddhism are covered in greater detail in Ch.6, some words of introduction are necessary here. Most of the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism are created out of two major strands

of Buddhist thought which have placed monasticism in Tibetan areas in an entirely different context from its Southern cousins. The dominance of Mahāyāna (L. *t'egpa chenpo*), or "Great Vehicle" Buddhism, has replaced the solitary pursuit of *nirvāṇa* - the cessation of suffering - with the less individualistic *bodhisattva* (L. *changchub semspa*) ideal - the heroic undertaking to attain enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings; and the doctrine that enlightened Buddhas can maintain their presence in the world through manifesting illusory "bodies" (L. *sku*) designed to lead others to enlightenment. Furthermore, the introduction of Vajrayāna (L. *dorje t'egpa*), or "tantric" Buddhism - which consists of a vast range of ritual and meditative practices, many of which concentrate on methods for manifesting the presence of Buddhahood and controlling its power through the use of visualised divine imagery and the recitation of mantras - has vastly diversified the body of ritual available to monastic institutions. The main emphasis of this study will be to examine the way in which certain ritual forms are found either in opposition to one another, or in dovetailed structures of ritual practice, and the place that the 'presence' of the Buddhahood has within ritual practice and structures of authority.

The Source of Authority

Discussing monasticism in Tibetan Buddhism presents certain difficulties. As Gellner (1992a: 59) notes of Newar Buddhism in Nepal (also Vajrayāna), it is easy, but mistaken to assume that the practice of Buddhism can be equated with the practice of monasticism. Rather, the various indigenous manifestations of Buddhism prevalent in Tibetan areas subsume a vast profusion of ritual practitioners. As Kvearne notes:

A host of semi or quasi monastic priestly types is found with overlapping aims and conventions. Whether living in settled communities or not, these yogins, spellbinders and meditators are broadly considered to belong to the Sangha [that is, the community of Buddhist superiors] and are treated as such even if married. The diversity of professional types found in Tibet, each sanctioned either by scriptural authority or by historical precedent, is in turn a reflection of

the belief that all human activity can be dedicated to achieving enlightenment. (1991: 254).⁷

It is similarly misleading to assume that monasteries somehow mark the established heart of Buddhism in Tibetan areas, surrounded by a peripheral structure of less important professional or semi-professional figures. Within the four major 'orders' (L. *cholug* - "system of religion") of Tibetan Buddhism - the Gelukpa, the Kagyud, the Sakya and the Nyingmapa - a wide spectrum of attitudes and institutional biases concerning monasticism are to be found, with many of the more exalted positions in orders such as the Nyingmapa being held by married *lamas*. The version of the Vinaya - the system of religious discipline - adhered to in Tibetan Buddhism is the ^{Mūla-}sarvastivadin code. Different from that practised in Theravada Buddhism, it is based on a series of "vows of liberation" (L. *so'tar gyi sdomba*) which include both lay and monastic vows and does not, in Gellner's terms, demarcate monasticism as "an institutionally separate kind of Buddhism" (Gellner 1990). In Ladakh, which Samuel describes as the most "clericalised" of Tibetan Buddhist regions (Samuel 1993a: 318-319) - all informants asserted the equality in principle of both laity and monastics in the pursuit of enlightenment. Amongst these orders, the Gelukpa ("those of virtuous method") distinguish most firmly between monastic and non-monastic personnel, and thereby arguably represent the "ideal type" for the study of monasticism in Tibetan areas.

Nonetheless, even within a Gelukpa monastery such as Kumbum, a variety of differentiated ritual practitioners are present. A particular concern of this work is not so much to establish the structure of authority within the monastery as it applies to itself (the dispensing of discipline and so forth), but how different types of ritual practitioner within the monastic hierarchy are 'authorised' to perform different types of ritual act that situate monasteries with their own local surroundings (put more simply, how different types of ecclesiastical figure are authorised to perform different kinds of 'pastoral care'), and on the other hand, how similar ritual forms hold entirely different significances depending on who performs them.

⁷See also Aris (1987: 138).

An awareness of such differences is at odds with those perspectives which deny any real distinction between monks in terms of symbolic status or ritual authority.⁸ The assertion of this thesis is that there *are* such differences, that they are pronounced, and that they accord to a certain understanding about the symbolic status of different types of monk within the Gelukpa hierarchy. Particular attention will be paid to the difference between the ritual status of the 'ordinary' monk (either within the confines of Kumbum monastery itself, or beyond its walls as an aspirant within the more rigorous philosophical and scholastic training of the Gelukpa monastic universities) and that of the 'incarnate *lama*', whose near-divine ritual status is ascribed at birth. Their respective positions and powers will be discussed in terms of certain indigenous understandings about birth processes and the tension between ideas of physical embodiment and spiritual progress in tantric Buddhism. Attention will also be paid to the ritual status of laity, both as householders and as ritual practitioners (including the status of two 'oracles' from the Lingshed area, who are regularly possessed by certain deities 'affiliated' to Kumbum).

The Focus of The Authoritative Act

This 'ascetic ideal' of monasticism has, both in Theravadin and Mahāyāna Buddhism, been contrasted with the more worldly aims of householders (Ortner 1978: 55) or more subtly, with the possibility of the "domestication" of the Sangha, the systematic involvement of the monastic community in the ritual, social, or economic affairs of the laity. Monasteries, insofar as they provide educational and ceremonial services to laity through settled existence in particular agrarian economies, are thus regarded as having become mere shadows of an originally unencumbered eremitic tradition (Strenski 1983). In this view, even the occasional 'reform' movements by charismatic Buddhist figures, aimed at re-establishing firm lines of demarcation between monks and laity, are doomed to impermanence, destined to "slide towards domestication within a few years" (Carrithers 1979).

⁸ Thus, for example, Day's analysis of monks' involvement in household rites: "As the monk dons the cloth, he joins a spiritual community in which he loses his identity. As a monk, he is equivalent to all other monks as far as domestic ritual is concerned." (Day 1989: 71)

The peculiar preoccupation of Western observers with the domestication, or indeed 'corruption', of 'pure Buddhism' often centres around this issue, focusing particularly on two ethnographic tendencies in Buddhist communities, both of which will be dealt with in some depth in this thesis:

i) Economic dealings with the laity. The act of "ritual gift-giving" by laity - which Strenski identifies as a major factor in domestication (Strenski 1983: 463) - in support of the monastic community (called *zhindak*, or "sponsorship") will be examined both as an economic form (exactly *how* monasteries are supported), and as a ritual one (the issue of ritual reciprocity). Central to this will be a discussion of the household estate structure in Lingshed, not simply as a social unit which provides economic support for monks, but as a crystallisation of certain symbolic understandings about the house as a source of 'wealth' (L. *yang*).

ii) The propitiation of local divinities by Buddhist practitioners. Often deemed a "syncretic" practice (Obeyesekere 1963; 1982) the giving of offerings to a variety of household and local divinities and spirits by monastic personnel on behalf of both laity and monastery is one of the central ethnographic preoccupations of this thesis. Such practices will be discussed in terms of their relationship to the central tantric traditions of 'deity yoga' performed within the monastery, as well as to less explicit indigenous notions of the person as a basically chthonic being. It is argued that the concept of domestication in the Tibetan Buddhist context conflates ideological *compromise* with local beliefs on the one hand with authoritative and totalising cosmologies which *incorporate* local cosmological forms on the other.

Essential to both of these discussions is the concept of chthonic fertility, as an object of ritual attention and exchange, and thereby as the focus of authoritative ritual acts by monks. Such geomantic understandings of religious practice are, I shall argue, essential to the very structure of Tibetan Buddhism as a soteriology, being built around the central ritual metaphor of the "subjugation" (L. *dulwa*) of chthonic forces. This metaphor of subjugation in turn informs basic mythic understandings about Tibetan Buddhism as a state religion. The thesis will examine the

relationship between these understandings and the claims that certain classes of monk have to certain forms of ritual authority.

The Mechanism of Acceptance

Of course, claims to authority (as opposed to dominance) require popular accession to be effectively constituted. This in turn depends upon how ritual acts are viewed and represented, both by monks as well as by laity. In general indigenous exegesis of the role of Tibetan Buddhist rites has been discussed in terms of their comparative relationship to the established soteriology of Buddhism. Thus, in the Tibetan context, Samuel follows Spiro (1970) in asserting differing “orientations” to ritual life, depending on the interpreting actor’s worldly or supra-worldly aims (Samuel 1993a: 31).

Implicit in such a statement is the assumption that ritual forms are relevant *in some sense* to all Tibetan Buddhists; that they are always seen as effective. In this thesis such relevance to the particular concerns and interests of laity (or indeed monks) is not assumed, but treated instead as the paramount criteria of its authority. This is discussed in terms of extant local ideologies about the chthonic nature of local events. It is argued that the ritual acts of Tibetan Buddhism are not held in opposition to existing geomantic notions concerning local deities, but dove-tailed with them as part of a transformative ritual process, which appropriates geomantic concerns rather than suppressing them. That said, considerable space will also be given over to the concomitant limits to monastic authority that such geomantic ritual understandings impose, and the place that alternative ‘shamanic voices’ have within such a schema.

Fieldwork

With the exception of a short trip to the Tibetan exile centre in Dharamsala to procure some outstanding Gelukpa texts, all fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in Ladakh in North-West India.⁹ Politically, Ladakh is part of the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir, but geographically

⁹ I had previously made several trips to Tibetan communities in Nepal, Darjeeling, Lahaul and Ladakh, as well as a stay of several months in Chinese Tibet. These were not associated with the present work.

it is located on the Tibetan Plateau, just inside the massive folds of the Himalaya, which act as a huge rain shadow to the annual rains that are the life-blood of the Indian subcontinent. Its summers are short and sun-baked, its winters long, snow-bound and bitterly cold, with temperatures plunging down to -45°C in the months following the winter solstice. Ladakh is isolated to all overland travel during most of the long winter, the only traverse being via the irregular army and civilian flights out of Leh. Even in the summer, the overland journey to the plains takes two long days by bus over the mountain passes.

Fieldwork was carried out between November 1993 and April 1995. After some months spent settling in to the regional capital Leh, I was invited to visit Lingshed village by Karma Namgyal, a monk who lived part of the year in Kumbum's monastic house (*labrang*) in Leh. Lingshed is extremely remote even by Ladakhi standards - a week's travel on foot from the nearest road, let alone from the comforts of Leh - and many people in the capital dismissed the idea of my travelling there, saying the place was "primitive and backward" and very short on resources. The journey, they insisted, was very dangerous during the winter - better to stay in Leh. The more outspoken amongst them simply called me mad and said I would die.

In a typically anthropological way, therefore, the prospect seemed ideal. Here would be 'traditional' Tibetan Buddhism - remote, isolated, unspoiled by the endless tourists that infested Leh - a small claim in a shrinking world to a certain ethnographic uniqueness. In late January 1994, after three months in Ladakh, I set off, accompanied by Karma Namgyal and Thubstob Dorje (my porter), on the first of many journeys.

Nestled on the mountainous border between the Ladakh and Zangskar Valleys, Lingshed is, even in the height of summer, five days' trek over high mountain passes from the nearest motorable road, itself six hours drive from Leh; in the winter, these passes become impassable with deep snow. The only route during the winter is along the frozen corridor of the Zangskar Gorge as it slices through the Zangskar mountain range, passing within a few kilometres of Lingshed (see Fig. B). There is no actual path here, simply the treacherous ice of the frozen river, which freezes over to varying degrees for the full 120 kilometres of the Gorge, linking the snowbound Zangskar Valley to the rest of the world by a tenuous lifeline. Zangskar use this route - which they call the *Chaddar* - to the best of their

ability, traversing the ice by day and sleeping in caves at night, carrying loads of butter and wool to trade in Leh bazaar (Crowden 1994). So, after a week of gruelling days and frozen nights, we arrived at Lingshed, just in time to attend the annual *Smonlam Chenmo* Prayer Festival.

In total, I spent six months in Lingshed, most of which was during the Spring and Summer of 1994, and the greater part of my life there was spent in the monastery itself. Although this is a comparatively short stay in a primary fieldwork site, Lingshed is one of the poorest villages in the area, and I was acutely aware of the economic burden my mere presence was placing on certain families in the village. Consequently, a significant proportion of the exegetical material and discussions included in the thesis was gleaned through secondary fieldwork at the monastic house in Leh: housing between ten and forty people from Lingshed, this temple-cum-boarding house was constantly maintained by one or two senior monks and a variety of laity. This proved to be a real resource, especially in the autumn and winter of 1994-5, when temperatures in Ladakh dropped to record lows, making the expected trip to Lingshed impossible. I would spend most days at the *labrang*, interviewing informants, attending rites and confirming details on many of the things that I had witnessed whilst in Lingshed, and getting descriptions of those events that I had missed (the most important being the events at the King's New Year, for which I must rely entirely on the descriptions of monks and villagers in the capital).

In this work, a prior grasp of how to read and write (if not necessarily translate) Tibetan, and some small knowledge of the many doctrines and ritual forms of Tibetan Buddhism proved not simply invaluable, but indispensable (Snellgrove 1966; Ramble 1990). But the language gap was always to prove difficult and my original fieldwork technique consisted of using a small number of interpreters, taping a large number of discussions, and participating in and observing as much as I could of what people physically did and what, if any, texts they used. Perhaps some of the densest ritual information that I gained initially was through participant observation in its most obvious and available form, by acting as sponsor for a variety of rites throughout my time in Lingshed. This had the advantage of securing my social position in the monastery, and meant that the performance of rites, and the sponsorship of the monastery - not simply from an economic perspective, but from the "lived

experience" of the sponsor, became a legitimate area of my concern, in the eyes of villagers and monks.

In time my grasp of the language improved and I was no longer reliant on interpreters except for clarifying the more difficult points. Lengthy exegesis on ritual activities or monastic responsibilities was still taped, and I would have the material transliterated into written Ladakhi before translating the written material myself, and checking the translation with Ladakhi scholars in the capital. Such transcriptions provided not simply basic information, but important terminology that could then be further examined.

This method has illuminating drawbacks. My transliterators had strong views on the issue of 'proper' transcription, and I must thank the patience of Mr. Tsering Norbu of the Cultural Academy in Leh for ignoring his better instincts and finally agreeing to producing vernacular transcriptions (on the assumption that he was also allowed to produce 'correct' ones). The other difficulty was social: whilst senior monks were in general only too pleased to air their views on tape, the same was not true of younger monks or laity, who required more roundabout treatment. The hierarchy of the monastery meant that, whilst religious matters were often common knowledge, they only "belonged" to specific monks in the sense that they had received the necessary training and teachings to perform them, and therefore could only be "represented" by those officers, as opposed to simply being "talked about" on an everyday basis. This meant that on certain occasions, my interviews with senior monks became occasions for broader monastic teaching sessions!

Certain aspects of the life of Kumbum monastery needs much more study. In particular, my position as a fieldworker working primarily within the monastery means that much of lay and household life is missing, and would certainly benefit from a closer analysis. Equally important would be a study of the broader institutional structure that surrounds Kumbum, and particularly the links it has with those other Ladakhi and Zangskari monasteries.

Ethnographically, there is little in this thesis that has not been seen before elsewhere in the Himalaya, and in that sense does little more than simply providing another ethnography of a Tibetan Buddhist community. Its real intention lies in reassessing academic approaches to extant material, and particularly to the relationship between Buddhism as a doctrinal

position and Buddhism as an ecclesiastical institution composed of historical people. In particular, it seeks to refute the claim that Tibetan Buddhism is a universal, ahistorical, and context-independent 'philosophy of life' and assert instead its inseparability from the historical acts of particular people.

Kumbum as a Representative Sample

By way of a postscript, some word needs to be given to my rather easy use of terms such as "Tibetan Buddhism" to refer to the form of religious practice prevalent in Lingshed. Indeed, many Ladakhis would themselves take some justifiable offence at having Ladakh and Zangskar referred to as "Tibetan areas", for reasons which will become clear in the next chapter. When I use the term "Tibetan area" I mean it in the sense that this part of Ladakh and Zangskar partake of a cultural milieu of which Tibet is (or perhaps was) the largest political and cultural member by far, that they share a certain definable set of religious practices which have identifiable historical and institutional links, a certain body of institutional or economic forms, and belong to a reasonably coherent linguistic group. I do not mean to imply by this that there is no diversity within this collection of regions: indeed, many of the aspects of monastic structure that are discussed here are particular to Ladakh and to the Gelukpa. Religious practice in Tibetan Buddhism is extraordinarily varied in its particulars. This cannot, however, be taken to mean that Tibetan Buddhism simply constitutes a competitive marketplace of unrelated religious lifestyles and ritual traditions, of which monasticism is simply one, or that what we elicit from one section of a Tibetan Buddhist community has no bearing on other sections, or on other communities. Paradoxically, the diversity of religious methodologies in Tibetan Buddhist traditions often masks a striking unity of ideas and cultural values. As Snellgrove boldly asserted in the earlier years of modern Tibetological studies:

There would seem to be little doubt however that the sameness of ways of thought and action is far more pervasive throughout Tibetan speaking areas than is ever likely to be the case in India. There are two primary reasons for this, the absence of linguistic barriers of any kind throughout Tibetan-speaking areas and the more

'missionary' attitude of Tibetan religion and culture...All that Dumont and Pocock have written with regard to the oneness of India (*Contributions*, I) applies with added force to Tibetan speaking areas, and thus an anthropologist, unless he arbitrarily limits his researches, is likely to be involves willy-nilly in the whole range of Tibetan philosophy and ritual, in Tibetan history and mythology. (Snellgrove 1966: 212).

Samuel has argued that this unity can be found not in a single adherence to a certain structure of religious, economic and social organisations, but in diverse sets of varying 'syntheses' of "familiar and universal elements" (1993a: 335) such as the household, the temple, the sponsorship relationship and certain cultural/religious tendencies (principally, the shamanic and the clerical): these differences in synthesis manifest themselves differently in different orders of Buddhism, and different geographical/economic circumstances.

As I mentioned earlier, however, much of the information about Tibetan regions that is available to anthropologists is historical reconstruction, rebuilt from accounts of life before the Chinese Invasion. Snellgrove himself was speaking in the years immediately following the Tibetan Diaspora, a time before the unified whole that may have been Tibet disappeared underneath the crushing weight of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and before the divide between the outlying Tibetan Buddhist communities of North-West India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan became not simply a geographical border, but a gap of generations. In the politically disparate and unconnected world that arose out of these events, we can no longer assume a culturally-informed unity, as Ramble's comparison of Buddhist communities in Nepal so clearly shows (Ramble 1990; see also Holmberg 1989). But that does not mean that we will therefore not find it.

PART I

Chapter 1: Buddhism in Ladakh

Chapter 2: Kumbum Monastery - Life as a Monk

Chapter 3: Kumbum Monastery - Architecture, Space and Economics

Chapter 4: Conceptualising Kumbum

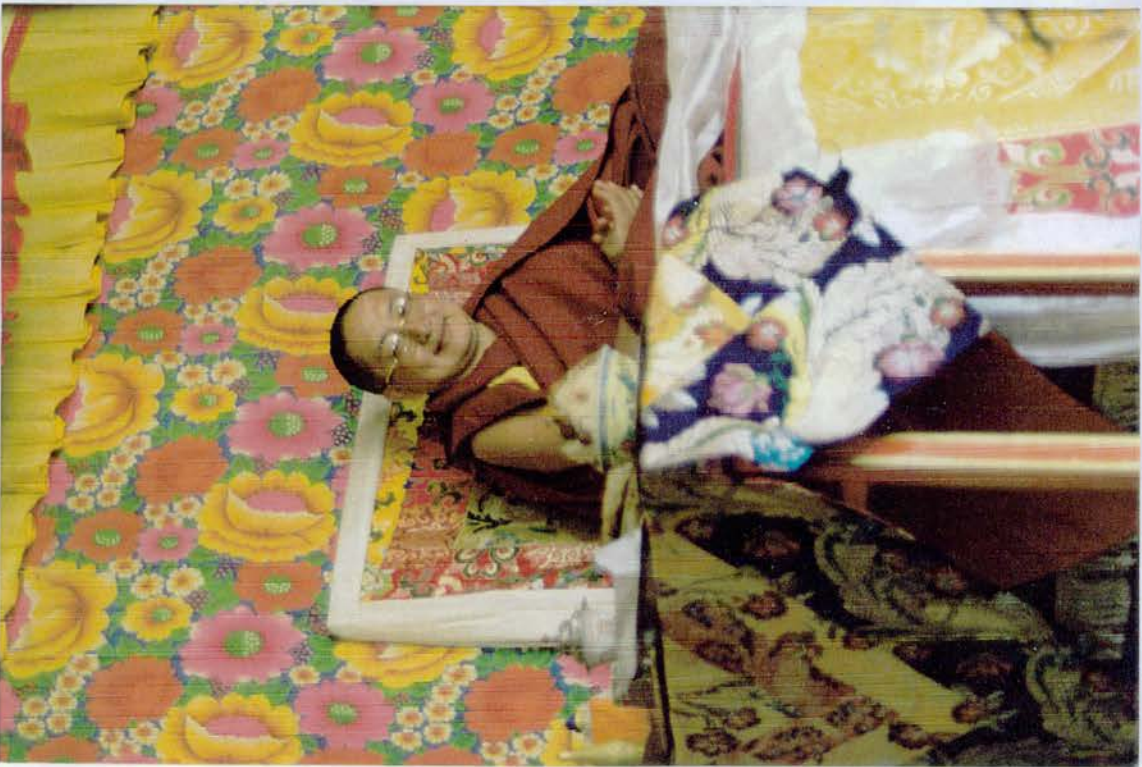
Chapter 1:

Buddhism in Ladakh

Overleaf:

Photo 1.1 (left): Dagon Rinpoche.

Photo 1.2 (right): Geshe Ngawang Changchub.



1.1- Mythic Time

According to the pious histories of Tibet, the arrival of Buddhism was a staggered achievement, taking place across several centuries. A fourteenth century ritual cycle, the *Mani Ka-bum*, describes how the aggressive tendencies of the Yarlung Kings of Central Tibet brought their forces into contact with China to the West, and Nepal to the South, during the seventh century.¹⁰ King Srongtsen Gampo - depicted as the first of the Tibetan "Religion Kings" (L. *chosgyal*) and a manifestation of the divine Buddhist hero Chenresig - was offered by way of conciliation a bride each from T'ang China and the courts of Kathmandu. The Chinese Princess, Kong Jo, travelling over the Western mountains of China in 650 c.e. brought with her a statue of the Buddha Śākyamuni, called the Jo-bo ("Lord").

But the new arrival did not come unopposed: the statue's chariot, upon arriving in the Tibetan capital, began to sink into the ground, and could not be released. Kong Jo, however, was well versed in geomancy, and consulted a geomantic chart given to her as a parting gift by her father, in order to discover the nature of the obstruction. She found that the land of Tibet was a maelstrom of negative geomantic elements, arranged like a she-demoness lying on her back, thrashing her arms and legs to repel the new arrival. Particularly, the Plain of Milk where the capital city lay was the palace of the king of the *lu* water spirits, and the lake at its centre was the heart-blood of the demoness. Such malignant forces, she determined, accounted for "the evil behaviour [of the Tibetans] including brigandage" (Aris 1980: 13).

To counteract these negative influences, the Chinese Princess advised Srongtsen Gampo to build a series of twelve temples on the various *me rtsa* ("fire veins" a word borrowed from the medical term for moxibuction points in Tibetan acupuncture) of the Tibetan landscape in three huge concentric squares crossing the entirety of central Tibet, with each temple constructed around a "nail" designed to bind down respectively the hips, shoulders, knees, elbows, hands and feet of the

¹⁰See Aris (1980); Kapstein (1992); Gyatso (1987).

demoness (Stein 1972: 38-9).¹¹ These were the necessary preliminaries to finally filling in the lake near Lhasa and building the new Jo-khang shrine - which was to house the Buddha-statue - on top of it.

But Srongtsen Gampo initially mistook Kong-jo's advice, attempting instead to build the Jo-khang straight away. Whatever he and the Nepalese Queen built in the day, however, the enraged local spirits tore down in the night (Aris 1980: 14-15). Finally understanding Kong Jo's plan, the king built everything according to her instructions, thus suppressing the *lu* and transfixing the chthonic spirits of Tibet. This suppression of the land allowed its many auspicious qualities to come to the fore, encouraging the religious tendencies of the otherwise savage Tibetan race.¹²

This was not the end of the story. The *Padma Kat'ang*, the biography of the tantric yogin Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava (generally called Guru Rinpoche), records how, a century later, the second of Tibet's Religion Kings, Trisong Detsen, ordered the founding of Tibet's first monastery at Samye near Lhasa.¹³ Initially, the king himself oversaw the building work, but was met with resistance. What the king's builders erected in the day, earthquakes destroyed the following night. Consulting his astrologers, the king was told that the local spirits of Tibet were inimical to the new monastery, and thus would destroy whatever was built. Unable to continue, the king asked his advisers what should be done. They recommended inviting the *bodhisattva*-abbot Santaraksita, a respected monk and religious scholar from India, to oversee the building work. But even Santaraksita's efforts met with failure, as the local gods continued to destroy whatever was built. Finally, Santaraksita declared that it was beyond his powers, and that only the powers of a tantric master such as the renowned Guru Rinpoche could overcome such obstacles. Guru Rinpoche - a married Buddhist yogin and exorcist from the Swat Valley in Southern Afghanistan, depicted in many subsequent texts as the Second Buddha and a further manifestation of Chenresig - accepted the call, and began his journey across the Himalaya to Samye. Using his tantric powers, the

¹¹Many of the temples containing these "nails" exist to this day. See Snellgrove and Richardson (1986: 74); Aris (1980: Ch. 1).

¹²See Gyatso (1987) on this common representation of pre-Buddhist Tibet.

¹³For the biography of Guru Rinpoche see Douglas and Bays (1978); also Holmberg (1989: 105-108) and Snellgrove and Richardson (1986: 96-99).

exorcist travelled throughout Tibet, challenging the local gods and spirits of each region to magical battle. Systematically, he brought the local gods of each region to their knees, threatening them with the overwhelming powers of his *dorje* - a ritual implement signifying his enlightenment - and bound them to accept and protect Buddhism and renounce blood sacrifice. By the time he arrived at Samye, the whole of Tibet was subjugated to Buddhism, and the building of the monastery could continue unhindered.

The tales of Srongtsen Gampo and Guru Rinpoche are commonly told throughout the Tibetan cultural area, and their role as mythic histories of state is to a large extent self-evident. Certainly, their probable origins in the centuries post-dating the events described makes them pious reconstructions rather than dependable history. Nonetheless, they constitute a central plank in a series of understandings - about Buddhism's institutional presence, and the ubiquitous and ever-present influence of chthonic forces on the character of Tibetans as people - whose position in the cultural imagination cannot be doubted. Even in Ladakh and Zangskar, which traditionally maintained a certain independence from Tibet, similar myths of state speak to a common sense of origin. The chronicles of Ladakh trace the ancestry of the Ladakhi kings back to Srongtsen Gampo and the Yarlung Valley (Rabgias 1984); similarly, the Bo-Yig land grants documents held at Kumbum's sister monastery of P'ukht'al in Zangskar declare:

In this Zangskar valley which is full of wealth and happiness...came Padmasambhava [Guru Rinpoche] who gained control over the non-human spirits and put down the bad features of the area. The valley is shaped like a female demon lying on its back; so he built [the temple] Kanika on its head. His statue was made on its heart at Pipiting and on the feet of the demon he built a shrine in a garden of the Future Buddha Maitreya. Padmasambhava prophesied that Zangskar would be like the happy cemetery at Sukhavati (i.e. a beneficial place for meditation) in India. (Crook 1994a: 435).¹⁴

Thus, the story of Zangskar's formation as a Buddhist land contains many aspects from both Tibetan state histories. Particularly, the magical suppression of the land itself, to make way for the shrines of Buddhist heroes, is an iconic past repeated again and again. In Lingshed itself, in the

¹⁴See Aris (1980: 6) for similar ritual imagery from Bhutan.

southernmost flank of the valley, villagers indicate proudly the pressed handprint of Guru Rinpoche himself, made during his momentous battle with the local spirits of Tibet.

1.2 - Kumbum in Historical Perspective

Of course, not all history is mythic history, and Kumbum and its surroundings are far from being timeless entities. Implicit in the writing of this ethnography are all the trappings of a certain period in the study of Tibetan Buddhism, a certain period in the history of Ladakh, and above all a certain moment in the history of Kumbum monastery. During my time at the monastery I became aware of the various dimensions of its existence as an institution caught up within a political, religious and economic world that was changing with great speed. Rather than an untouched traditional gem of Tibetan Buddhist life, isolated in the frozen petri-dish of the Himalaya, it grew increasingly obvious that Lingshed was riding the crest of a wave of enormous transformation that had, in this phase at least, begun with the Chinese Invasion of Tibet in 1950. This was simply the most recent of a series of recorded waves that have washed to and fro over Ladakh and Lingshed since the first millennium. Many, but not all of these waves, have been involved with building, or rebuilding, Ladakh as a Buddhist realm.

Archaeological evidence points to the presence of Buddhism in Ladakh as early as the First Century BC, when the region was a peripheral domain to the Buddhist centres of the Kushan empire (Crook 1994a; Snellgrove 1987; Snellgrove and Skorupski 1979). Such a presence seems to share little with modern Buddhism in the region, which followed from the military expansion of central Tibet into Ladakh and Western Tibet in the 7th Century under the leadership of the Yarlung Kings. This expansion brought Tibet into direct contact with Buddhist India to the South and Buddhist China to the West, a meeting which began the convulsive conversion of the Tibetan royalty to Buddhism. During two 'diffusions' of Buddhism from India between the seventh and eleventh centuries, a series of religious virtuosi turned Ladakh and its surrounding regions into one of the major cultural crossing points between India and Tibet.¹⁵

¹⁵See Snellgrove (1987) for a comprehensive discussion of this period.

In the latter diffusion, seminal religious figures such as the 'translators' (L. *lotsava*) Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055) and Marpa (1012-96), and the hugely influential Indian monk-scholar Atisa (982-1054), made their initial presence on the Tibetan scene felt in the regions of Western Tibet, Ladakh and Zangskar.¹⁶ The influence of Rinchen Zangpo was felt in Lingshed, where the oldest shrine (the *tsan-khang* or "secret room") in the monastery contains depictions of the translator, of a similar style to those of the 12th Century Lotsava Shrine at the Alchi Choskhor temple complex in the Ladakh Valley (see Snellgrove and Skorupski 1979).

This inspired religious fervour was not to last. As the various strands of Tibetan Buddhism coalesced around the teachings of many of these religious preceptors, the various political powers within Tibet were forced (in 1207) to submit to the overwhelming might of Genghis Khan's Mongolian armies. Having thus avoided political annihilation, a growing struggle for the patronage of the Mongol Khans began to rock the newly-formed religious establishments of Tibet.

It was amidst this tense political climate that the Gelukpa Order, of which Kumbum monastery is a part, came into being. One of the last of the self-contained orders to appear on the Tibetan scene, the Gelukpa were founded in the 14th century by the scholar-monk Tsongkhapa (1357-1419).¹⁷ The order - which emphasised monasticism as the essential determinant in the religious life, alongside the extremely controlled use of tantra - originally made a name for itself through its strict discipline and arbitration of land disputes between other orders and land-owners. It spread rapidly from its original monastery at Ganden (founded 1409) near Lhasa, to become a widespread and politically powerful institution that had 'brought over' monasteries throughout Tibet and surrounding regions.

As part of the expansion of Gelukpa power, a variety of institutions in Ladakh and Zangskar were converted to the Gelukpa during the 1440s by Tsongkhapa's disciple, Changsems Shesrabs Zangpo (Petech 1977: 168n; Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980: 42; Crook 1994a). Amongst the numerous acts of Changsems Shesrabs Zangpo was the founding of the Tashi Od'Bar

¹⁶Dates from Snellgrove and Richardson (1986).

¹⁷Dates from Snellgrove and Richardson (1986); Thurman (1989). Willis (1995) has 1357-1428.

Shrine at Lingshed, presently at the heart of Kumbum's temple complex. One of the oldest of the Kumbum monks related the event:

It is said that Changsems Shesrabs Zangpo was coming over the Hanumala Pass [to the south of Lingshed *en route* to Zangskar - see Fig. 2.1]. As he came over the pass, he saw a tantric symbol shining brightly on a rock. So he said "I shall build a *lha-khang* [temple or shrine] there." The rock was placed inside a *changchub chorten* [a *stupa* depicting the Buddha's enlightenment], and the Tashi Od'bar shrine was built around it.¹⁸

On the wider political scene, the progressive alliance of Mongol power with the Gelukpa Order led to their eventual ascendancy in central Tibet under the leadership of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1681) and Gushri Khan. This in turn led to a complete rearrangement of most of the religious establishments in Tibet. Ganden, along with the monastic universities of Sera and Drepung, became one of the three major "seats" of Gelukpa power in Tibet, surrounding the capital Lhasa in a triumvirate of ecclesiastical dominance. The Kagyud Order - who had latterly presented the major challenge to Gelukpa power in a protracted war over Central Tibet - had vast tracts of land confiscated and monasteries closed. As a result, Tibetan relations with the kingdoms of Ladakh, Zangskar and Bhutan - both of whose kings supported the Kagyudpa, and had been accused of persecuting Gelukpa establishments - soured, precipitating war (Petech 1977).

Lasting from 1681 to 1683¹⁹, the war was to prove the demise of Ladakh as a truly independent kingdom: calling on the military support of the Kashmir Moghuls to oust the Tibetan and Mongolian forces in the area, Ladakh became politically and economically crippled, and vacillated between the religious control of the Gelukpa Order and the economic

¹⁸Since the Tashi Od'Bar shrine and the earlier shrine for Rinchen Zangpo are side-by-side, it is feasible that Changsems Shesrabs Zangpo was simply converting the site, as he had done in the Zangskar monasteries to the South (see Crook 1994a), rather than establishing a *new* religious community there. The monks at Kumbum pointed to the prior existence of two cave-monasteries in the Lingshed valley, which they said were not Gelukpa. Villagers referred to one of these monasteries as *Brigang*. (Mills 1997).

¹⁹Petech (1977); Snellgrove and Richardson (1986) have 1684 onwards.

power of Kashmir. In the end it was left compromised in both directions, facing punitive economic levies from Kashmir, and the major re-orientation of its internal ecclesiastical and monastic structure in favour of Gelukpa dominance from Lhasa. Monasteries of all orders were placed under the Gelukpa 'seat' at Drepung, and all the Gelukpa monasteries there within the control of rGyud Stod, the tantric college at Sera. It is arguable to what extent the other orders took this seriously, but the specifics of this centralisation of Gelukpa institutions remain to this day.

As the economic stability of Ladakh gradually returned, so did the powers of local kings. Ladakh and Zangskar were unified again under the kingship of Tsewang Namgyal in the late 1700s. In 1779, he donated many of the Gelukpa monasteries in Ladakh and Zangskar to the visiting Gelukpa luminary, Lobzang Geleg Yeshe Dragpa, the 8th. Ngari Rinpoche incarnation, from Western Tibet. This included the monasteries and villages of Karsha, P'ukht'al, Likir and Mune (Petech 1977: 112). He also donated the region of Rangdum, and granted tax exemption to the assigned areas. Following this, in 1783, Ngari Rinpoche founded Rangdum monastery, the eventual "mother monastery" (L. *ma-gon*) of the group. Although not explicit, it is highly probable that Kumbum and its surrounding villages were included as part of this grant, as a subsidiary of one of the others possibly Karsha or P'ukht'al (see Fig. B).

The power of the kings of Ladakh was soon to wane once more, as Kashmir sought to reclaim its prize. In the 1840s, a series of minor wars perpetrated by the Dogras of Jammu annexed Ladakh and brought it under the sway of the Maharaja of Kashmir and, indirectly, British rule. The kingships were abolished except as titular posts and Dogra forts were built in Ladakh and Zangskar. Rule from Kashmir was comparatively benign, and the influence of *pax brittanica* in the region saved the monasteries from many of the ravages that Buddhist areas had suffered under Muslim reigns. Ecclesiastical connections with Tibet continued uninterrupted, and the new status of Ladakh went unquestioned by a Tibetan government and Gelukpa order that had become increasingly inward-looking and unwilling to enforce its political will at its borders (Snellgrove and Richardson 1986: 224-230). Monks from Ladakh and Zangskar continued to travel to the monastic universities of central Tibet, whilst interference from Kashmir was minimised by the long three-week journey across the Himalayas from Ladakh to Kashmir.

This situation continued until the 1950s, when the forces of the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet from China. Chinese influence in Tibetan affairs increased steadily over the next nine years, until the ill-fated Tibetan Uprising in 1959 precipitated a bloody Chinese military crackdown, and the 14th Dalai Lama's flight into exile in India.

1.3 - The Renaissance of Tibetan Buddhism?

In the years immediately following the Tibetan diaspora, during which 100,000 Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile, the position of Tibetan Buddhism as a definable religious tradition looked grave. Repression of religious practice in Tibet reached its high point during the ensuing Chinese Cultural Revolutions, and most of Tibet's monasteries were either destroyed, ransacked or turned into grain silos and 'work co-operatives'.

In exile however, the Tibetan refugee community capitalised on the modest concessions it received from a variety of receiving nations, most particularly India and Nepal. Refugee centres were set up in Assam, Sikkim, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Karnataka. Dharamsala (H.P.) became the focus for refugee processing and the centre of the 14th Dalai Lama's government-in-exile. The Three Seats of Ganden, Drepung and Sera were eventually relocated to the secluded Tibetan refugee enclave at Mundgod in Karnataka, Southern India. In Nepal, an unprecedented number of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries have sprung up in the Kathmandu and Sherpa regions (Fürer-Haimendorf 1990; Hellfer 1993). Indeed, the survival of Tibetan culture outside Chinese Tibet has, to most intents and purposes, centred on the survival of Tibetan Buddhism (Cantwell 1988; 1996a).

Nonetheless, the strengths of the situation in exile should not be over-emphasised: the established religious hierarchies of Tibet were now either destroyed or in complete disarray; the monastic communities and ecclesiastical bureaucracies of pre-invasion Tibet (see Goldstein 1989) had to rebuild themselves afresh in an alien political and economic environment. It was to be several decades before the Tibetan Buddhist establishment in exile could turn its attentions to the religious requirements of the once peripheral Buddhist communities along the Himalayan border.

1.4 -Ladakhi Buddhism and the L.B.A

Similar changes began to overtake the Buddhist population in Ladakh. Isolated from links with Tibet by the Chinese occupation, Ladakh became the centre of a series of minor wars over territory between China, Pakistan and India throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. If the Buddhist communities of Ladakh and Zangskar had represented a peripheral section of the larger Tibetan ecclesiastical hierarchies in the 200 years prior to the Chinese Invasion, this situation was made absolute in the immediate wake of the Tibetan Diaspora.

In the absence of Tibetan assertions of religious authority, a variety of other representations of 'Ladakhi Buddhism' came to the fore, particularly arising from the influence of Kashmir converts to Buddhism. The Buddhism of Ladakh, already viewed as a "paralysed periphery under an effete autocracy"(Kaul 1956: 18 quoted in Bertelsen 1995), was increasingly portrayed by Kashmiri Buddhist organisations as backward and under threat from a burgeoning Muslim majority in the region.

Such voices coalesced into systematic policies of religious reform with the political ascendancy of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (L.B.A.). Originally founded in 1937 as the Young Men's Buddhist Association of Ladakh, the organisation had always been very politically active, declaring their intentions to "safeguard the interests of the Buddhist community of Ladakh and preserve its cultural heritage".²⁰ Such intervention nonetheless involved active campaigning against a series of "social evils" which were deemed to be "vestiges" of previous social practices. These included:

a) Polyandry. This was outlawed by the Indian Government in 1942, but almost no prosecutions were brought and the practice remains prevalent in the areas of Zangskar and Sham (Lower Ladakh). The L.B.A. argued that this was to stop as it kept the Buddhist population down in a region increasingly populated by Muslims.

b) Alcohol consumption.

²⁰Taken from an interview with the Secretary of the Youth Wing, Ladakh Buddhist Association, 13/1/94.

c) Blood sacrifice to local gods. This was done through the L.B.A. sponsoring or encouraging the visits of high *lamas* to the region. According to the L.B.A., this practice has been *almost* entirely eradicated, coming to an effective end in the early 1980s.

d) *Shimi*, the giving of offerings to dead relatives at the King's New Year, argued as being 'un-Buddhist' because the dead would have gained rebirth within a short period and therefore would no longer require offerings. The L.B.A published a pamphlet denouncing the practice in 1989, and issued a set of direct instructions (it was not clear on what authority) in 1990-1.

1.5 - Influence from the South

In 1980 the 14th Dalai Lama visited Zangskar Valley and gave teachings there. Whether this took place at the invitation of the Ladakh Buddhist Association or not, it certainly represented the high point of a steady stream of important Tibetan Buddhist figures visiting Ladakh. The re-establishment of the Three Seats as effective teaching colleges in India meant that the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy could turn its attention to the previously peripheral Buddhist communities of the Himalaya, of which North-West India was a point of particular concern. In the early 1990s, the Lingshed area began to benefit from the particular attentions of a high Buddhist scholar, the *geshe lharampa* Ngawang Changchub (**Photo 1.2**). Having spent 23 years in study at Gomang College at Drepung monastic university, Geshe Changchub turned his attentions to what he felt was the unfortunate spiritual and economic condition of his natal area. As one of the most important figures in Lingshed during my stay there, his own description of this period, taken from a small autobiographical text used for sponsorship purposes, follows:

In the Summer of 1991, I returned to my native district of Ladakh. I was sad to see that there really had been no development during the past 23 years in respect of opportunities for livelihood or education. I resolved there and then to do something to alleviate the hardships experienced by the people of the Lingshed area. The best course of action would be to raise the standards of the monastic and secular education and thus I began by

engaging in a program of teachings to the monks of Lingshed Monastery. I was very pleased with the level of interest shown and when they requested me to return again the following summer I was glad to accept.

The next year a teaching tour of remote small villages in Zangskar was organised by the Zangskar Buddhist Association and a Zangskar youth organisation. Together with three other scholars from Gomang I visited more than 100 villages over three months. The tour was a great success and I was again extremely pleased by the response shown by the people.

I returned again to Lingshed where I had discussions with local monastic and lay community leaders. A strong need was felt for some sort of development program focused initially on the small schools of the Lingshed area.

On October 17th 1992, I had an audience with His Holiness to report on and receive advice concerning the state of Buddhism in the North-Western Himalaya Region. He suggested that I teach mainly Graduate Path [*L. lam rim*] and Mind Training [*L. lozhong*] techniques as these were the most suitable for short periods of instruction during the summer months at Lingshed. He also advised me to maintain and strengthen my relationship with the people of Lingshed and surrounding areas. During the audience I felt a deep inspiration such as I had not experienced before and I felt confident about implementing his advice regardless of whatever difficulties there may be.

In accordance with His Holiness's instructions, I spent four months in the Lingshed area during the Summer of 1993 giving teachings to the monks of Lingshed monastery and to lay people from the villages of the area. From the 2nd to the 8th August I organised a Seminar focusing mainly on Buddhist Sutra and Tantric teachings but also including two hours a day for people to air their views on the current problems in the area and how they might best be solved. The seminar was well attended by many people from different parts of Ladakh and Zangskar as well as a number of foreign tourists.

On the 16th of December 1993, during his visit to South India, I had another opportunity to meet His Holiness as part of a group from Bangalore with whom I was connected. The main reason for the audience was to get advice on establishing a Dharma centre in Bangalore and how Buddhism might best be taught there. His Holiness advised me to teach whatever methods brought peace to people's minds and meaning to their lives. I was able to report on the success that we had in improving the schools

in the Lingshed area and a general increase in the level of interest in Buddhism. This audience, like the previous one in 1992, instilled me with strong confidence and hope that in future, I would be able to accomplish His Holiness's wishes.

Geshe Changchub was also influential in persuading the Gelukpa incarnate *lama* Dagon Rinpoche (**Photo 1.1**) to intervene. Based in Kathmandu, the incarnate agreed to spend three summers in the Lingshed area, giving teachings and tantric empowerments. Combined with this, Geshe Changchub and a series of younger monks at the monastery worked assiduously at procuring financial sponsors from the many trekking and 'meditation' tours and individual Western Buddhists that have begun to stay at Lingshed during the summer trekking period. The economic input arising from this has provided opportunities to finance the building of a nunnery in the area, the support of certain forms of local medicine, and the possibility of sponsoring young monks to go to Southern India to receive full monastic training.

What follows, therefore, is a description of Lingshed and Kumbum at a certain moment in time, a few years into a process wherein the newly re-formed Gelukpa Order is re-establishing its links with a Buddhist community which has spent some years in comparative **isolation**.

Chapter 2:

Kumbum Monastery - Life as a Monk

LADAKH

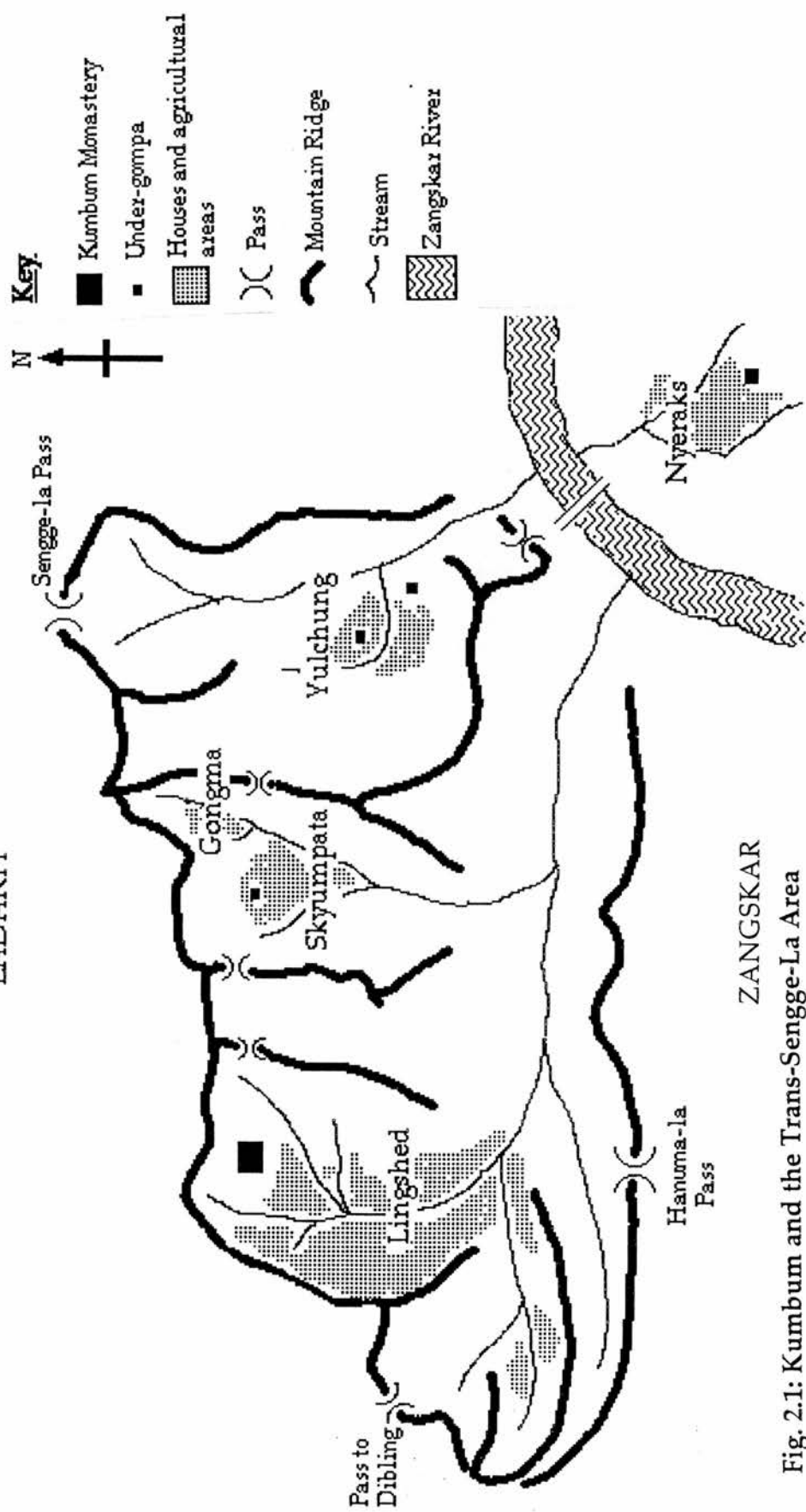


Fig. 2.1: Kumbum and the Trans-Sengge-La Area

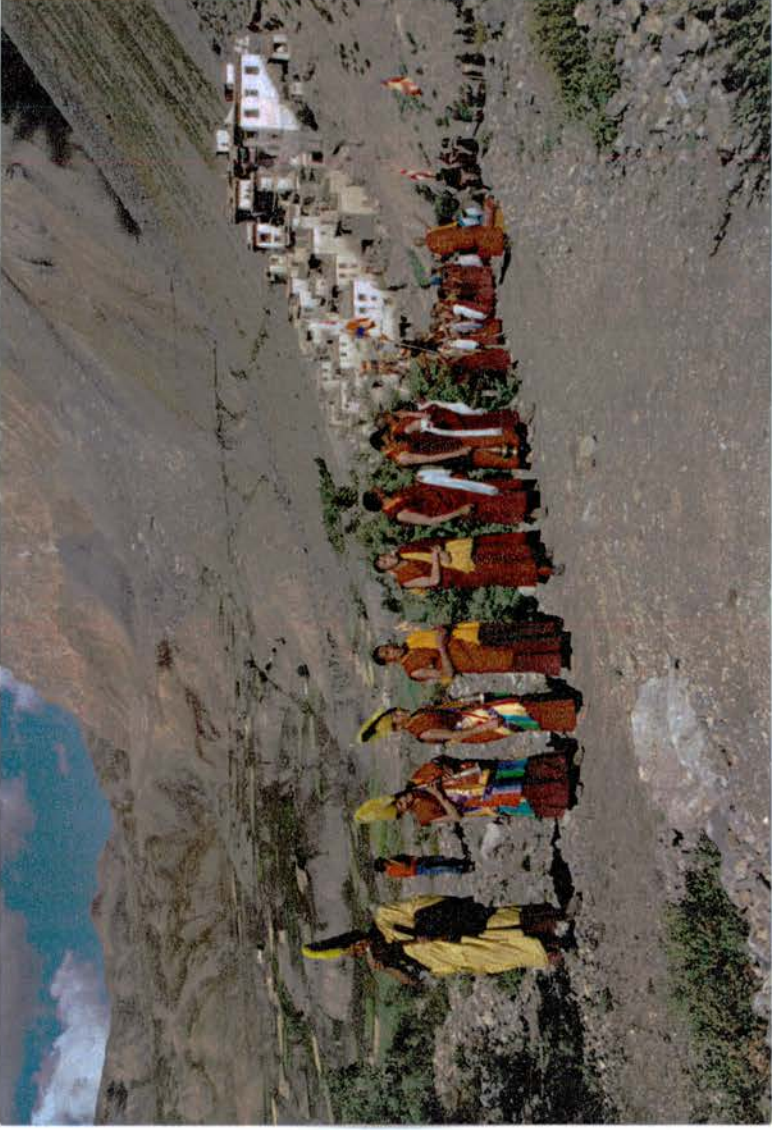


Photo 2.1: Kumbum monks line up outside the monastery (in background) to greet the arrival of Dagon Rinpoche, 29th August 1994.

2.1 - At First Sight

If one were travelling from Leh to Kumbum in the summertime, traversing the 5000 metre Trans-Sengge-La Pass once most of the snow had melted away, Lingshed and its surrounding villages would seem to be nestled within a vast cauldron of mountains, criss-crossed with mountain spurs that point down towards the fast flowing waters of the Zangskar River. Entering any of these villages from the outside world, one's first glimpse is always from above.

Descending from the pass above Lingshed itself, and passing clockwise around one of its many entrance cairns, the layout of almost the entire village greets one in a single vista, spread out in deep greens and yellows across the valley, nestled on ridges and slopes, built up with evident care around a fan of tumbling melt water streams that descend from mountain waterfalls and braid together into a single tributary at the valley floor, flowing out of the village through the gorge that leads south to the Zangskar River.

Within Lingshed valley, almost every available spot of land that can be viably used, is. The marks of human habitation separate the villages off from the comparative desolation of the areas between. Unlike many villages in Ladakh and Zangskar, which cluster their houses together into lonely cliff-top citadels, the houses of Lingshed are dotted about on all sides of the main and subsidiary valleys, interspersed with fields of barley and peas, fed by intricate canals and miniature streams, distributing carefully negotiated quantities of precious water to ensure another year's harvest for the village's 400 inhabitants. The houses are mud-brick constructions varying in size from the larger *khangchen* ("great houses") where the young household head and his or her family live, to the smaller subsidiary dwellings called *khangbu*, inhabited by elderly grandparents or celibate lay-nuns.

When entering the village from the East, Kumbum monastery itself is hidden behind a slow curve in the hillside, only to be visible once the hour-long trek down the mountainside is almost complete. Once in full view, however, its physical presence is impressive, draped across the mountainside in long hanging lines of monastic quarters, or *shak* (a word which means literally 'pendant') that taper down from the central temple complex, or *gompa*, at its peak. In the sharp Himalayan sunlight, the crisp

edges of the whitewashed buildings are broken up by the maroon robes of monks going about their business, hurrying to prayer in the main temple, studying texts or entertaining the many laity that come to visit the monastery. Especially on the numerous 'holy days' of the year, the corridors and courtyards of the monastery buzz with life, and monastic quarters are filled with the chatter of monks' various friends and relatives come to visit, bringing food, swapping news or requesting rites to be performed in the village. Physically separated from the village though Kumbum may be, it is hard to overcome the impression that it remains the social and economic cross-roads of the area.

2.2 - Kumbum - A Brief Overview

Before looking at each of its many aspects in detail, a brief overview of Kumbum as an institution is necessary. The monastery most closely resembles what Sen (1984) would class as a "lesser" monastery: comparatively small, it lacks a substantial teaching infrastructure, and is economically, socially and ritually tied to the surrounding population. Such local institutions actually represented the bulk of monasteries in pre-1950 Tibet (Snellgrove & Richardson 1986: 247-8). Kumbum itself houses a floating population of some sixty-five monks, all of the Gelukpa Order. With the occasional exception of a visiting monk come to teach or carry out some errands on behalf of the order, the Kumbum community all hail from one of six surrounding villages: Lingshed, Skyumpata, Gongma, Yulchung, Nyeraks and Dibling (**Fig. 2.1**). These villages are referred to as Kumbum's 'sponsor' (L. *zhindag*) villages, and provide for the continued upkeep and support of the monastery and its inhabitants. The monastery has a *gonlak*, or subsidiary temple in each of these villages, maintained by a caretaker monk (L. *gomnyer*) from the monastery.

Monks spend much of their time either teaching and performing rites in the villages or being trained and performing rites in the *gompa* proper - that is, the temple complex at the peak of the monastery.²¹ Monastic assemblies (L. *ts'ogs*) - the official gathering of monks for a ceremonial purpose - take place most often in the main prayer hall, and can

²¹For purposes of clarity, I will refer to 'the *gompa*' when discussing the central temple complex, and 'the monastery' when discussing the entirety of Kumbum, including monks' quarters.

often last much of the day, with monks eating and drinking during most proceedings. Any spare time a monk may have is spent sleeping, relaxing, or studying in their individual monastic quarters. Above the *gompa* itself, a special set of rooms is kept for Ngari Rinpoche, the incarnate *lama* who 'owns' Kumbum, but it is also used to house any high *lamas* that may be visiting.

2.3- Being A Monk In Kumbum

In his wide-ranging analysis of the general literature on Tibetan Buddhist monasticism, Sen (1984: 17-18) goes to some considerable lengths to define precisely what a monk is. His efforts are not uncalled for: as he notes, authors such as Stein have discussed certain varieties of "married monk" (Stein 1972: 140), a phrase which is confusing at best (Snellgrove 1957: 201). Sen and Snellgrove both insist that the term be restricted to celibate religious only, and not be used to discuss those who adopt the robes and ritual capacities normally associated with monks, but not the vow of celibacy.

Certainly, when the number and variety of different religious types is as great as it is in Tibetan regions, clarification is always welcome. Nonetheless, an overemphasis on what a monk is (as a definable post) often obscures what a monk does, in terms of his adherence to a certain way of being religious. Samuel (1993a) has discussed the numerous religious types in Tibet as being constructed out of interweaving syntheses of "shamanic" and "clerical" Buddhism. This he exemplifies in terms of the major distinction present within Tibetan monasticism: that between ordinary monks (*traba*) and the class of spiritual superiors called *lama*.

This latter term is easily misinterpreted: in the broadest sense of the word, *lama* is used to indicate anyone who is your distinct spiritual superior, and thus (especially in Ladakh) is often used by laity when referring to any monk, or more specifically to any monk with whom they have a relationship of tutelage (Samuel 1978: 52). More strictly, a *lama* is someone (monk or otherwise) who is both initiated into tantric wisdom (Sen 1984: 19) and qualified to confer it upon others. This latter, stricter definition is the one I will adhere to in this work.

In the Gelukpa context, almost all high *lama* are 'incarnate' *lama* (L. *tulku*), that is reincarnations of important religious figures, many of whom

are also felt to be the manifestation of certain tantric deities. Samuel has argued that such 'tantric wisdom' is best described as representing a "shamanic" religiosity as opposed to the simple clerical monasticism of the majority of monastery inhabitants.

However, since post-holding incarnate *lama* are often - and in the Gelukpa Order, always - monks, the shamanic and clerical aspects of religiosity often intertwine. As such it seems best to follow Samuel's lead and define monasticism not so much as a specific status, but as a 'method of religiosity', which can and is combined with other modes. Particularly "clerical renunciation" is characterised by a certain agenda of disciplinary and intellectual practices which aim at a progressive realisation of a certain kind of religious renunciation. It is that agenda that I would like to look at here.

2.4 - Monastic Ordinations

In general, entry into monastic life in Tibetan Buddhism is rarely a personal decision made by the monk himself, and Kumbum is no exception. Children are often brought to the monastery by their parents at an early age, often as young as five. Here they are dressed in the robes of a fully-ordained monk and presented to the *lopon* (head monk). Their hair, previously shorn to a simple top-knot, is then cut off by the *lopon* who thence makes prayers (L. *ts'ig zangs* - "noble words") to signify the child's admittance to the monastic community. Thereafter, the new monk must wear the *zan*, the outermost of the three robes of monkhood.

Initiation into the monastic community depends on certain criteria which appear to be standard to Ladakh. Principally, the child must have no substantial physical malformity. Secondly, as Dollfus notes of monks at Likir Monastery:

They are recruited as much from the stratum of the "people of the royal family" as from the "nobles" or their majority from the "ordinary people"...Only the stratum of the "inferior people" - blacksmiths and sedentary and itinerant musicians - could not enter orders by virtue of their contagious impurity. (Dollfus 1989: 81, my translation).

In this sense, monks in Lingshed are principally taken from 'landed' groups - either those that own land or farm it on an established basis.²²

At this early stage, young monks are simply *traba* ("student", a term which applies to all monks but particularly unordained ones) and are given no vows to maintain or, if older, simply those limited vows pertaining to lay religious (L. *gyesnyen*). This period usually lasts from 2-5 years, and is generally seen as the preparatory period for monastic practice. Monks will be assigned to a monastic quarters (L. *shak*), where they will be placed in the care of an older monk who will see to their general education and discipline. During this time, the young monk will learn the rudiments of reading and reciting texts, and be trained in many of the simpler aspects of monastic life as well as performing the lighter everyday work of the monastery, such as acting as messengers or carrying and dispensing tea during prayers.

Admittance to the second, semi-ordained (L. *gyets'ul* - "virtuous manner") status follows a few years later, often in the mid-teens. At this stage, the monk will receive 36 vows, as determined by the Vinaya, during the performance of prayers by an incarnate *lama*, which the monks must verbally follow. The absence of an incumbent incarnate at Kumbum means that those monks wishing to receive ordination must either travel to a nearby incumbency (such as Tikse monastery near Leh), or await the arrival of a visiting incarnate. As semi-ordained, the monk dons the full three robes of monastic community, and takes part in the various rites performed in the main prayer hall of the monastery. The monk may now also begin his training in the tantric practices of the monastery.²³

²² In Lingshed, the only such outcaste group was the blacksmith's household. It is difficult to assess the reasons for this prohibition, beyond the traditional impurity associated with the group itself. Certainly, villagers appeared to have no aversion to the occupations themselves: since there are few or no Mon or Beda (itinerant musician castes) in the area, villagers would make their own music, claiming it as their own with some pride. I suspect (although I cannot prove it) that the prohibition is linked to the tendency of such castes to engage in occupations which support them on an exchange basis: like monks, they traditionally receive their actual sustenance from others.

²³ Sen (1984: 19) argues this tantric aspect follows only after 15-20 years of training. This is true for those entering for the scholastic *geshe* degree (see below), but not for ordinary monks faced with the considerable ritual responsibilities of a monastery like Kumbum.

Monks will remain as *gyets'ul* for some time - in many cases more than ten years - receiving a broad training in the philosophy, discipline and debating procedures of the Gelukpa Order before being admitted to fully-ordained (L. *gyelong*) status, a position technically necessary for many of the senior posts in the monastery (2.6) This latter involves taking 253 vows, conferred during a full day's rite. As with the *gyets'ul* vows, this involves the intercession of an incarnate *lama*.

The monastic population in Kumbum included all of these statuses. Out of a survey of 41 of the monks taken in January 1994, 13 were full *gyelong*, 19 were *gyets'ul*, and 9 were novice *traba*. The novice population was regarded as large at the time following a 'recruitment drive' by the monastery in the early 1990s after several elderly *gyelong* had died during a particularly harsh set of winters.

Monastic ordination in Tibetan Buddhism is, for the most part, a permanent alternative to lay existence, and lacks the temporary ordinations common in Theravadin Buddhism (see Tambiah 1970; 1976). The exception to this is the institution of lay vows (L. *gyesnyen*), most often taken for the two-day period of the twice-yearly *Snyung-gnas* fasting rite held in the monastery (3.2.2). The status of vow-holder conferred during this rite allows laity, both male and female, to stay in the grounds of the monastery overnight, an activity normally forbidden to laywomen. To a certain extent, therefore, the *gyesnyen* vow holders, however briefly, do attain the ritual status of novice monks.

2.5 - The Structure of Offices in Lingshed Monastery

Membership of the monastic assembly of Kumbum also necessitates active participation in a number of duties associated with the ritual and economic activities of the monastery. There are six main offices, whose incumbents are chosen at regular intervals according to a combination of seniority of *gyets'ul* ordination, the decision of a general council of monks and, if this fails to secure a candidate, through divination (L. *mo*).²⁴ The major posts at Kumbum were:

²⁴In *mo*, names are placed inside balls of barley dough, and thence placed inside a pot, which is shaken whilst prayers are made to the *choskyong*, (Protectors of the Religion) with the first name to fall out taking the post.

i) The *lopon*, (“teacher”) or head monk. Most larger teaching monasteries have at their head a *khenpo* (“professor”, usually a very educated incarnate *lama*). As a local monastery, Kumbum lacks such an august centre, being run on an everyday basis by the *lopon* who fulfils many, but not all, of a *khenpo*’s bureaucratic duties. His position as ritual head of the monastery and of the monastic assembly (L. *ts’ogs*) is related to his annual performance of a two-week meditation retreat (L. *ts’ams*) prior to the religious New Year, which conveys upon him the ritual powers of the monastery’s tutelary deity (L. *yidam*), Yamāntaka. Following from this, the *lopon* is charged with either presiding over, or sending a representative to, most household rituals, especially those involving prayers for the dead. The *lopon* also has guiding role in matters of monastic discipline, which function gives him executive control over most decisions made in the monastery.

The *lopon*’s tenure is three years (or less, should he choose to resign), and the post is usually resigned and installed on *Zhipa’i-Chonga* Day, the anniversary of the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha Śākyamuni - see **Appendix A**. After his resignation he is referred to as *zurba* (‘retired’), a position of great respect and authority, although no longer necessarily burdened with the responsibilities of office.

ii) The *umdzat* or Master of Ceremonies, the post directly beneath the *lopon* in seniority. His ritual duties primarily concern his choosing and starting all prayers that are performed in the main prayer hall (L. *dukhang*). He must know by heart all prayers and rituals within the monastery’s repertoire. Like the *lopon*, he has seniority in the monastery, and is therefore privy to many of the executive decisions made. At the end of the *lopon*’s tenure, the incumbent *umdzat* automatically takes his place.

iii) The *u-chung* is the *umdzat*-in-waiting, charged to start all prayers and rites held *outside* the *dukhang*. This is a relatively junior position with no executive powers but, since it inevitably leads to the post of *lopon*, it is usually given to a monk of proven knowledge, ritual capacity, and good voice, usually after a decision is taken by all the monks or, if no decision is reached, by divination. His installation occurs 3-4 months after the resignation of the *lopon*.

iv) The *gyesgus* is the principal disciplinary officer of the monastery, a post changed every three years. The term “disciplinary officer” is technically correct, but only in the sense that he maintains the structure of discipline within the monastic assembly itself. In this sense he also acts as intermediary between the monastic assembly and the sponsor of any rite performed by them, informing the *umdzat* of the rites and prayers requested by the sponsor, and introducing the sponsor as the object of dedication prayers (*sngowa*) near the end of the rite. He is not empowered to deal with major breaches of discipline, such as theft, which must be decided upon by a council of all the monks. As with Theravadin areas, all monks were theoretically equal within the rules of the Vinaya, and no single monk had authority to order another monk to do anything above and beyond the context of spiritual tutelage. In practice, as Tambiah notes in *Thai monasteries* (1970: 75), distinctions between novice and monk, seniority of service, teacher and pupil, all acted as platforms for individual relationships of discipline, especially in the sense that teaching the code of discipline, as part of the Buddhist Canon, is channelled into the relationship between religious preceptor and disciple. Thus, much of what might be termed discipline in the secular sense of the word was the responsibility of the *lopon*, or “teacher” who was empowered to give orders as the everyday workings of the monastery.

The post is changed on *Galden Ngamchod* Day (“[twenty] fifth day offering for Ganden” - see Appendix A), which commemorates the birth and death of Tsongkhapa. On this day, the new *gyesgus* is led in procession from the founding Tashi Od’Bar shrine (1.2; 3.2.2) to the main prayer hall, where he is installed and reads a prepared speech marking the renewal and re-establishment of monastic discipline.

v) The *gomnyer* or ‘caretaker’ and key-keeper of the *gompa*’s main shrines. His duties revolve around performing all the daily offerings in each of the shrines (usually done around dawn), and looking after all ritual paraphernalia and communal rooms, for which he is financially responsible in cases of damage or theft. Each of the various village shrines (L. *gonlak*) also have resident *gomnyer*, who are charged with the daily offerings, especially the performance of the daily *skangsol* prayers to the *choskyong*, the Protectors of Religion (Ch. 6).

In Kumbum, *gomnyer* was a three year post, being changed on *Chubsum Choga Day* (**Appendix A**), when the incumbent hands back the list detailing the belongings of the various shrines, and affirms that they are correct. *Gomnyer* in the outlying village shrines varied from one to three years.

vi) The *nyerpa*, or managers, are integrally bound up with the running of the monastery as an economic entity, and their main duty is securing lay sponsorship and provision for the monastery throughout the year. Although there are usually two *nyerpa* that deal with everyday events and make sure all the monks get fed, sets of *nyerpa* are assigned to deal with larger religious events. *Nyerpa* also supervise the allocation of monastic estates and land to villagers, and, more recently, of cash loans. The rent and interest from these sources represents the economic basis for the continuation of the monastery (see Crook & Osmaston 1994: Ch. 20).

A variety of other posts are also obligatory parts of life in the monastery, in particular the playing of certain musical instruments during ceremonies. Considerations of merit and skill apply to the designation of the various offices of the monastery, especially those of greatest responsibility. However, as supported members of the monastic community, each monk is obliged to perform a certain rota of duties throughout their career. Obligatory duties are the performance of *gomnyer*, *gyesgus* and *nyerpa*, either for the monastery as a whole, or for specific rites and festivals. Other duties, specifically those of the three primary ritual officiants of the monastery - the *lopon*, *umdzat*, and *u-chung*, where voice, the ability to memorise and recite texts, and a strong interest in ritual and tantric practice, are required - are determined according to aptitude, but *within* the hierarchy of ordination that determines other posts.

Performance of all of these posts, whether fulfilling the religious (L. *chos*) or secular (L. *srid*) duties within the monastery, depends in turn on one's membership of the monastic assembly, whose seating arrangement exemplifies this hierarchy of ordination (3.2.1). Thus, as Sen (1984) notes, both secular and religious duties are subsumed within the constitution of the monastery as an essentially religious and ritual establishment.

2.6 - Monastic Discipline

In its most obvious social proscription, the Tibetan Vinaya code of discipline centred around the monk's physical and social removal from certain principal activities of lay life.

This had two major dimensions. Firstly, removal from activities of agricultural production. Monks were discouraged from agricultural labour, and particularly the production of staple crops such as barley and peas. Each monk was allocated the produce of one field (called a *traba'i-zhing* - 'monk's field'), which is worked by their immediate relatives, or *snyen*, plus in certain circumstances a small vegetable garden, which is worked by the monks themselves. Both monks and laity agreed that such work was *sdigpa* (a term often glossed as 'sinful', but more accurately implying an action which causes negative karma), since it killed many insects and worms, as did any digging or ploughing. Normatively, involvement in agricultural activity was expected to decrease as a monk entered more senior ranks: semi-ordained monks were often allowed to help their families with the harvest if it was necessary, although in my experience such work was limited to that labour necessary for their own subsistence: thus, they would work on the single field allocated to them, rather than the principal fields of their natal households. Fully-ordained monks were expected to avoid such acts except in extremis. Most agreed that it would be out of the question for the head monk (*lopon*) to involve himself in any act of agricultural production, with some laity feeling that he should not even enter the fields of the village during the later summer months.

Such stipulations were closely related to monastic observances of the *Yar-gnas* Summer Retreat during the sixth and seventh months of the Tibetan Calendar (**Appendix A**). For one and a half months during the Summer, monks cannot journey more than 500 arm spans from the *gompa* in any direction unless on monastery business. If monastic obligations such as a death in the village or essential trading forced monks to go beyond this limit, they had to receive the blessing of the *yardag*, a senior monk (often the head monk) who is entrusted with keeping the *Yar-gnas* restrictions purely.²⁵ This blessing, conferred at a special ceremony (L. *skurim*), applied

²⁵In 1994, there were four such *yardag*: one principal and three subsidiaries.

for seven days, whereupon the monk must return to receive another. If monastery duties took him beyond the possibility of such a return the monk had to 'transfer' his retreat to another monastery under Ngari Rinpoche's headship: thus, if staying in Leh, he would transfer his retreat to Likir monastery, where blessing could be more easily sought.

During the period of *Yar-gnas*, the three main structures of vow applicable to monks had to be maintained as purely as possible. Those were:

a) those Pratimoksa (L. *sot'ar* - 'liberation') vows pertaining to their position as semi- or fully-ordained monks;

b) the *bodhisattva* (L. *changsems*) vows of those intent on enlightenment;

c) the tantric (L. *sang-ngags* - "secret mantra") vows of those who have received Vajrayāna empowerments (Ch. 6).

In particular, monks are not allowed to eat after noon (a restriction relaxed during the freezing winter months), unless given dispensation on the grounds of work responsibility, age or infirmity. Restrictions also applied to the kind of work that can be performed during this period: especially, monks could not dig, move stones or help with building work. Sonam Rinchen, an *ex-lopon* of Kumbum, explained the rationale behind the strictures of the Summer Retreat:

The real importance of *Yar-gnas* lies in the fact that [at that time] many sentient beings are being reborn and are wandering about. Therefore, if monks are going to and fro from their abodes, there is a great danger of them killing [these insects]. The Buddha did not allow monks to go any great distance from the *gompa*, and this restriction is called *Yar-gnas* [literally, "summer abiding"]...During *Yar-gnas* digging, moving stones and building are forbidden because doing so causes the death (and rebirth) of many insects. Of course, I'm afraid that once two and a half months are up many insects die because once the restriction is lifted

everyone starts wandering about a lot and building *castles* and so forth!²⁶

The second dominant feature of a monk's removal from lay existence was his non-involvement in acts of reproduction: monks were forbidden to marry or engage in sexual relations with members of the opposite sex. The monastic rule also forbade monks from spending more than three nights in the households of particular laity, and in general discouraged them from staying there at night at all. On the several occasions when I travelled with monks, they tended to be very careful either to find a suitable village shrine to stay at or to sleep in those abodes (the *khangbu* or 'small houses') occupied by grandparents or unmarried laity. Only as a last resort would they sleep in the shrine-rooms of the *khangchen*, the main abode of the household estate, where the household head, his or her spouse and their children lived.

2.7 - Resignation and Gelukpa Scholasticism

Monks were not forced to fulfil the various offices and duties within the monastery, nor for that matter did they have to observe the strictures of *Yar-gnas*. Some monks opted to remain outside the ordinary round of duties that characterised one's membership of the monastic assembly. Those wishing to avoid individual duties can either negotiate or pay other monks to take their place if they are in a position to do so, but truly to take 'time off' one must apply to the *lopon* for permission to resign from the monastic assembly itself. This does not mean having to leave the monastery, but does mean the monk will no longer receive the benefits of the communal sponsorship that the monastic assembly receives both in cash and food terms, and must rely on the support of their individual family and friends.

Resignation is very different from disrobing, and can (and usually does) involve decisions aimed at the advancement, rather than the ending, of a monk's career. In particular, resigning monks may wish to enter into a wider sphere of monastic education, such as entering one of the central monastic universities of the Gelukpa Order to study.

²⁶Senior monks referred to the *Yar-gnas* Retreat as usually lasting two and a half months; in 1994 it lasted only one and a half.

To understand the significance of this, we need to return to the wider ecclesiastical structure that surrounds Kumbum. In the Gelukpa Order, as with other Tibetan orders, not all monasteries are structurally comparable. This is particularly so in the area of monastic education. Kumbum in isolation lacks most of the facilities necessary to educate a monk beyond the semi-ordained level. Indeed, for much of the basic education in tantric ritual, the monastery calls in monks from larger monasteries such as Karsha, where greater educational opportunities are available. The King of Ladakh's donation of some of the most important monasteries in Ladakh and Zangskar to Ngari Rinpoche in 1779 (1.2) unified most of the Gelukpa order institutions in the area under the symbolic ownership of his reincarnation lineage. That group now includes seven monasteries, including Kumbum and Karsha. These monasteries were placed under the headship of Rangdum monastery in Zangskar, referred to by the Kumbum monks as the group's *ma-gon* ("mother monastery"). Relationships between the seven monasteries tend to involve a sharing of ritual personnel for key occasions, and the opportunity for monks from one monastery to stay in the others. In general, however, the monasteries appeared to maintain a functional and economic independence of one another.

The present incarnation of Ngari Rinpoche - the 14th Dalai Lama's younger brother - has renounced monastic life entirely and married. The absence of Ngari Rinpoche from the monastic round has substantial ritual repercussions: in particular, certain key ceremonial duties - such as the ordination of monks - are usually performed by the incumbent incarnate *lama*. In his absence, Kumbum monks tended to go to other monasteries with high incarnates such as Tikse in the Ladakh valley, to receive their ordinations.²⁷

At a level above this, the Gelukpa monasteries in Ladakh and Zangskar send young monks for training at the Buddhist monastic colleges in Karnataka, Southern India, most notably to the college of Gomang in Drepung monastic university. Kumbum - whose major emphasis lies in tantric practice - is also affiliated to the upper Tantric college (rGyud Stod) of the Gelukpa Order, and obtains much of its tantric instruction from

²⁷Although Rangdum maintains the titular role of *ma-gon*, many monks suggested that Likir monastery had become the bureaucratic head of the group in the years following Ngari Rinpoche's disrobing. I could not ascertain precisely what this shift involved.

teachers taught there. In this more structured educational environment, monks will usually receive extensive training in debating, philosophy and monastic discipline before going on to receive tantric training in rGyud Stod.

Monks wishing more extensive education than that provided by Kumbum must therefore begin to address the hierarchy of monastic institutions that stand above it. Geshe Ngawang Changchub, one of Ladakh's most recent attainers of the *gyeshes lharampa* degree, the highest scholastic degree in the Gelukpa Order, was born in Lingshed and has been returning there regularly since the early 1990s. The following is transcribed from a translation of Geshe Changchub's autobiography:

I was born on the 24th March 1949 in Lingshed. My parents, Tsering Palgye and Sonam Dolma were very poor farmers. From an early age I always felt a strong attraction to monastic life and so, despite the initial objections of my parents, at the age of 13 I was allowed to become a novice monk at Lingshed monastery. From then until I was 19, I stayed at the monastery and applied myself to the memorisation of the scriptures that I was to study later.

In 1968 my desire to study philosophy increased to the extent that I decided that I should continue my studies at the great Tibetan monastic university of Drepung. The ancient institution had been re-established in India [following the Chinese Invasion] by Tibetan refugee monks at Buxar in East India. Secretly, without the knowledge of my parents who would have tried to prevent me from leaving, I sneaked away one night and headed for Buxar.

Once there I entered Gomang College of Drepung where I studied mainly under the guidance of the then abbot Tenpa Tenzin, as well as Tsultim Gyatso and Losang Tenpa, who were later to serve the college as abbots. I studied the traditional Gelukpa syllabus, which began with five years of preliminary study in debating, epistemology and some Buddhist cognitive psychology. This was followed by Prajnaparamita studies, which initially included a one-year study of the tenets of the various Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools of philosophy and the stages of the path to Enlightenment. Then came the study of Prajnaparamita presentation of the Mahayana path to Enlightenment, which took four years. Finally I studied Madyamaka, Abhidharma and Vinaya for two years each which brought my total number of years in formal study to 16.



After my sixth year of study, I began teaching philosophy to the younger monks of Gomang. This was helpful in developing my understanding of the scriptures as well as giving me a good opportunity to help others. Upon completion of my formal studies, I entered into a period of review and re-examination which took a further seven years and brought to 23 my total number of years studying at Gomang.

In November 1990, following his award of the Nobel Peace Prize, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Drepung Monastery. At the time I was called upon as Gomang's Lharampa Geshe candidate of the year to debate with another candidate from Drepung's Loseling College for 90 minutes in front of His Holiness and a congregation of many hundreds of monks. On the 26th December 1990, I took my final examination on the study of sutra in the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Varanasi and was formally awarded the degree of Lharampa Geshe, the highest degree within the Gelukpa tradition. After the examination, His Holiness specially questioned me and then patted my head which I considered to be a great blessing.

Finally after the Great Prayer Festival [*Smonlam Chenmo*] after the Tibetan New Year in 1991, according to tradition, I answered questions from a circle of scholars from the great monastic universities of Sera, Ganden and Drepung.

During my 23 years of study I often had to experience difficult conditions due to lack of clothing, food and medicine. Because of my poor family background, however, I was accustomed to adversity and remained undeterred from my studies. On April 17, 1991 I entered [rGyud Stod] Tantric College in Arunchel Pradesh to study the esoteric side of the teachings, the Buddhist Tantras. I am currently continuing those studies and will take my final examination in 1996. In addition, I have also tried hard to improve my English since completing my Geshe exams.

Resignation from a local monastery, and entry into the ladder of monastic education, epitomised by Geshe Changchub's meteoric rise, can alter a monk's status for good. The Geshe's return to Lingshed marked the beginning of a series of local revolutions with him at their centre. His comparatively short period as a monk (and therefore low position in the hierarchy of ordination) is at odds with the enormous bureaucratic and religious authority he wielded in Kumbum. Certainly, much of this can be put down to a stern and decisive manner unique in Kumbum, but far more

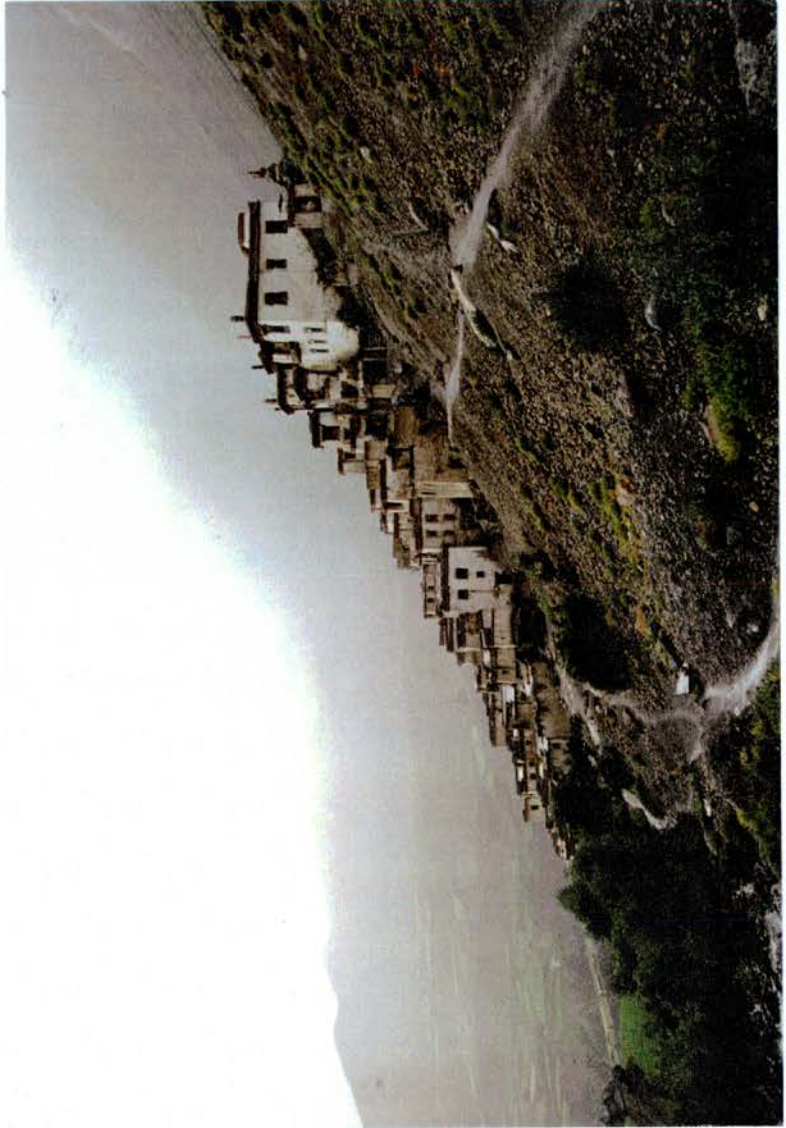
can be attributed to the greater sense in which he represented the active presence of the broader hierarchy of the Gelukpa Order.

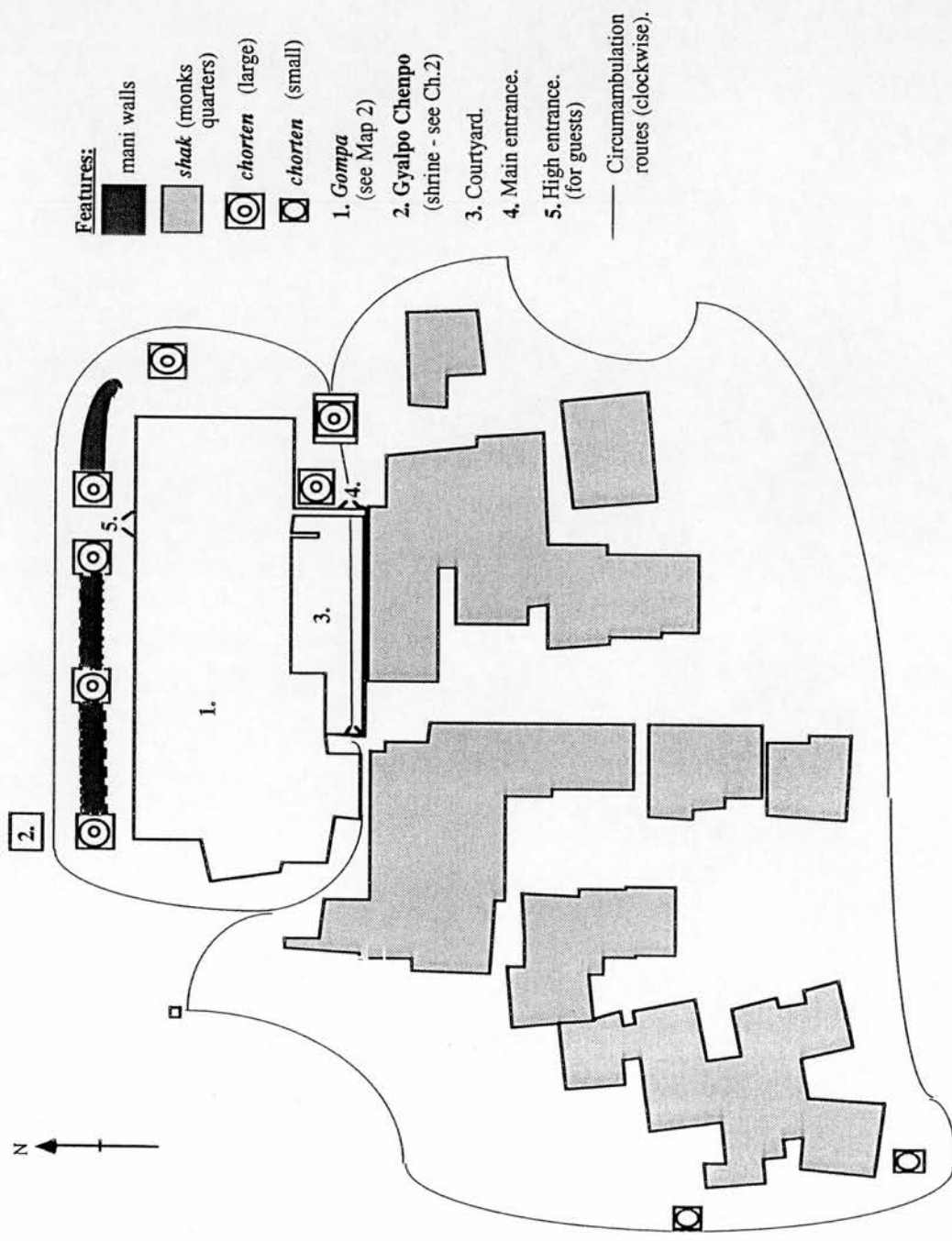
Chapter 3:

Kumbum Monastery - Architecture, Space and Economics

Overleaf

Photo 3.1: Kumbum monastery, Summer 1994.





Features:





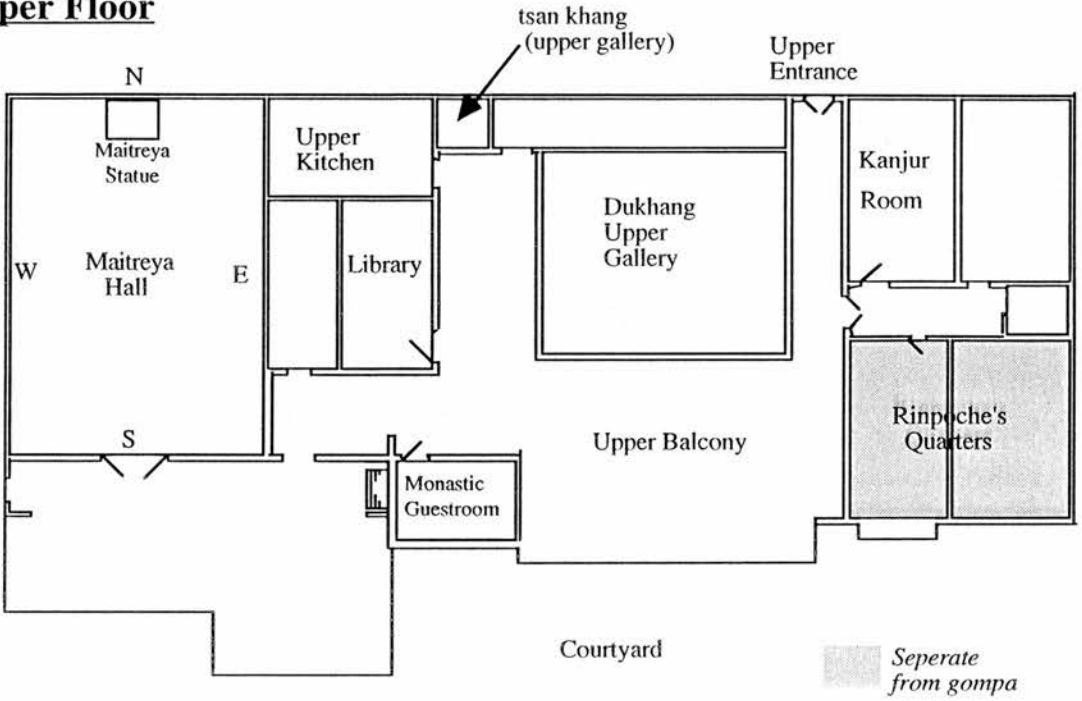
-  mani walls
-  *shak* (monks quarters)
-  *chorten* (large)
-  *chorten* (small)
- 1. *Gompa* (see Map 2)
- 2. *Gyalpo Cherpo* (shrine - see Ch.2)
- 3. Courtyard.
- 4. Main entrance.
- 5. High entrance. (for guests)
- Circumambulation routes (clockwise).

Fig. 3.1: Kumbum Monastery, main areas.

Upper Floor



First Floor

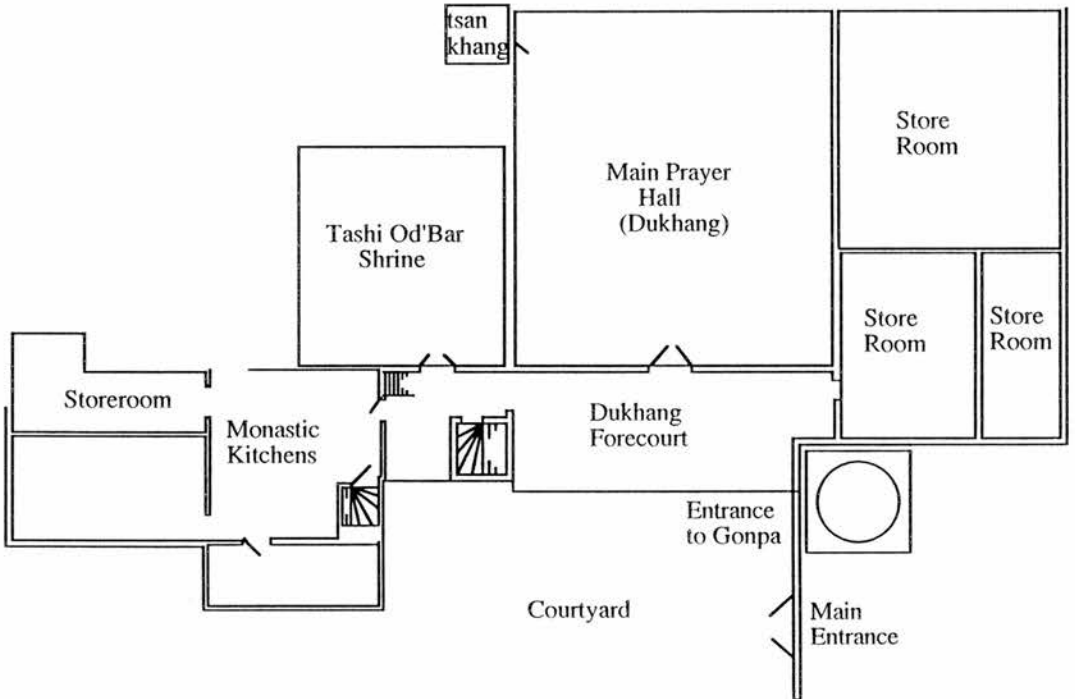


Fig. 3.2: Kumbum Gompa layout.

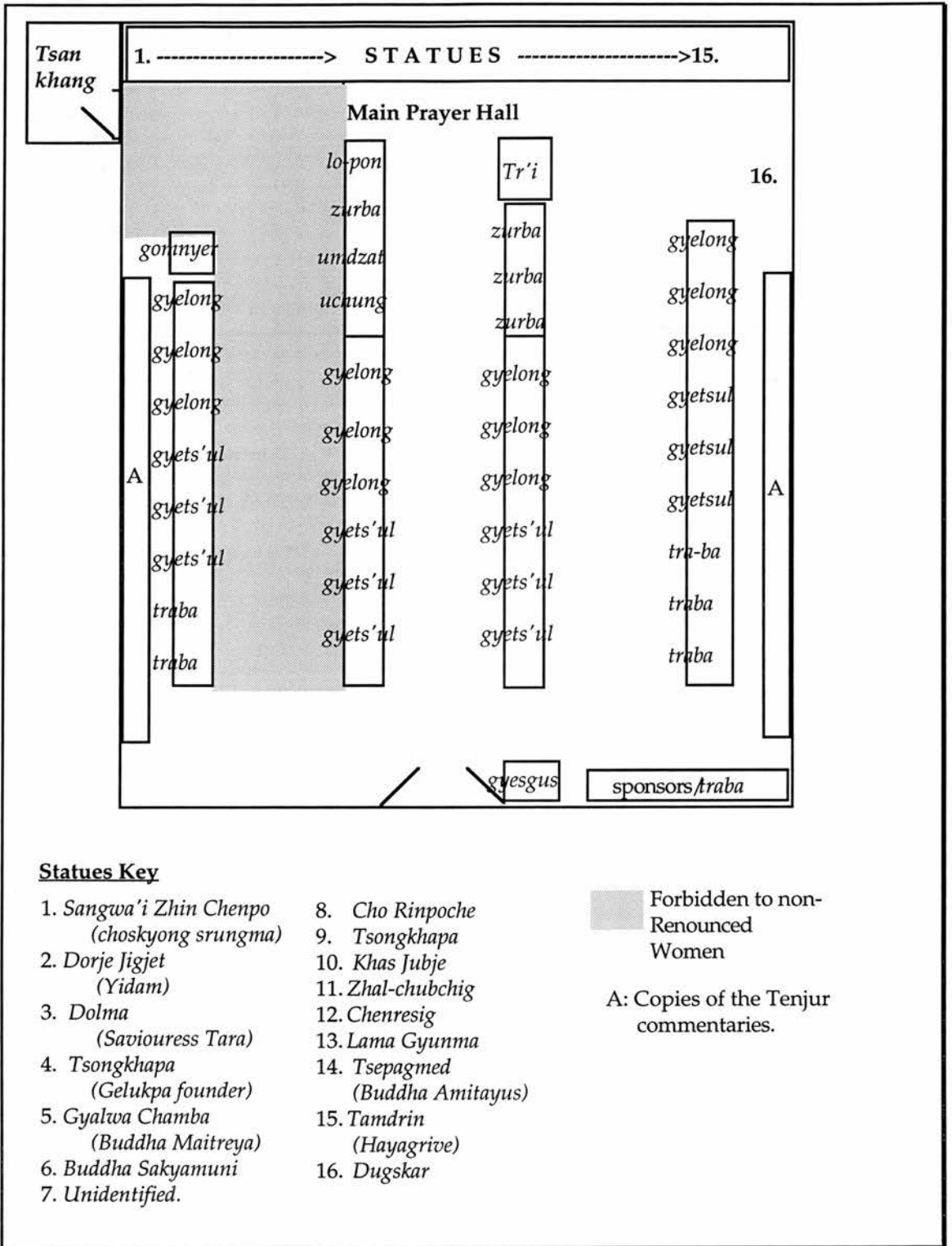
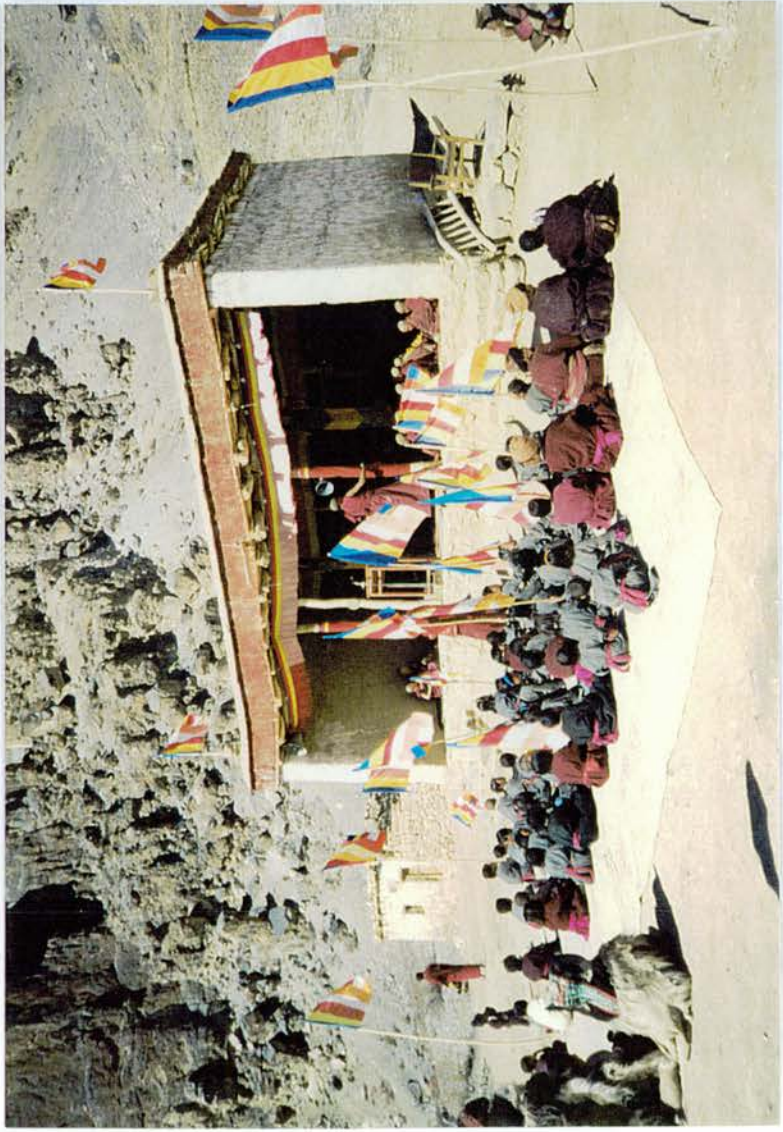


Fig. 3.3: Normal Seating Arrangements in Main Prayer Hall

Overleaf:

Photo 3.2 (left): Laity and monks gather at *p'otang* on *Zhipa'i Chonga Day*

Photo 3.3 (right): Women, wearing *perag* head-dresses, attend *Zhipa'i Chonga Day* speeches.



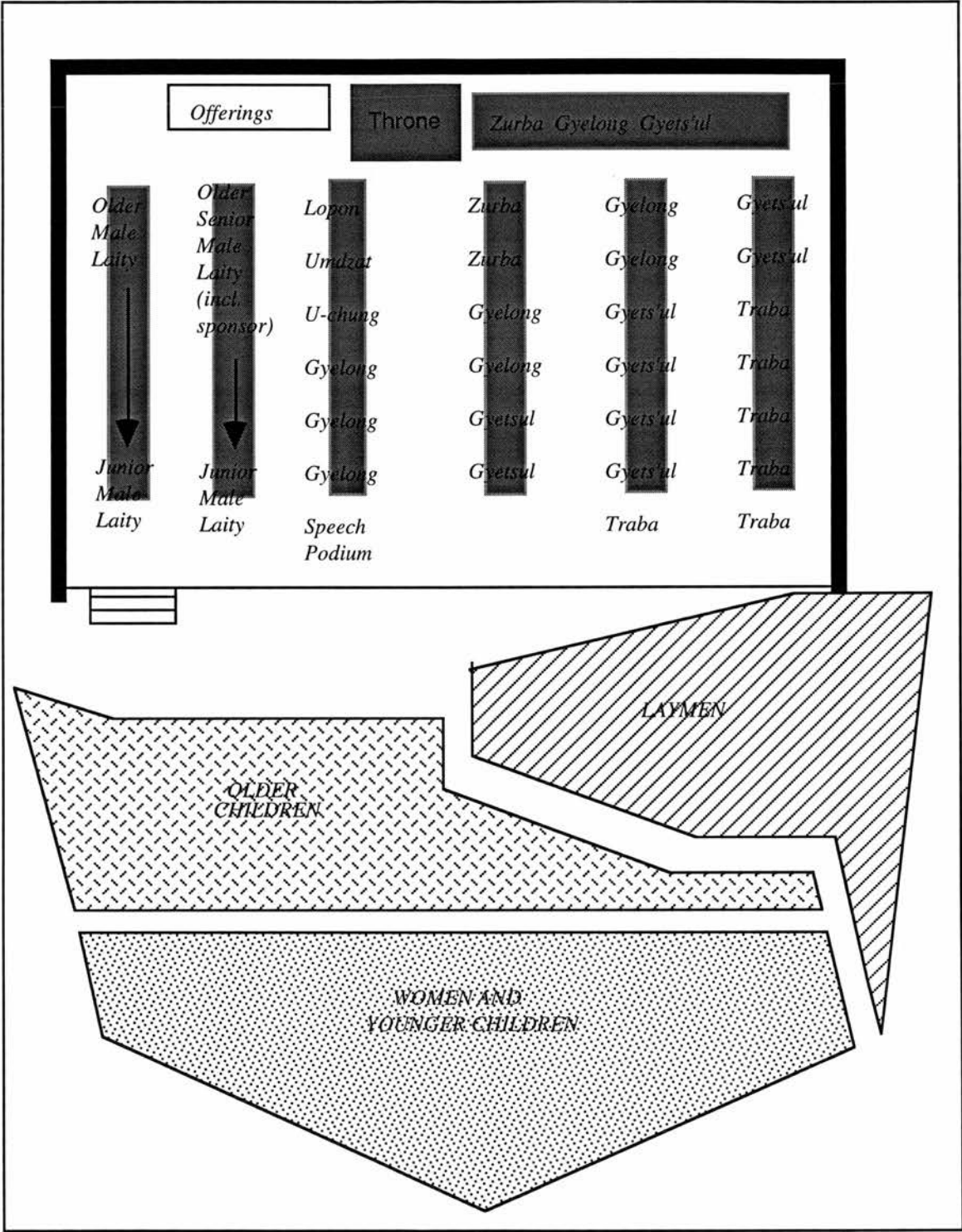


Fig. 3.4: P'otang Seating Arrangements

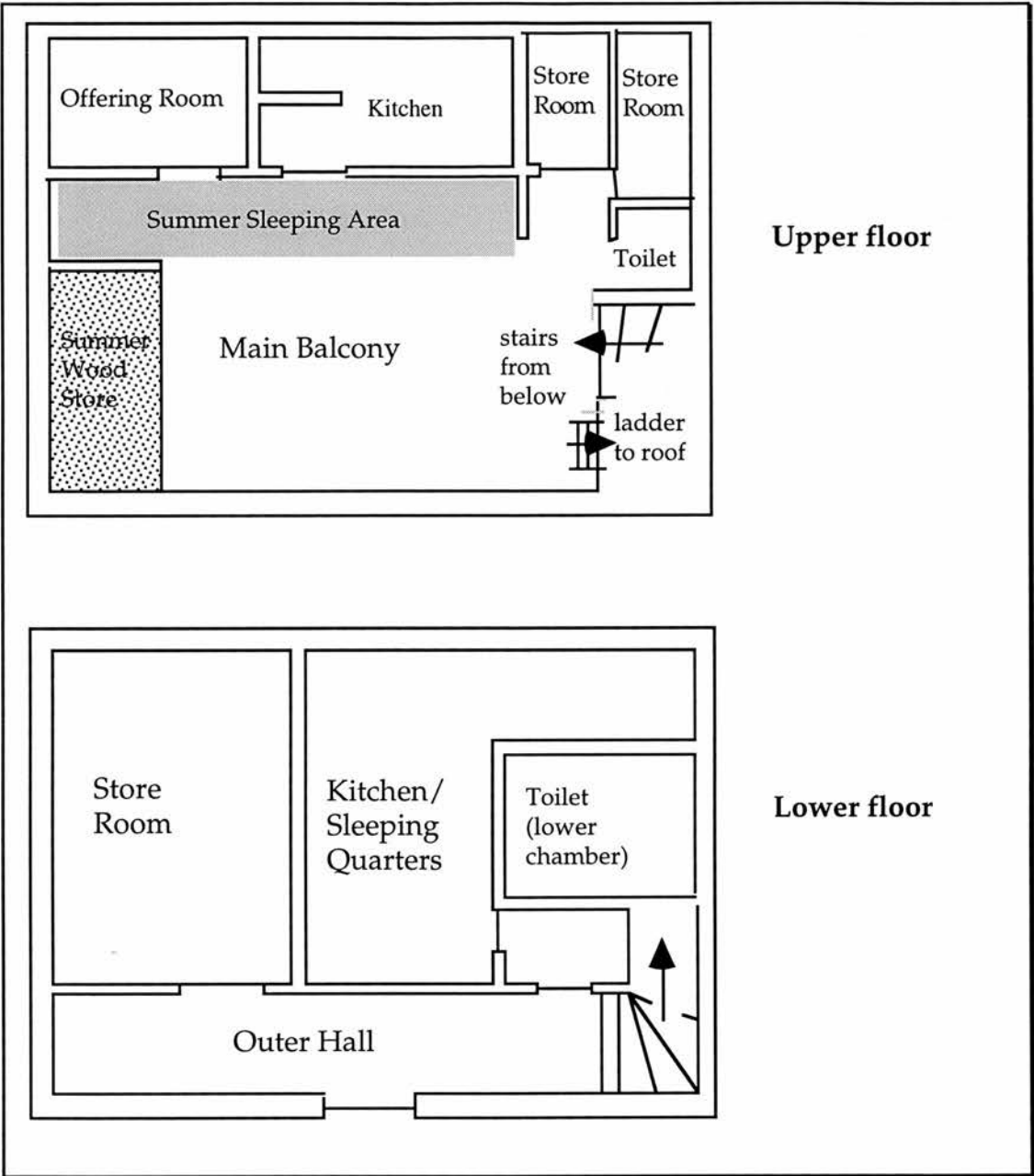


Fig. 3.5: Typical Monastic Quarters (Shak), Kumbum Monastery

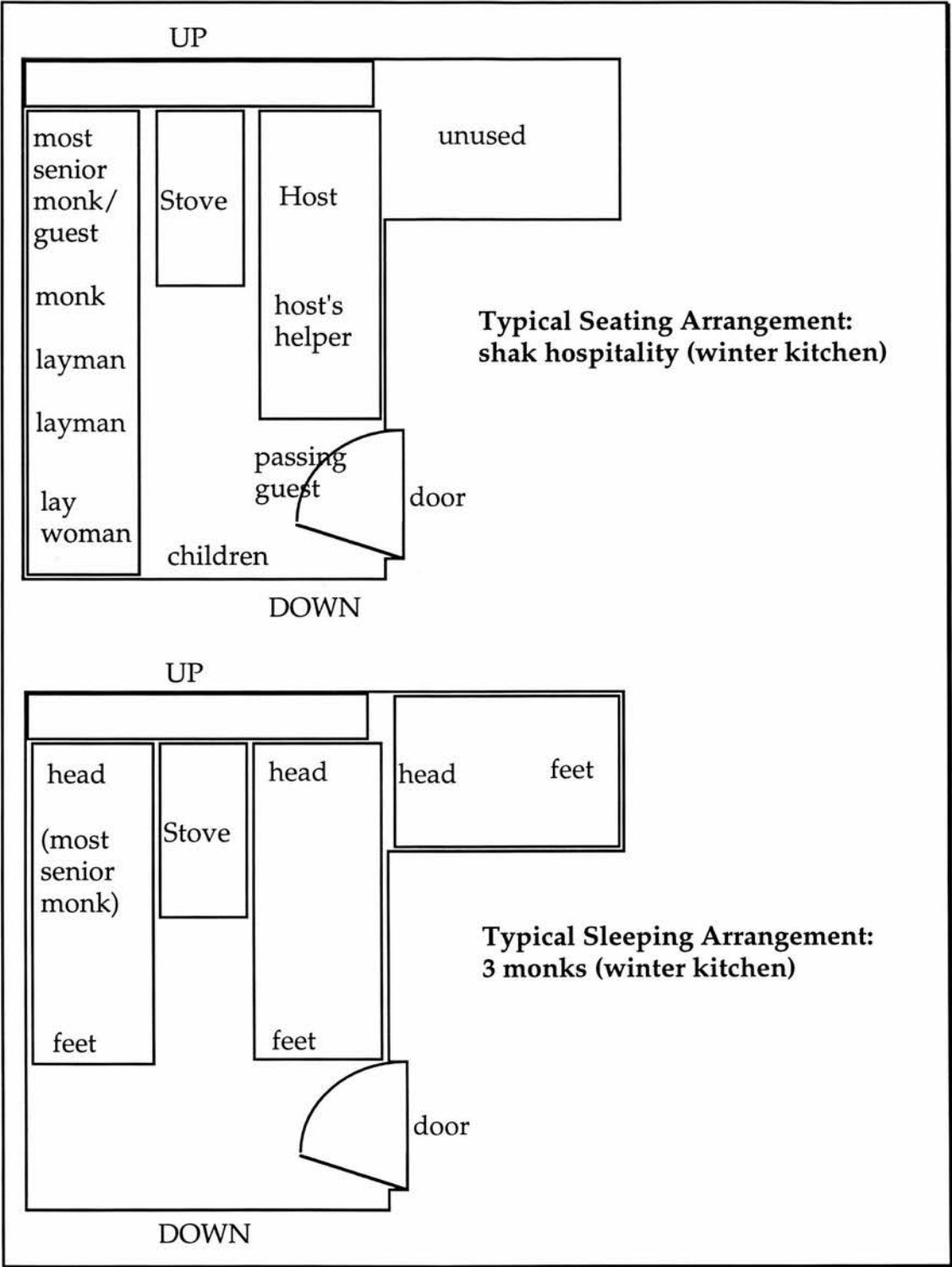


Fig. 3.6: Seating and Sleeping Arrangements in a Typical Shak

3.1 - Introduction:

In the second sentence of his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Wittgenstein stated that “the world is the totality of facts, not of things”. For the same reason, describing the architectural contents of Kumbum monastery - a main prayer hall, five shrine-rooms (two unused and mostly dilapidated), two communal kitchens, quarters for visiting incarnate *lamas*, a guest room, two teaching rooms, a series of store-rooms, plus almost forty monastic quarters collected beneath these communal buildings - is easy but ultimately futile. To begin really to understand the monastery as a functioning institution we must look at how these components fit together as a complex, interrelating ritual and symbolic space.

Most importantly, the monastery buildings are far from homogenous in status. Within the monastery as a whole, only the main prayer hall, shrine rooms, monastic kitchens and associated store rooms technically comprise the *gompa*, in the eyes of the monks. Above the *gompa* is the *zimchung*, the sleeping quarters for visiting incarnates. Although physically joined, this was not regarded as part of the *gompa* and its support is economically separate from the rest of the monastery. Below, the monastic quarters (L. *shak*) fan out beneath the main buildings. These *shak*, to which the monks retire every evening to sleep, are seen as part of the households that support the residing monks.

Indeed, the *gompa* proper is only one third of the actual mass of buildings that is ‘the monastery’. However, since all of these were often collectively referred to as “*gompa*” (especially by the laity), this occasionally caused confusion. For the sake of clarity, I will henceforth refer to the structure of temples that is technically referred to as the *gompa* as ‘*gompa*’, and refer to the conglomerate structure of *gompa*, incarnates’ quarters and monks’ *shaks* as ‘the monastery’.

3.2.1.1- The Gompa Proper

The *gompa* itself contains four main temples: the main prayer hall (*dukhang*), where most daily prayers and rites are held; the Tashi Od’Bar (“Auspicious Shining Light”) shrine, mainly dedicated to Chenresig, the Buddha of Compassion; the new *Chamba Khang* (“Maitreya Hall”), dedicated to Maitreya, the Future Buddha; and finally the *Kanjur Lhakhang*,

where the Buddhist scriptures are held. These last two are on the top floor of the building, above the main prayer hall. The *gompa* also has certain affiliated buildings, not physically attached: the teaching pavilion, and a set of sub-shrines (L. *gonlak*) in nearby villages.

3.2.1.2 - Divinities in Kumbum:

All of these temples come under the general rubric of *lha-khang* ("deity-room"), and contain the shrines and statues of one or more deity, all of which will be evoked at some stage in the annual round of prayers. The term *lha*, which I gloss as 'deity' or 'god', is actually much more flexible and polysemic than our own monotheistic notion, generally referring to any disembodied numen which lays claim to considerable supernatural power. In this respect the term includes everything from relatively powerful water spirits to fully enlightened Buddhas.

From a traditional Buddhological perspective, it is perfectly reasonable to ask to what extent the ritual veneration and propitiation of such *lha* is 'Buddhist' in the strictest sense of the word, and the answer is surprisingly simple: their veneration is as Buddhist as they are. Like people, *lha* have spiritual lives of their own: thus, they can be non-Buddhists or they can be converted to Buddhism. Whether they are 'Buddhist' or not has no bearing, as far as the people of Lingshed are concerned, on whether they exist or not, but it does have a bearing on whether they are suitable objects of veneration. Gods who through their own efforts have become Buddhas, or at least to some definite extent spiritually realised, are felt to be fitting objects of refuge (L. *skyaps*) for Buddhists, in the sense that their worship contributes to the passage towards enlightenment. Indeed, it is the invocation of the presence of such divinities into everyday life which is the central metaphor of most religious practice in Tibetan Buddhism.

Whilst the career of a high *lama* might involve ritual dealings with a vast variety of divinities, the monks of Kumbum (and, to an even greater degree, the laity of Lingshed) concerned themselves with a small coterie of divine figures that were regularly propitiated, surrounded by a wider, but limited assembly of less regularly called-upon numina. Most of these were orthodox to the Mahāyāna in general, such as the Buddha Śākyamuni and the Five Buddha Families (L. *rigs-nga*), and the *bodhisattvas* Chenresig,

Dolma and Jampal Yang. Others, particular to the monastic tradition, were to be found in the more complex literature of the Vajrayāna. Central amongst these were the *sangde jigsum*, the three central tantric deities of the Gelukpa Order: Duskhor, Sangdus and, most importantly, Yamāntaka or Dorje Jigjet.²⁸

The last of these, Yamāntaka, was the tutelary deity (L. *yidam*) of the monastery and 'chief' of a series of extremely powerful deities called the *choskyong*, (the Protectors of the Doctrine), which are held to defend Buddhism, the monastery, and all Buddhists, and thus receive daily attention (Ch. 6).

A somewhat anomalous deity amongst all of this is the divinity Gyalpo Chenpo ("Great King"), who, like the other deities is given offerings everyday by the monastic *gomnyer*, but whose shrine is actually outside the monastery (Map 3.1). Gyalpo Chenpo is not a *choskyong*, but one of the forms of Peihar, one of the protectors of all Tibet, and advises the Dalai Lama (through the mouth of the famous Nechung Oracle).²⁹

Along with the various tantric and non-tantric deities, a series of historical figures were also objects of veneration, many of them on a par with the highest Buddhas. Particular amongst these was Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelukpa Order, and for many monks the archetypal *lama* figure.

3.2.2 - The Kanjur Lhakhang

Above the main prayer hall is the highest shrine-room of the monastery. The *Kanjur Lhakhang* houses the assembled editions of the *Kanjur*, the Buddhist Canon itself. This set of texts are held to be those sets of teachings ascribed directly either to Buddha Śākyamuni or to his magical counterpart, the Buddha Dorje Chang. The texts contain a variety of topics including most notably:

²⁸This mixing of the Tibetan (Duskhor and Sangdus) with the Sanskrit (Yamāntaka) follows the normal usage by the Kumbum monks.

²⁹The iconography and status of this deity, and most of the others mentioned in this work, are described in Getty (1978) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993).

- i) religious discipline, especially the Mahāyāna version of the Vinaya code of monastic discipline (L. *sdomba*);
- ii) teachings on the moral and meditative “perfections” (L. *p’archin*);
- iii) metaphysics and philosophy;
- iv) ritual texts, called *rgyud* (Skt. *tantra*), containing the liturgy for a wide variety of ritual and meditative practices going under the same rubric.

3.2.3 - The Main Prayer Hall (*Dukhang*)

The main prayer hall was the most important room in the monastery in terms of the everyday activities of the monks. It contained some of the most important shrines and statues in the monastery, as well as numerous *Tenjur* texts, commentarial Buddhist teachings given by important Buddhist masters since the Buddha.

In an average day, between three and six hours of prayers were held there. Opened at dawn every morning by the monastic caretaker (L. *gomnyer*), who set up daily offerings to each of the major divinities of the monastery at the beginning of his rounds of the shrine-rooms, the *dukhang* was the main point of congregation for the monastic assembly. Either here or in its immediate forecourt, all necessary institutional prayers were performed, communal meals are eaten and important teaching sessions were held. These meetings were presided over by the *lopon* or his designated representative. Also present (especially for prayers, which generally accompany all assemblies for whatever purpose) was the *umdzat*, whose duty was to lead all prayers in the main prayer hall.

The importance of the monastic assembly as a conspicuous feature of everyday life within the monastery cannot be overestimated, and its distinct and bounded identity had substantial ritual and administrative force, being the pivot of monastic decision-making as well as disciplinary and ceremonial activity. It had a distinct ritual presence greater than that of the simple combined presence of the monks: when assembled, it represented the third of the Three Jewels of Buddhism - the Sangha (L. *gyedunpa*) - and was therefore an object of veneration. This stipulation

applied not only to laity but to monks as well: if arriving late for prayers, monks would prostrate before the assembly.

The centrality of the site of the *dukhang* was however secondary to the actual ritual activity of the monks: on occasions when circumstance forced the main assembly to be moved to another shrine room in the monastery, monks temporarily referred to this as the *dukhang*, although maintaining the term when speaking of the normal prayer hall, referring to it as the *dukhang chenmo* ("great *dukhang*"). Logically therefore, the *dukhang* was the sine qua non of 'monastic space', constituting almost by definition the place of monastic assembly. It was marked out both physically and spatially as devoted to the constant on-going re-constitution of the celibate Sangha, both in the sense that it was their most notable place of meeting, and in the sense that it marked the boundaries of the *activities* of the monastic community as a corporate body.

This co-terminality of physical space and monastic role was symbolically expressed. As with all Tibetan Buddhist prayer halls, the outside walls to either side of the door were decorated with the Four Protector Kings (L. *gyalchen zhi*), held to protect the *dukhang* in each of the four directions.³⁰ The inside walls similarly depicted those aspects crucial to the bounded nature of the monastic assembly. As a monastery given over to predominantly tantric practice, the Kumbum *dukhang* was decorated (on either side of the door) with murals of the principal *choskyong* (Dharma Protectors), deities that had been bound to protect the Three Jewels of Buddhism (the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) and ensure the maintenance of religious vows, and whose evocation was a central part of tantric practice (Ch. 6).

Conversely, Powers (1994: 208) reports that many assembly halls have paintings demonstrating the correct wearing of robes. Even in Kumbum, the wearing of the maroon robes was seen as an important manifestation of monastic discipline (L. *tr'ims*): robes were acquired by monks as they progress up the ladder of ordination, and were one of the most important signs of a monk's status.³¹ Within the *dukhang* itself

³⁰Arguably, this relates to their protective role in the life of Śākyamuni (Getty 1978: 166).

³¹For the symbolism of such robes see Perdue (1976: 5-6).

monkshad to ensure the correct wearing of all robes, a stipulation that did not apply to other temples.

Secondly, the twice-monthly confessional (L. *so-zhong*) rite performed by monks to confess and atone for the breaking of vows was performed here. This rite was closed off to non-vow holders, including all laity and novice monks, and was only attended by semi-ordained and fully-ordained monks: during this confessional, the doors are closed to all outsiders.

As with almost all room-spaces in Ladakh, there was an upper (L. *go* - "head") and a lower (L. *zhugs* - "bottom") end which was explicitly acknowledged.³² The end of the room furthest from the door was "uppermost", and contained the statues of the numerous divinities evoked in the assembly's various rites and prayers. Conversely, the place beside the door was the "lower" region, where laity went to watch or make prostrations. The area in between was reserved for the monastic assembly, who were seated in four rows, facing in towards a central aisle. Seating rationale placed the holders of the greatest number of vows closest to the statue end of the prayer hall, along with the *lopon*, *umdzat* and *u-chung*, who, as principal ritual officiants, also sat in the centre rows (Fig. 3.3).

Highest of all was the throne (L. *tr'i*) for visiting incarnates at the uppermost end of the right-hand row of monks, which looms above the seats (and indeed heads) of the other monks. Usually this seat is empty, except for a representative photograph of the principal *tulku* of the Gelukpa Order, the Dalai Lama. This is more than simply a nominal presence: the photograph is used as a focus of ritual attention and respect, and is presented with offerings of food prior to all meals eaten by the monastic assembly.

Otherwise, monks were seated in the order they took their vows as semi-ordained monks: fully-ordained monks were seated closest to the statues; 'below' them are the semi-ordained monks. Novice monks yet to receive their *gyets'ul* ordination huddled in the corners at the back of the hall if they were too young to be put to use serving tea during the long prayer-assemblies. For many rites they were excluded totally.

The door to the *dukhang* was also 'guarded' by the monastery's discipline officer, who maintained discipline throughout all assemblies.

³²French (1994: 114) describes the same protocol for Tibetan courtrooms.

The maintenance of discipline during assemblies concentrated (apart from on ensuring that monks remained awake throughout) on the correct wearing of robes within the *dukhang*, and maintaining the correct seating order for monks.

This up-down metaphor was combined with an important rule of spatial exclusion: on no occasion could non-renounced women of any age - that is, those women that could be classed as 'reproductively active' - enter the aisle of the main prayer hall in front of the monastery's tutelary divinity statue, or, for that matter enter the *tsankhang* ("pure room") beyond it (**Fig. 3.3**). This rule was maintained despite the fact that the *tsankhang* was almost completely empty and unentered by anyone for almost 15 years.

3.2.4 - The Tashi Od'Bar Shrine

To the left of the main prayer hall was the Tashi Od'Bar Shrine. Physically much smaller than the *dukhang*, the room housed the *chorten* built under the auspices of Changsems Shesrabs Zangpo in the 15th Century (**1.2**). The room was rarely used by the monastic community itself, perhaps because its small size meant that only 10 people could fit in at a time. To my knowledge, it had four main functions:

i) The room contained a series of representations of the central divinity Chenresig, particularly in his eleven-faced form (*Zhal-chub-chig*), as well as a large and elaborate model of Chenresig's divine palace, built by Tashi Paljur, a famous local doctor and astrologer. These were the focus of two important rites held at the monastery, notable for their substantial lay involvement: the Summer and Winter *Snyung-gnas* fasting and purification ceremonies, in which laity take the eight vows of a lay renouncer, perform prostrations and recite the mantra of Chenresig in the shrine for one and a half days. Whether male or female, such temporary 'renouncers' are permitted to sleep overnight in the monastery. During this time eating and drinking are restricted, especially during the second day. The rite is led by two monks, who recite the central texts (**Appendix B**). *Snyung-gnas* is generally attended by 8-10 laity, usually in their latter years.³³

³³See also Ortner (1978) for a description of this rite.

ii) The other rite performed here is integrally related to *Snyung-gnas*. The purifications that are an essential part of the fasting rite are performed through use of a small water-vase called a *bumpa*. The water in the vase is referred to as *dud rtsi* (usually glossed as ‘ambrosia’) and I am told is acquired thus: a small portion of water is blessed and poured into the vase; the vase then becomes the object of a communal rite simply referred to as a *Mani*, where laity from all over the Lingshed area gather in and around the shrine and chant the mantra of Chenresig (*OM MA NI PADME HUNG*) over the course of two days.³⁴ After a certain number have been recited (usually one hundred thousand, or some multiple thereof), the *bumpa* is checked again by the monks, and if the prayers have been performed correctly, the *bumpa* should be at least two-thirds full, ready for the year’s *Snyung-gnas* rites.³⁵

iii) The shrine was opened on all public days, when laity would come to pay their respects at the monastery, entering the shrine to offer prayer-scarves and incense, or make prostrations.

iv) On *Galden Ngamchod* Day during the 11th month, the new disciplinary officer is led from the Tashi Od’Bar Shrine to the main prayer hall, where he makes his inaugural speech (2.6).

3.2.5 - *The Maitreya Hall*

The most recent temple to be built in Kumbum is the *Chamba Khang*, or Maitreya Hall, dedicated to Gyalwa Chamba (“the Victorious Maitreya”, the Future Buddha). Finished in 1993, the hall replaced an older, much smaller Maitreya Hall under the monastic kitchens. Following the building of the kitchens, the monastery gradually accumulated sponsors to build a

³⁴Tibet (including Ladakh and Zangskar) is occasionally referred to as “*Chenresig-gyi-zhing*”, the “field of Chenresig”, referring to the divinity’s role as the protector of all Tibetans. As a result, tantric forms based on Chenresig are open to all Tibetans to practise, and his mantra is known and recited by almost everyone on an everyday basis.

³⁵I asked a Tibetan woman in Leh once if she believed this was true: she laughed and said “God only knows! The monks say it is.” Those monks I asked commented that only laity believed such things.

new Hall, since it was felt that having a statue of Maitreya located under the kitchens was inappropriate. The new Hall is much larger, and the monks were rightly proud of the glorious murals which adorn the walls, as well as the much larger Maitreya Statue. Technically, this was not a 'new' statue: only its outer shell was rebuilt, the inner contents having been transferred from the old status. These contents, called *zungs* ("memory") include a central 'life-wood' (L. *la-shing*) and a set of mantras that 'empower' the statue with the presence of the Buddha. All of these have in turn been 'empowered' by their ritual proximity to a previous Buddha statue, a reiterative process whose 'lineage' ideally stems from an original likeness of the Buddha himself.³⁶

In 1994, the room was comparatively spartan, lacking the final additions of seating for monks. Nonetheless, its many windows and spacious air made it the venue for the annual sand mandalas (Ch. 6), whose production required minute precision and thus a certain amount of light.

3.2.6 - *The Guest Room (Rab Sal)*

The position of guests in the social hierarchy is a matter of note which will be discussed in greater detail later. In general, the status of the guest (L. *donpo*) is a very high one, especially if from outside the village. Non-incarnate visitors to the village as a whole, especially high monks or important sponsors, would often be housed or at least entertained in the comparatively sumptuous *rabsal* guest-room above the main *dukhang*.

3.2.7 - *The Teaching Pavilion (P'otang)*

About 150 yards to the East of the monastery is a covered pavilion, open to one side, some eight metres by ten, with its internal platform raised about half a metre above the surrounding ground. This is the *p'otang* ("palace"), the teaching platform set aside for public teachings, empowerments and speeches that are aimed at the local population beyond the monastic community. As far as I could tell, it was only used during the summer, being somewhat inaccessible due to snow during the

³⁶See Tambiah (1984: 230-258) for similar ritual forms in Thai Buddhism.

winter. In the Summer of 1994, during which both the incarnate *lama* Dagon Rinpoche and Geshe Changchub visited Lingshed, such public events were common, and took some 2-3 weeks of the crucial harvest period.

The *p'otang* was an enclosed square building (**Fig. 3.4 and Photo 3.2**) open on one side. Seating inside was arranged in lines much like the main prayer hall, focusing on a central aisle, at the 'upper' end of which was a raised throne (L. *tr'i*) and a platform for offerings. The raised throne was used as the seat of the *lama* (in the sense of the relevant spiritual teacher on any given occasion). This did not always mean either an incarnate such as Dagon Rinpoche or even an actual person: on *Zhipa'i Chonga* Day (a celebration of the Buddha's birth) in 1994, when neither Geshe Changchub nor Dagon Rinpoche was present in the village, a four foot statue of the Buddha was carried from the monastery and placed on the throne. Monks and laity made prostrations and offerings before the statue prior to the day's speeches by the village monks and elders. One month later, Geshe Changchub arrived, and gave a series of teachings from the throne on Tsongkhapa's *lam rim* (an exposition of the "graded path" to enlightenment). Two months after this, Dagon Rinpoche arrived in the village, and gave an extended series of teachings and tantric empowerments from the throne (**Photo 15.1 to 15.4**). In each case, laity and monks prostrated themselves before the throne prior to receiving teachings or empowerments, and treated the occupant as "the *lama*" and therefore of Buddha status (**Ch. 6**).

The seating lines leading to the throne were used to seat the rest of the monastic community and, behind them, the sponsor, senior male laity and guests (**Fig. 3.4**) on various different heights of cushion or matting (highest for the main monastic officiants, lowest (and least comfortable) for young laity and the youngest monks). In certain cases (particularly with western visitors and female household heads who had acted as sponsors) women were given a place to sit within the enclosed podium. The remaining male laity, women and children sat on the ground outside in informally segregated groups.

3.2.8 - *Gonlak in Outlying Villages*

Kumbum also maintained a small temple in each of its nearby sponsor villages of Skyumpata, Yulchung, Nyeraks and Dibling (Fig. 2.1). These shrines were called *gonlak*, short for *gonpa'i-yanlak* - "the limbs of the *gompa*". These *gonlak* each housed a single "caretaker" monk (L. *gomnyer*) who saw to the regular performance of ritual, both within the shrine, and in the village as a whole. These caretaker postings were from one to three years, whereupon they were rotated within Kumbum's monastic assembly. Larger rituals, such as funerals and the autumnal exorcisms, require larger monastic participation, and therefore are occasions on which sometimes the entire monastery will visit the outlying villages. In the villages that acted as sponsors to Lingshed monastery, no other monastery had an inhabited *gonlak*.³⁷

3.2.9 - *Sponsorship of the Gompa*

Most rites and ceremonies performed in the main prayer hall or any other venue for the monastic assembly were accompanied by either a full meal or "a tea" - several cups of yak-butter tea and a portion of ground barley. This was usually prepared in the monastic kitchens (Fig. 3.2), and provided for through the core institution of ritual sponsorship, or *zhindag*.

The monastic life of the *gompa* as a communal institution was supported by a combination of instituted income and specific ritual sponsorships. Instituted income consisted of revenue from rented lands and seed that belonged to the *gompa* (including annually, semi-permanently and permanently leased land), interest-accruing loans made to farmers, and the various acts of trading that the monastery partook in to increase its various capital reserves (see Shakya, Rabgyas, and Crook 1994). The majority of such rent and interest was accrued as staple produce handed over to the monastery after harvest. The monks themselves provided certain kinds of produce, particularly fuel. Certain days were set aside during the winter and summer when the monks foraged for set

³⁷ This is not always the case: Phylactou (1989) for instance, comments on the variety of Buddhist orders maintaining inhabited shrine-rooms in the village of Hemis Shukpa Chen in Ladakh.

weights of firewood and grass: only the senior officers were exempt from this task.

This core income was used to feed and support the activities of the monastic assembly (as opposed simply to the population of monks) during its everyday ritual activity, covering two meals and a tea throughout the year. In many circumstances, obligations to the monastery involved substantial donations of labour, or the *corvée* provision of pack animals (see also Grimshaw 1983; Goldstein 1989: 4).

Specific ritual sponsorships also provided a significant income. A regular series of obligatory rites throughout the year all required sponsorship. In general, the sponsorship of monastic rites occurred along household lines, occasionally with established rotas of responsibility linking certain household groups within the village. On top of these regular ritual responsibilities, incidental ritual activity such as funerals (11.2.3) provided significant income to the monastery. The donations of foreign tourists, along with a small but important set of Western sponsors who had 'adopted' the monastery, introduced an increasing cash element, particularly with reference to the more elaborate forms of monastic rite.

In both scenarios, the sponsorship of the monastic assembly was explicitly related by all those I asked (both monks and laity) to the provision of ritual services. Sponsorship, either of an instituted or occasional kind, provided support for specific rites, and the economic provision of differing rites could not be pooled for convenience's sake (see also Shakya, Rabgyas and Crook 1994: 629). Even in the case of the general annual provision given by households to the monastery after each year's harvest, this was strictly limited to providing for the food and tea required at daily monastic assemblies.

Sponsorship of monastic assemblies was organised by a series of "managers" (L. *nyerpa*) who were charged with overseeing ritual and economic arrangements between the monastery and its various sponsors, and ensuring that they were fully paid for. Like most monasteries, Kumbum had many *nyerpa* - most, but not all, monks - each assigned with a different task. These various offices followed the lines of ritual sponsorships and were rarely if ever conjoined, leading to a complex financial and economic structure with no common pool of resources (see also Tucci 1980: 133; Sen 1984: 46). Whilst certain *nyerpa* were charged with general types of ritual occasion (for instance, the *gomnyer* was charged with

everyday offerings to each of the monastery's various divinities), posts were also allocated towards the organisation of specific festivals throughout the monastery's year, as follows (see Appendix A for a further description of these occasions):

<u>Rite</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of Nyerpa</u>
<i>Skam Ts'ogs</i> Prayer Festival	Monastery	2 (monks)
<i>Smonlam-Chenmo</i> Prayer Festival	Monastery	3 (monks)
<i>Zhipa'i-Chonga</i>	Monastery	3 (monks)
<i>Yar-Gnas</i> Summer Retreat	Monastery	3 (monks)
Sand mandala empowerments	Monastery	3 (monks)
<i>Galden-Ngamchod</i>	Monastery	1 (monk)
<i>Losar</i> (King's New Year)	Village	7 (laity)

Monastic *nyerpa* were given a float as the basis for providing for the rite, which should be invested and eventually returned to the monastery. *Nyerpa* used a variety of means to amass the relevant funds, including calling on relatives to be sponsors, trading or hiring out seed and land at a certain rate of interest. They were also responsible for ensuring that the sponsor's ritual requirements were met, and that the main officiants at each rite were informed.

3.3.1- Above the Gompa - The Incarnate's Quarters (Zimchung)

The quarters inhabited by visiting incarnate *lamas* (L. *tulku*) were at the very top of the monastic complex, above the main prayer hall. Although architecturally part of the *gompa*, it was viewed as being functionally and ritually separate. They contained sleeping quarters for the guest and any attendants that may have come with him, plus a shrine room containing a throne for the incarnate as well as a cabinet shrine containing (amongst other things) the clothes of the protector divinity Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo (Ch. 6), to be donned by the monastery's affiliated oracle when possessed by that divinity.

The term *tulku* ("emanation body") implies some of the unique status of incarnate *lamas*. Regarded as having consciously passed through the process of death, and therefore having actively chosen the means of their own birth, such incarnates are also perceived as being the physical

manifestations of divine forms. The visit of a *tulku* to the monastery is akin to the arrival of a divinity, in itself a blessing (L. *chinlabs*).

The location of the Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo oracle's ritual clothes in the same shrine room also hints at an important conceptual distinction between ordinary people and human manifestations of the divine: the clothes of the oracle are donned as a sign of the divinity Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo actually possessing the oracle. The *zimchung*, in other words, is very much a guest room for gods.

3.3.2 - Sponsorship of the *Zimchung*

The difference in status between ordinary monks and incarnate *lamas* had important economic dimensions. Whilst the presence of such incarnates within a monastery was of substantial indirect benefit to the financial position of such institutions, the property and financial resources of incarnates (called their *labrang*) were historically always separate from those of their associated monasteries (Sen 1984: 39-42; also Goldstein 1973), passing instead to each successive reincarnation.

3.4.1 - Below the *Gompa* - Monks' Quarters (*Shak*)

Below the buildings of the *gompa* are stretched out several lines of monastic quarters (L. *shak*), to which the monks return at night. The average *shak* was composed of a small personal shrine room, store rooms, winter and summer kitchens-cum-sleeping quarters, and a toilet. Quarters were usually constructed on two floors, with the summer kitchens and sleeping areas in the balconied upper floor, and the better insulated winter quarters down below (Fig. 3.5).

Most *shak* were the lifetime abodes of between one and three monks. Usually the occupants of a single *shak* were related to one another, often via a single household. This relationship was often one of uncle to nephew, but occasionally those sharing quarters were older and younger siblings, or cousins. Most monks I asked felt the optimal number to be two, preferably an older monk charged with the religious education of a younger one, especially in matters of monastic discipline, the learning of prayers, and the fundamentals of reciting scripture. This meant that much of the basic education of monks occurred in pupillary lineages, especially in terms of

what many Ladakhis regarded as the “normal” *shak* relationship between paternal uncle and nephew.

Shak allocation was a matter of negotiation, dictated by economic and practical imperatives as well as by the *shak*'s crucial role as part of the monastic teaching process. This latter consideration generally meant that younger related monks would not be in the same *shak* if it was at the expense of having an older monk there who could give instruction. Moreover, although some older monks lived alone, it was considered exceptional for a younger monk to do so. The pattern of residence within the monastery was therefore one in which vertical relationships between novice and senior monk figured highly, and my experience was that the closest relationships were between younger and substantially older monks, with a strong emphasis on the reliance that they placed on specific older monks for advice and care.

As with the *dukhang*, all living quarters and shrine-rooms in *shak* were furnished and occupied according to an up-down rationale. The shrine-room (*chodkhang* - offering-room) was on the top, balconied floor, although smaller icons and pictures, with their associated offering paraphernalia (L. *chodzas*) would be often brought down to the winter quarters during the colder months, assuming the upper floor is unoccupied. Such ritual paraphernalia was placed in the upper end of the room (usually the furthest wall from the door), above the stove and communal cooking implements. All of these objects were seen as being ideally ‘clean’ (L. *tsang*), whilst unclean items, such as shoes, washing implements and toothbrushes (these latter having been sullied by saliva, although they were still kept off the ground, away from the shoes) were kept closest to the door. If possible, all sleeping spaces were arranged so that the heads of the sleepers point towards the “head” (L. *go*) end of the room.

In the kitchen, seating hierarchies were once again maintained, but with a pronounced spatial distinction between hosts and guests (Fig. 3.6). Guests were seated facing the host, in a line which stretched from the door (the lowest end, or *tral zhugs* - “seat of the line”) to the innermost part of the room (or *tral go* - “head of the line”). The ‘rules’ for seating were far more complex here than in the *dukhang*, and were constructed according to a series of ranked hierarchies: thus, a student was always lower than his or

her personal *lama*, the host was always “lower” than the guest, laity were lower than monks, females lower than males, and younger lower than older, *in that order of priority*. Thus, a young monk would be “higher” than a old laywoman, but a visiting layman from Britain would be higher than his monk hosts. If guests were seen as markedly senior to the host and other guests, they would be seated in a separate room, above the kitchen. Such seating arrangements are part of standard etiquette in Buddhist Ladakh and regions of Tibet (see Phylactou 1989; Day 1989; Ortner 1978: 75).³⁸ Such hierarchies also effected the way in which people treated food: in particular, the highest guest was fed first. Theoretically, this ‘highest guest’ was the Buddha, who received offerings before anyone ate. Similarly, great care was taken not to confuse the order of eating: dishes and cups were almost never shared, being ‘polluted’ (L. *dipchan*) by the saliva of the guest. Eating or cooking implements that had been used or polluted were never placed back in the communal cooking pot, and the washing up was always done by the “lowest” possible person, on the grounds that they could not be polluted by anyone lower than them.

3.4.2.1 - *Symbolic and Economic Status of the Shak*

Like the *tulku*’s quarters, *shak* were regarded as separate from the *gompa*.. Each *shak* belonged instead to specific households, and thus could to a large extent be regarded as extensions of the village. The resident monks either hailed from that household or were at least closely related to it. All these households were within the six sponsoring villages that surrounded Lingshed monastery. Upkeep of the quarters was the household’s responsibility. If *shak* were going to be empty for a long time, or were too expensive to upkeep, they could be sold or rented to other households by the owning household, although in practice this was rare.

³⁸ Many situations were of course faintly ambiguous, especially when seniority was not immediately obvious. As a younger layman I generally tried to take a position “lower” than older laymen. Such senior laymen, on the other hand, regarded me as a ‘guest’ to the entire area and thus saw themselves as my ‘hosts’ (regardless of whether they were actually serving food). Thus both of us would try to adopt a lower position, usually generating an extremely physical struggle for places, something which was greeted by those around us as a perfectly ordinary event.

To understand the manner in which the *shak* is integrated into the household, rather than monastic, economy, and thereby understand more about the profoundly ambiguous status of the ordinary monk, we must make a rather substantial diversion into the demography and economic structure of the village household estate (L. *t'rongpa*).

3.4.2.2- Households and Householders in Lingshed

Within the analytic literature on Tibet, the understanding of many areas of social process has increasingly been dominated by the household as one of the central cultural, social and economic elements (Aziz 1978: 117). Households in Buddhist Ladakh, as with much of the Tibetan cultural region, are corporate bodies with distinct and bounded social, legal and ritual statuses and responsibilities. They constitute the basis in villagers' understanding of their rights and duties, embodying a host of social and ritual identities which centre the various categories of personal and communal action. Household membership in Ladakh is determined not by lineage but by birth within the physical confines of named household estates (Reis 1983; Phylactou 1989). In these manners, Buddhist regions of Ladakh and Tibet often conform to Levi-Strauss's portrayal of *société à maison* - 'house societies'.

In the majority of anthropological monographs (see for example Phylactou 1989; Day 1989; Crook 1994b; Grist 1990; Dollfus 1989), village life is depicted as revolving around the household estate (L. *tr'ongpa*), the central unit of agricultural production and social reproduction. In the usual picture, estates were not compact single dwelling places, but rather name-holding conglomerates of buildings, usually divided into two categories of house: the *khangchen* ("great house"), which was the productive and reproductive focus of the *tr'ongpa*; and the *khangbu* ("offshoot house"³⁹), which maintained a kind of ancillary and subsistent existence in dependence on the central *khangchen*.⁴⁰

³⁹This term is often replaced by *khang-chung* - "small house" in Indus valley areas.

⁴⁰For the sake of clarity, I will use the term 'house' to refer to either *khangchen* or *khangbu*, and occasionally *shak*; 'household' refers to the cultural and social categories and activities that surround such houses; and 'household estate' refers to the inheritable legal conglomerate of *khangchen*,

For a variety of reasons, the monastic quarters has been excluded from this depiction of the estate, thereby contrasting the household and the monastery as analytic alternatives. For reasons which will be gone into throughout this thesis, I would argue that such a contrast is ethnographically unsound, and that relocating the *shak* as part of household estate and household economy is crucial. Thus, from now on, I will treat the estate as being composed of *khangchen*, *khangbu*, and *shak*.

The *khangchen* was the residence of the central reproductive marriage of the household estate, and therefore the channel of estate inheritance; ceremonially, a *khangchen* was only accepted as such when it acted as sponsor to rites from which the entire village benefits. *Khangbu* and *shak* were dependent houses whose population normatively arose out of that central marriage, but do not have the same dominant presence within village affairs. Whilst *khangchen* were fully fledged socio-jural institutions with inheritable property and lands, independent taxable status and a distinct legal and economic presence (via the estate head - *khyimdag* - the oldest effective inheritor, usually male, but often female) within the village as a whole, *khangbu* and *shak* were none of these, having legal status only as an adjunct of the *khangchen*. To understand fully the distribution of personnel within the *khangchen* and *khangbu*, it is necessary to begin looking at marital arrangements in Ladakh, and especially at the structure of the polyandrous marriage.

3.4.2.3 - Polyandry and the Household Estate

Like many Tibetan areas, the practice of polyandry in Ladakh and Zangskar remained *de facto* a statistically important marriage option, despite its outlawing in Ladakh and Zangskar in the 1941 Polyandry Act. The most usual form of this type of marriage strategy was fraternal polyandry, with a set of brothers marrying a single wife and co-habiting under the single roof of the *khangchen*. Whilst this sort of marriage

khangbu, and *shak*, that is referred to by Ladakhis as the *tr'ongpa*. The use of the 'estate' designation, most commonly used in Tibetan studies to discuss monastic property or aristocratic land (e.g. Grist 1990; Goldstein 1973) seems most persuasive when discussing such complex inheriting systems of property and labour.

emphasised the social paternity of the eldest brother (*L. apa-chenpo* - "great father"), the roles of younger brothers in the procreative process were certainly recognised.⁴¹

Although there was a generally felt preference for patrilineal descent and virilocal (*L. bagston*) marriage in Ladakhi areas, this was outweighed by a concentration on the unity and continuity of the household estate. Estates without viable male inheritors would marry in husbands, with the oldest daughter staying as estate head. Such uxorilocal (*L. magpa*) marriages were described by Ladakhis as rare (and the cause of some mirth), a normative ideology which hides a substantial statistical presence (Reis 1983). The interpretation of fraternal polyandry as a central cultural norm in Tibet has been questioned by Goldstein (1971), Aziz (1978) and, within the Ladakhi context, by Grist (1990) who have all noted that polyandrous marriage strategy was linked to landed and upwardly-mobile estates intent on maintaining and consolidating wealth and an available labour pool from one generation to the next, whilst non-land holding economic groups such as sharecroppers were predominantly monogamous. This economic aspect to marriage strategy has also been linked to the taxation structure of Ladakh and Zangskar (Prince Peter 1963; Grist 1990). Basic taxes were levied not on the extent of land holdings held by a household estate, but simply as a simple unitary *zhing-khams* or corporate household estate (Prince Peter 1963: 341-2). Thus, maintenance of the unity of the estate, and avoidance of splits and the creation of new independent *khangchen*, reduced burdensome tax liabilities.

It may well be an extension of this conservative inheritance approach that causes a normative bias towards having only a single reproductive marriage within a single estate (Grist 1990, writing about the Leh area), a possible case of Goldstein's more general "mono-marital principal" for Tibet⁴², wherein a single marriage per generation was regarded as the optimal case.

The predominance of the polyandrous marriage strategy in householding areas such as Lingshed has two important repercussions. First, it leaves behind a large number of redundant personnel (both male

⁴¹On the ethnography of polyandry in Ladakh and Zangskar see Crook and Crook (1994), Phylactou (1989), and Prince Peter (1963); for Tibetan areas generally, see Goldstein (1971) and Levine (1988).

⁴²Goldstein (1971).

and female) who are extraneous to the central marriage structure of their households. In January 1994, the monastic population constituted 19% of the eligible local male population, almost one in five.⁴³ Secondly, it creates a centralised inheritance structure, to which reproductively redundant personnel are redundant. Moreover, out-marrying sons and daughters lose all claim to inheritance to the property of their natal estate, which is focused on the *khangchen* house inhabitants.

This dichotomy between central and peripheral members within the estate demography is mapped out within the structure of estate habitation, since inhabitation of offshoot houses is dependent on the departure of redundant adult personnel from the *khangchen*. This means that, normatively at least, the inhabitants of *khangbu* fall into three different groups:⁴⁴

i) Departing grandparents, who move to the smaller *khangbu*, generally on the birth of the eldest son or daughter's first child. Here they farm a comparatively small allotment on a subsistence basis (see also Phylactou 1989: 123), and are expected to live religious lives in preparation for death. Grandparents might also take the choice to renounce married life altogether and either become a monk or nun or enter into celibacy as part of lay (*L. gyesnyen*) vows.

ii) Unmarried women, usually the younger sisters of women who have been married off or who have brought a husband into the house. To all intents and purposes, these women, designated as celibate 'nuns' (*L. chomo*, or *ane* - 'aunt'), become life-long spinsters, once again expected to give large amounts of time to religious pursuits, although rarely would they

⁴³ The monastery contained a population of 65 monks in January 1994. Leh Nutrition Project's survey (1993) estimated the population of Kumbum's six sponsor villages to be 787, with the male population over five years at 344. No comparable figures are available for the local population of nuns or permanently celibate women.

⁴⁴ As Phylactou notes, recent demographic changes brought on through the introduction of the cash economy to the central Ladakh region mean that a fourth group is becoming statistically important especially in the Leh area. In this group, a younger brother instigates an independent second marriage and goes to live in an offshoot house. Such offshoot houses often break away and become *khangchen* in their own right.

actually achieve the status of ordained nun (L. *chomo-rabjungma*).⁴⁵ The actual religious capacities of nuns were extremely circumscribed:⁴⁶ the number of nunneries in the region is very small, and the majority of such lay-nuns are retained with close links to the *khangchen*, living in *khangbu* as a labour resource for the estate, whilst having none of the high status that Ladakhi society gives to *khangchen* mothers.

iii) The final group living outside the *khangchen* generally fare much better than their female counterparts. As we have seen, monks inhabit *shak* in the monastery, and are charged with the majority of ritual activity concerning the estate. Although giving monks to the monasteries is an act of religious merit (L. *sonam*), they are also often younger brothers in a polyandrous marriage where the wife is simply too old for them.

Thus, a sample polyandrous household estate, based on a virilocal (L. *bagston*) marriage and comprised of a *khangchen*, two *khangbu*, and owning a *shak* in Kumbum monastery, might be arranged as follows:⁴⁷

⁴⁵Unlike men, who can become fully ordained, women can only obtain semi-ordained status.

⁴⁶Phylactou (1989) states that nuns perform virtually no religious rites for lay people. In general, this is true, although certain basic ritual tasks - such as the reading out of texts to the ill - which had been ordered by the monastery, were occasionally performed by nuns.

⁴⁷Although polyandry is widespread in Ladakh and Zangskar, it remains illegal, and therefore this case study is deliberately anonymous.

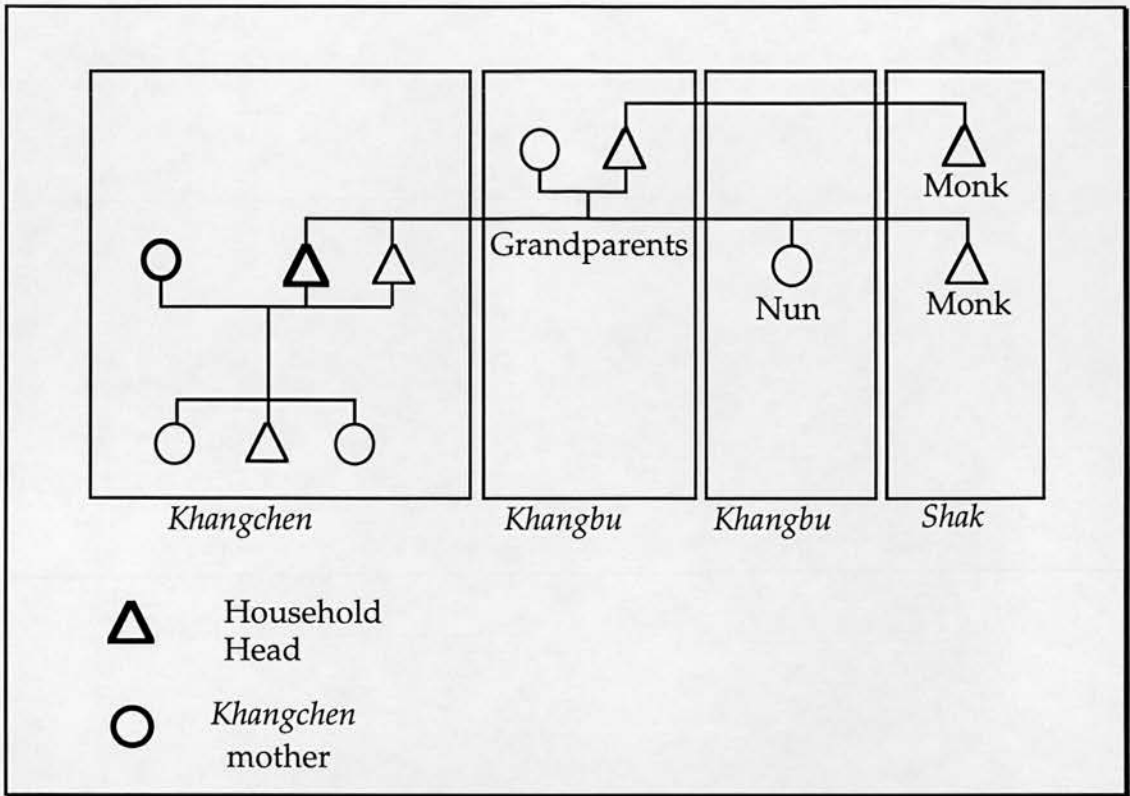


Fig. 3.7 - Personnel Within a Sample Household Estate

When the grandparents die, or any other significant shift occurs in the household demography, individual members would gradually relocate to compensate, according to practicality and personal preference. Thus, the demography of the average *tr'ongpa* constantly shifts as generations turn over, with *khangbu* and *shak* often remaining empty for years. However, the unchanging point in this constellation is the *khangchen*, upon which the *khangbu* depends for a jural presence. The monastic *shak* has a similarly dependent status, being owned as part of the *tr'ongpa* estate, and supported economically from labour resources affiliated to that estate.

3.4.3 - Support of Individual Monks

As monks were either discouraged or barred from working the fields, the production associated with the *shak* was thus entirely dependent on the available labour resources of the *khangchen* and *khangbu*. This means that the support of individual monks was not necessarily dependent on their status as a regular member of the monastic assembly. On the other hand, monks from poorer families represented a burden to their natal

households and were under some obligation to finance their monastic careers through any method which did not contravene their integrity as monks.

Thus, the financial situations of monks could vary considerably, which determined much of their career as monks. Poorer monks had to give over a large amount of time to securing alternative sources of income, ideally from a dependable and long-term sponsor. Indeed, the enthusiasm in matters financial demonstrated by certain monks was the object of occasional criticism from laity, who would comment that certain monks were greedy, or that their demands were inappropriate to their remit as ritual practitioners.

The disparity between monks' financial positions meant that it was not unknown for wealthier monks to employ other members of the same community. Certain onerous duties such as *gomnyer* to the village temples could in practice be 'traded' if a monk were willing to pay the going price. Similarly, poorer monks were often employed by wealthier ones to transcribe texts or act as valet. However, this disparity should not be overemphasised: the wealth differentials general to anyone in Lingshed were comparatively small, and as nothing compared to those found between monks in many of the larger monastic universities (Sen 1984: 63-8).

3.5 - Conclusion: The Structuring of Monastic and Bodily Space

One of the most important features of life in Lingshed, and other Buddhist communities in Tibetan areas, was the enormous emphasis that was placed on the concept of height, and the maintenance of the order and hierarchy that was implied by it. This hierarchy informed the organisation of a whole raft of architectural and bodily dispositions.

In particular, the various sections of the monastery that have been discussed in this chapter were distinguished in terms of height, embodying a hierarchy that fed down from the incarnate's quarters to the *gompa*, to the monastic quarters, and below them to the household estates in the village. The 'vertical' organisation of such spaces constituted a major metaphor for notions of purity and authority in this context, a metaphor which was clearly and systematically expressed. Monks identified various monastic rules dealing with the arrangement of crucial components within the

monastery, as well as ones governing external relations between the monastery and its surrounding area, for example:

- a) *shak* were not allowed to be built above the *lhakhang* (shrine rooms) of the *gompa*;
- b) central houses (L. *khangchen*) were not allowed to be built above the monastery unless the land between was cut by a stream;
- c) new *lhakhang* should always be built above existing ones.

Explicit rules also applied to the physical comportment of monks and visiting laity within the monastery grounds. The most important of these applied to the limited exclusion of laywomen. In the eyes of the monks, such exclusion had two principal foci.

The first of these was concerned with monastic discipline, but in a negative way. To protect the moral discipline of monks, laywomen were not allowed within the monastery grounds overnight, a period which (as we shall see in greater detail later (**Ch. 4**) is conceptually given over to sexual activity, an activity also reserved very much for the *khangchen* down in the valley. Thus monks were kept 'above' the activities of sexual reproduction: interestingly, on those occasions when monks and reproductively active laity were forced to share accommodation, the monks slept on the roof, thus maintaining the vertical hierarchy of renunciation. On the productive side of life, monks refrained from entering the village during the *Yar-gnas* Summer Retreat and (more generally) during the harvest period, whilst laity restricted much of their practice of *chos* (religion) to the winter months, when lay visits to the monastery multiplied several fold. Those laity I questioned argued that it was better to practice *chos* in the winter, because the summer harvest period was such a powerful cause of negative karma (L. *sdigpa*).

The second area of concern was that of lay relations with the monastery's tutelary Buddha, Yamāntaka. Lay women were not allowed to approach the statue of this deity, either by entering the aisle of the *dukhang* in which the statue was housed (**Fig. 3.3**), or by entering any part of the monastery during the *Skam Ts'ogs* festival (**Appendix A**), when the *lopon* enters a two week closed meditation retreat centred on the supplication of

this extremely wrathful Buddha. Here, the restrictions on female access went far beyond the human realm: monks stated that if women approached the Yamāntaka statue, there was a grave danger that they would be attacked by local earth-spirits (L. *sadag*); conversely, the monastery had to receive special dispensation to allow female animals belonging to the monastery into the grounds during *Skam-Ts'ogs*.

Moreover, a series of stipulations applied to *all* those entering the monastic grounds. In general, all non-residents should perform at least three clockwise circumambulations of the *gompa* before entering it through the *lower* entrance. The upper entrance was rarely used by villagers, being reserved for monks, visiting incarnates and important visitors to Lingshed. Laity were thus obliged to come 'up' to the monastery, whilst incarnates and important visitors to the area 'descended' upon it.

This kind of structuring of social space applied not only to actual position within various rooms and buildings, but also to bodily orientations within them. A series of disciplinary bodily practices mapped out cognitive dispositions to organised physical space, defining an ever-present sense of being placed within a hierarchy of purity.

One of the most important foci of this embodied sense of hierarchy is the almost universal practice of prostration. The manner in which this act is seen as logically and semantically constitutive of the very sense of social and cosmological hierarchy is best explained through a conversation I had with Karma about the winter *Snyung-gnas* rite. Inquiring what the principal observance for most laity was during the rite, he smiled, saying "Oh, one must prostrate many times of course, for the whole two days". I asked what such prostrations involved. Obviously feeling he was on safer ground than with my normal awkward questions, he cheerfully explained that there were several types, but most people made prayers "as though to Chenresig".

"Here, the hands are placed together, like with normal prayer, but with the thumbs pressed between the palms, to represent the jewel (L. *norbu*) of enlightenment within emptiness (L. *stongpanyid* (6.2)). The hands are then placed on the crown of the head, whilst thinking that it is necessary to develop a Buddha's "wisdom crown" (L. *subtor*); then at the forehead between the eyes, with the wish to develop the 38 noble names of the Buddha; then at the throat, wishing for the Buddha's teachings (L. *do*); and then at the heart (L. *t'ugs*),

where one must contemplate all the Buddha's good qualities. This is the best way, I think. But how do you give prostrations in Britain?"

"Well, in general, we don't, even in the temple", I replied warily. Westerners had a reputation in Ladakh for having no sense of respect. Some days before, Tsewang Norbu, the *gyesgus*, had enquired who my *lama* was. Unthinkingly, I had replied that I didn't have one. Tsewang was obviously shocked by this, and brought the conversation to a rather summary close. Later that day, Karma, having heard of the incident, had chastised me, saying that to say such a thing was very disrespectful (L. *t'oman* - literally, "the low raised"). It made me more cautious on the issue now. "In the West, you see, we say that it is better if everyone is equal, at the same height."

"No, no, no!", cried Karma, obviously amused by the sheer absurdity of such a remark. "This is not possible. If we were the same, how could we learn anything? Who would be our teacher, who would be our father and mother? What would we benefit [from such a thing]?"

The sense in which prostrations focus notions of social superiority into physical space is more complex than simply the act of lowering oneself. Prostrations are given along two axes: the first being the obvious sense in which the prostrator places their head upon the ground, thus lowering his or her "highest point" (the head) so that it is lower than the lowest point of the person or statue towards which they are prostrating; the second axis is that of length: all prostrations are done with heads pointed towards an established 'upper' end of the room, with feet towards a 'lower' exit. The dimension of relative height is thus translated into a horizontal axis through the focus of the interacting *bodily* axis.

The same rationale informed, or was played out in, a whole variety of actions. Assemblies performed outside the main prayer hall, especially those in the main courtyard, often attracted much attention in quiet moments from laity and non-involved monks, who would watch from the surrounding balconies, taking pains to conceal their bodies from sight of such rites. By crouching behind parapets or watching out the sides of overlooking windows, they would only show their heads: this was considered appropriate respect for those unavoidably placed above such rites. Thus, the primary determinant of the up-down metaphor was not physical space itself, but the body's movement within it. The human body

thus progressively determines the orientation of physical space, and vice-versa (Bourdieu 1972: 69).

Chapter 4:

Conceptualising Kumbum Monastery

4.1 - Introduction

The division of the monastery as a working institution into a variety of domains has striking implications for our understanding of the monastery as a collection of religious virtuosi. The separation in the economic and social affairs and statuses of the monastery from those of any visiting incarnate *lama* is of particular note, and will be dealt with at some length later. By way of a conclusion to this Part, I wish to concentrate on the more complex economic affairs of the ordinary monks. As we saw in the last chapter, the support of such monks as individuals can be conceptually separated from their status as participants in the monastic assembly. As individuals, they remained within the economic domain of the household itself, even if they were peripheral to its main functions as economic and social producer: as members of the monastic assembly, they constituted the Sangha (L. *gyedunpa*) - the Third Jewel of Buddhism - and received support as such.

This economic differentiation is not unique to Kumbum, and the *shak* system of economic provision for monastic communities has been documented elsewhere in Ladakh (Piessel 1980) and many other Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, not all of the same order (see Snellgrove 1957: 218; Shen and Liu 1953: 76-81; Kawaguchi 1909: 326-7; Sandberg 1906: 101; Das 1887: 61; Winnington 1957: 92, 138; Ma 1947: 377-78; Chen 1949: 100; Goré 1923: 395).⁴⁸ It is therefore of considerable importance that the significance of this system to our conceptualisation of religious life in Kumbum be addressed in greater detail.

⁴⁸Most of these sources are reported in Carrasco (1972: 123-4).

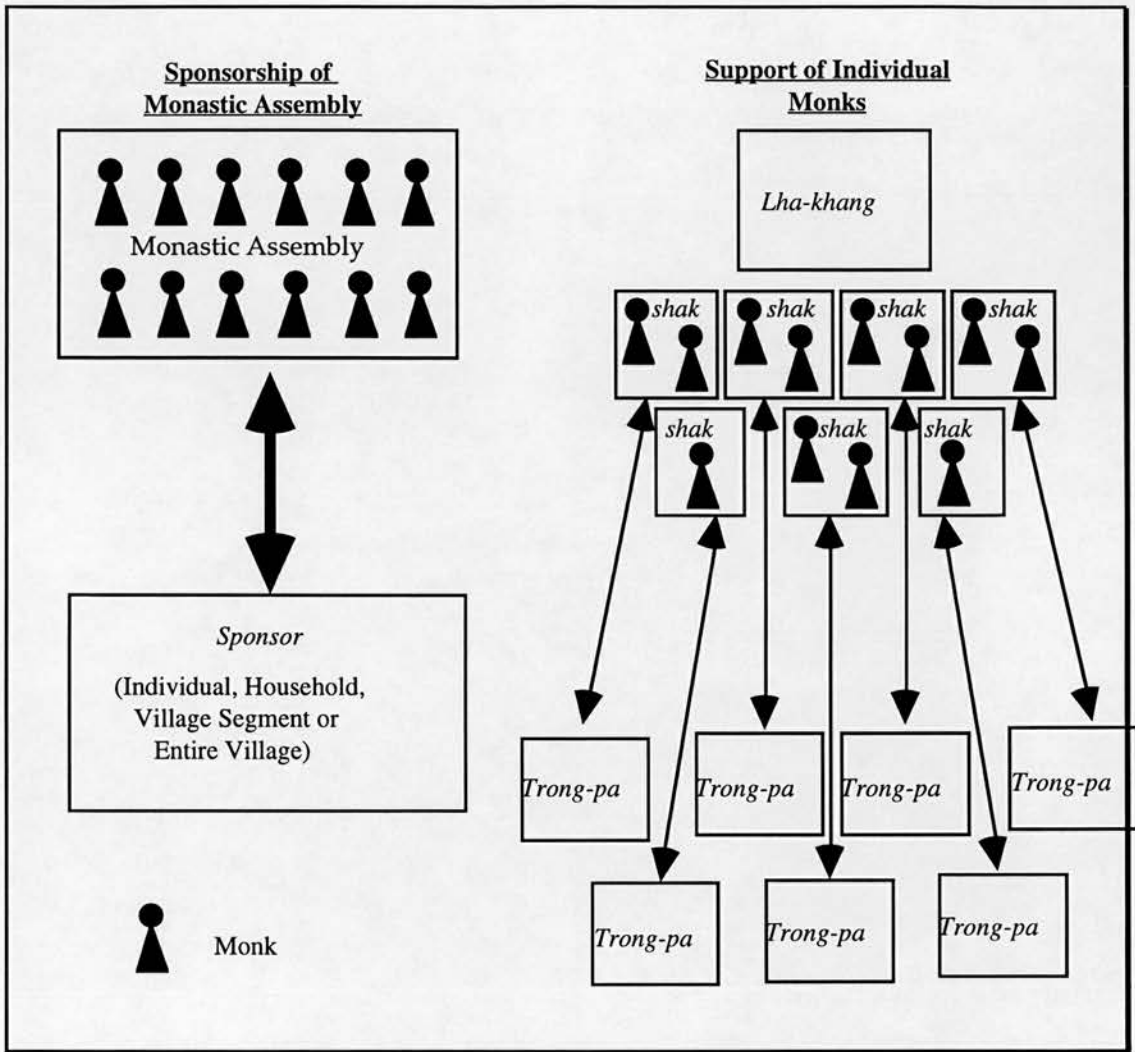


Fig. 4.1: Avenues of Economic Support, Kumbum Monastery

4.2.1 - The Sociological Status of Monks as 'Renouncers'

Monks' status as peripheral members of the household begs the question of the exact meaning of monastic ordination. At the very least, placing the *shak* within the economic structure of the household estate undermines any absolute distinction between household and monastic existence: the monastery can no longer be depicted as a monolithic and bounded "total institution", but rather appears to be a whole series of separate economic, social and ritual relationships which simply meet at the physical location of the monastery.

That said, some kind of divide between lay and monastic existence is crucial to Kumbum monks' self-representation, in which they contrast their role as "renouncers" (L. *rabjungnas*) with those of householders (L.

khyimpa). But if this is true, then how much sense does it make to deny this distinction? Is the monks' self-representation as socially separate from laity a mere fiction, a false consciousness designed to legitimate the monastery's pivotal position within the economic life of Lingshed?

Arguably, the difficulty in defining a monk's renunciation lies in our own perception of the household as a static, and above all very physical kind of phenomenon. Likewise, although we *define* 'householder' principally as a residence pattern, despite the fact that we most often *use* it to define a certain kind of social role: in our mind's eye, the householder is adult, married, and generally (but not exclusively) male. I would argue that this latter understanding of householding is more salient to the negative definition of the monk as renouncer. The monk is defined against the household in the sense that the household is something constantly in motion, something which performs certain functions in the social life of the village - something with a certain kind of social, ritual and economic *agency*.

The household estate therefore has two meanings: the first as a jural and physical entity, with a certain number of houses, fields and personnel, but secondly as an entity in which, as Gudeman & Riviera note in their Colombian ethnography:

...material processes are organised through the house, and the lexicon for them comes from the vocabulary for the physical dwelling: the house as shelter is a metaphor for the house as economy. (1990: 2)

This 'house as economy' in the Ladakhi scenario is one centred on the *khangchen* and its productive and reproductive responsibilities - a depiction of 'house holding' which marginalizes the non-productive, non-reproductive monk.

4.2.2 - *Conceptualising Wealth*

This relationship between clerical 'renunciation' economic production and social reproduction can be simplified considerably. As Crook (1994b) argues for neighbouring Zangskar, both workable land and an available labour pool within the immediate family are crucial factors in indigenous determinations of wealth (L. *yang*), and strongly influence

marriage strategy in household estates. The creation of wealth is thus dependent not simply on the process of agricultural production *per se*, but the more basic process of producing a labour force for such production. Wealth, thus, arises out of the twin processes of sexual reproduction and economic reproduction, key features which negatively define the monk's position within the household estate.

This creates wealth as a crucial notion in indigenous representations of household status, and suggests that it is such 'wealth' that represents the core lay value against which renunciation is negatively constructed. As such, *yang* must be precisely understood. Both agricultural production and sexual reproduction were couched in an idiom whose dominant metaphor was one of birth (L. *skyewa*), a verb which referred both to the 'growth' of crops and the birth and growth of children. Indeed, the principal rite of ploughing throughout Buddhist Ladakh (**Appendix A**) was held to "open the earth door (L. *saka*)", an image coincident with notions of rebirth, where the consciousness of the dead enters "the door of the womb" (see also Thurman 1994: 182; Freemantle and Trungpa 1987: 80-86). Similarly, much of the imagery of ploughing was self-consciously sexual (see Day 1989: 136; Phylactou 1989: 243). Thus, agricultural production and sexual reproduction can be singled out as processes of *physical embodiment*, either of crops or of people.

In later chapters we will see that this idiom of embodiment is crucial to understanding the status of a wide variety of religious practitioners; for the moment, it separates this kind of wealth (L. *yang*) from other more general forms of economic activity, most particularly the simple accumulation of wealth. Without a doubt, the most efficient *accumulator* of wealth in the region was the monastery, rather than households. Similarly, monks themselves engage in broadly economic activities such as the collection of firewood for the monastery, trading, renting land for interest, and so forth. I would suggest however that these do not represent principal activities concerned with *creating* wealth.

4.3 - A Matrix of Renunciation?

Returning to our sample polyandrous household estate, we can see by way of illustration the graded inverse relationship between the various dimensions of involvement in wealth production, and the ability to

perform authoritatively certain forms of ritual practice, on one's own, and others' behalf. Conversely, those entrusted with *established* positions of ritual responsibility, such as the monks, were to be kept as removed from the processes of sexual reproduction and agricultural production as possible.

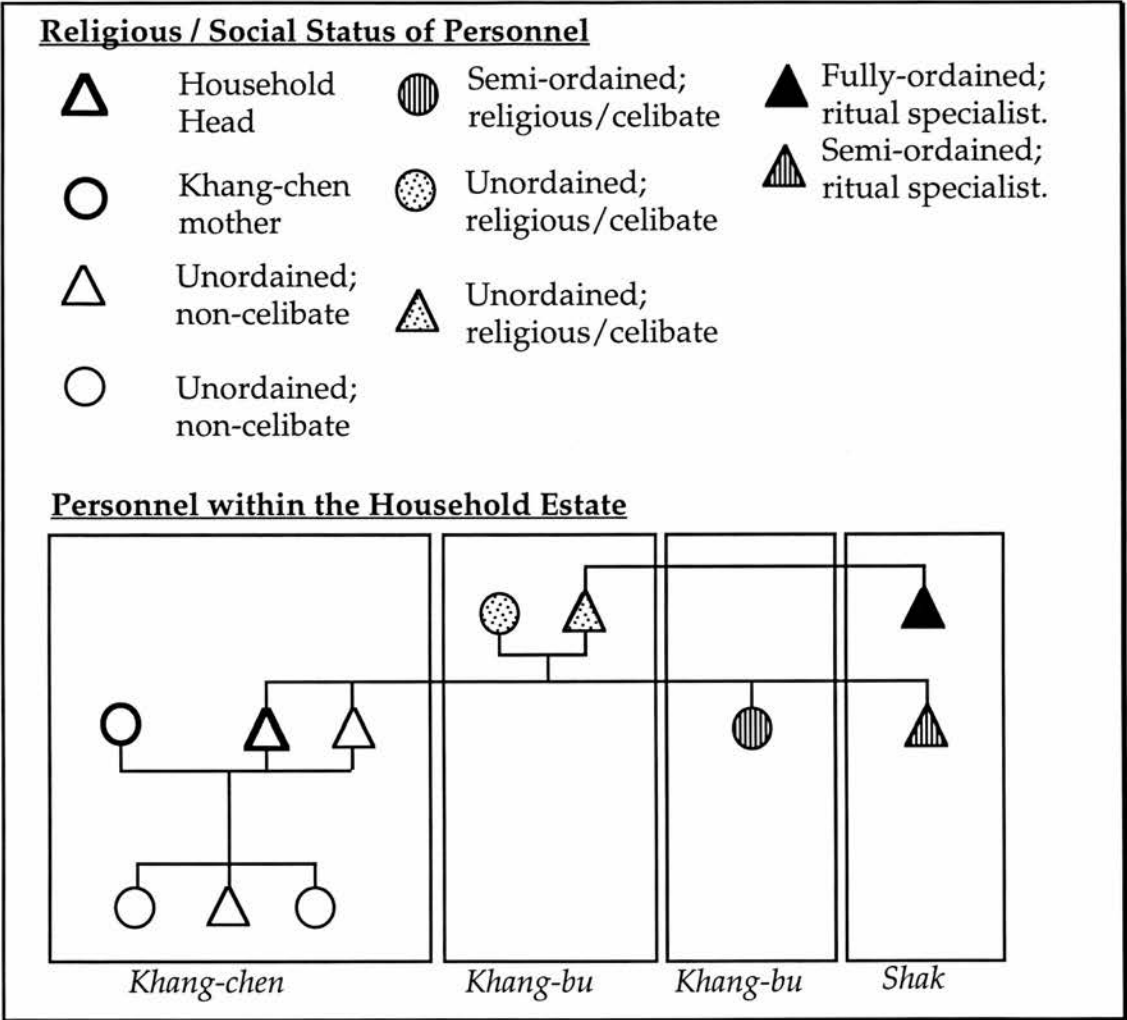


Fig. 4.2 - Personnel distribution in a sample polyandrous estate, as related to ideology of formal and informal religious practice

Relocating the monk back into the household estate highlights how 'clerical renunciation' can be seen not as a single leap from householder to monk, but rather as a series of grades of possible renunciation, negatively defined against a complex understanding of wealth. 'Clerical renunciation' thus involves a variety of relations with respect to the productive and

reproductive matrix of the household, both for monks and for laity. In the Lingshed situation, these can be identified thus:

Lay 'Clerical' Renunciation

i) Upon the marriage (and especially first child) of their children, the grandparents forsake the productive (and reproductive) *khangchen* and move to the self-sufficiency of the *khangbu*. Significantly, such a move also correlates with an expected change in life style as the grandparents are expected to become celibate (or at least not reproductively active), shift to subsistence production, and engage ideally in religious activities in preparation for death.

ii) The lay-nun (L. *ane* or *chomo*) enters celibate existence and is expected to live a religious life, with an extremely limited vocation as ancillary ritual officiant. Living in an offshoot house, she usually provides labour for the central house.

iii) *Snyungnas* renouncers: the taking of *gyesnyen* (lay religious) vows during the *Snyung-gnas* rite allows both male and female laity to enter and stay in the monastery overnight for the duration of their vows, which structurally replicate, in a limited form, the vows of novice monks.

Monastic 'Clerical' Renunciation

i) The novice monk (L. *traba*) enters monastic life, usually at a young age. No vows were officially associated with this status, which in Kumbum was occupied entirely by boys under the age of ten. The role was identified partially with residence (young *traba* spent most of the time at the monastery, but often returned home for extended periods) and a monk's initial training. It was, in other words, a preparatory role prior to being able to accept vows personally. No ritual duties are given to *traba*.

ii) The semi-ordained monk (L. *gyets'ul*) takes 36 vows and lives permanently in the monastery, and 'renounces' the central aspects of wealth production: particularly, the surplus production and sexual reproduction associated with the *khangchen*. Here his life becomes one of

celibacy and partial economic dependence: his family work his allotted field for him, but he can if necessary help out, and often works a small personal vegetable garden.

ii) The fully-ordained monk (L. *gyelong*) takes 253 vows, remains celibate, and becomes fully exempted from working in the fields. Many of the major ritual posts at Kumbum, such as *lopon*, *umdzat*, *gomnyer* and (in principle) *u-chung*, are reserved for fully-ordained monks only.

Thus a variety of possible 'clerical renunciations' exist simply within the Lingshed context, not all of them restricted to the monastic domain. All of them, however, took as their basis the household estate as an inheriting productive/reproductive matrix of activities, rather than as a static 'group' or physical entity.

4.4 - Non-Renunciation? The Religious Lives of Householders

Above, we examined the monks' vows in terms of how they progressively removed the clerical renouncer from the activities of agricultural production and social reproduction (2.5). In a picture centred solely on the monk as religious actor, the clerical renouncer appears to attain his position of religious authority through doing progressively less, socially and economically-speaking: his religious role aside, he becomes progressively disempowered, symbolically castrated, to use Paul's Freudian imagery (Paul 1982).

Similarly, the religious careers of certain 'peripheral' laity seem to take the same form, in particular the grandparents and celibate lay nuns. Both these types represent a form of semi-renunciation, a partial move into the realm of clerical renunciation. But to represent religiosity solely in terms of this kind of clerical renunciation of productive and reproductive capacities implicitly portrays the inhabitants of the central *khangchen* as failures within the religious world: mired in both the productive and the reproductive life, they are not even partial monks. Such a one-dimensional reading of the situation neglects the crucial function that central householders have in supporting monasticism in economic terms, support which is carried out at considerable cost: indeed, as we shall see in Part II, this economic endeavour by laity has significant religious dimensions of its

own. More than this, however, there are other means by which the sexually active *khangchen* inhabitants constitute themselves as religious actors.

Monks encouraged all householders to go for refuge (L. *skyaps la dro*) in the Three Jewels of Buddhism, a ceremony usually performed en masse in the presence of a presiding incarnate. Associated with this are three bodies of religious teaching and discipline, which monks regarded as being important for householders to adhere to or understand to some extent:

i) acceptance of the five precepts (to avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants)

ii) teachings on the Four Noble Truths (the inevitability of suffering; the causes of suffering; the possibility of the cessation of suffering; the methods to attain the cessation of suffering);⁴⁹ and

iii) the ten virtuous (L. *gyewa*) and non-virtuous (L. *mi-gyewa*) actions. These latter included three bodily (L. *lus*) actions (killing, stealing and sexual misconduct); four verbal (L. *ngag*) actions (harsh words, lying, slander and gossip); and three mental (L. *sems*) actions (covetousness, malice and wrong views).

Observance of the five precepts and avoidance of the ten non-virtues were particularly encouraged during the first and fourth months (**Appendix A**), during which the karmic repercussions for virtuous and non-virtuous actions were seen as far more powerful than other months. Monks singled out drinking *chang* (barley beer) and killing as the principal actions for householders to avoid during these periods, although ritual killing (L. *t'ak chod* - blood sacrifice) for worldly purposes was regarded as particularly heinous at any time.

Householders found many of the monks' prohibitions onerous to fulfil, especially when agricultural production was so inherently mired in negative karmic consequences. Since this was unavoidable during one's earlier years, many argued that it was the prospect of religious practice in

⁴⁹ To analyse these in great detail is impossible in a work of this size. For discussions of this topic in a Gelukpa context see Jackson (1993: 65-80).

old age that truly ensured any possibility of fortuitous rebirth. Arguably, it was this sense of a balanced life that informed a commonly felt horror at the notion of dying young, when one had not had a full opportunity to atone for one's accumulated negative karma.

Beyond this sense of the weight of karmic repercussion that arose out of agricultural activity, householder discussions on moral discipline revolved around avoiding *logyems* - sexual misconduct. Strictures on lay sexual activity advised against the following:

- a) having sex with members of the monastic community;
- b) having sex near the *gompa*, statues of divinities or other religious monuments;
- c) having sex on religious days or months;
- d) having sex during the day;
- e) having sex more than five times a day;
- f) having sex during pregnancy;
- g) having sex during the menstrual cycle;
- h) having sex with *snyen* up to the seventh generation;
- i) adultery.

Of these, (f), (g), and (h) were felt to cause dangerous pollution, or *dip* - (Ch. 10); whilst (e) was regarded as eroding one's *spark'a* or life-force. (a), (b), and (c) are however obviously connected with the maintenance of sexual continence as a specifically religious act. Particularly, they all served to maintain the distance between monks and sexual activity of any kind. This may not be obvious in the case of (e) - refraining from sex during the day - but this should be seen in the light of monastic prohibitions on monks staying the night in the houses of laity (2.6). Thus, sexual activity and the presence of monks are kept both spatially and temporally separate,

segregated by moral injunctions which are not simply progressive, but *complementary*. The moral strictures observed by householders reinforce the clerical renunciation of monks by helping to separate spatial and temporal domains of activity within the structure of the household estate.

If both householders and clerical renouncers have complementary, rather than simply stratified, structures of moral discipline which define their 'roles' (L. *ts'ul*) as different types of religious practitioner, then it is far from clear that we can locate a single religious 'ideal' in any particular section of the population. This is more than simply stating that there are alternative religious modes to clerical renunciation, but rather that available codes of moral discipline construct complementary and interdependent religious roles, with monk depending on householder and vice-versa.

However, if unilinear adherence to a certain religious ideal cannot clearly define more (or less) 'religious' roles, it can and does define more or less 'authoritative' ones. Within the context of communal ritual practice, religious authority is located within the ladder of clerical renunciation: the greater one's degree of renunciation of the processes of agricultural production and social reproduction, the greater one's authority within the sphere of ritual activity. It is this sphere, of communal ritual action by clerical renouncers (particularly, the monks of Kumbum) to which we now turn.

PART II:

Pastoral Care in Lingshed Village

Chapter 5: Introduction To Pastoral Care

Chapter 6: Tantric Buddhahood and the Divine Feast

Chapter 7: Dharma Protectors and Skangsol Rites

Chapter 8: Sponsorship and Benefit in Skangsol

Chapter 9: Textual Traditions and the Reading of Religion

Chapter 10: Pollution Concerns in Lingshed

Chapter 11: Household Purification

Chapter 12: Local Gods and the Embodied Person in Lingshed

Chapter 5:

Introduction to Pastoral Care in Lingshed

Overleaf:

**Photos 5.1 and 5.2: Overlooking Lingshed village in summer and winter.
Monastery buildings to the right.**



Overleaf:

Village Houses in the Trans-Sengge-La Area.

Photos 5.3 (left): Nyerags house with red-painted protective sigils.

Photo 5.4 (right): Lingshed house with household god shrine.

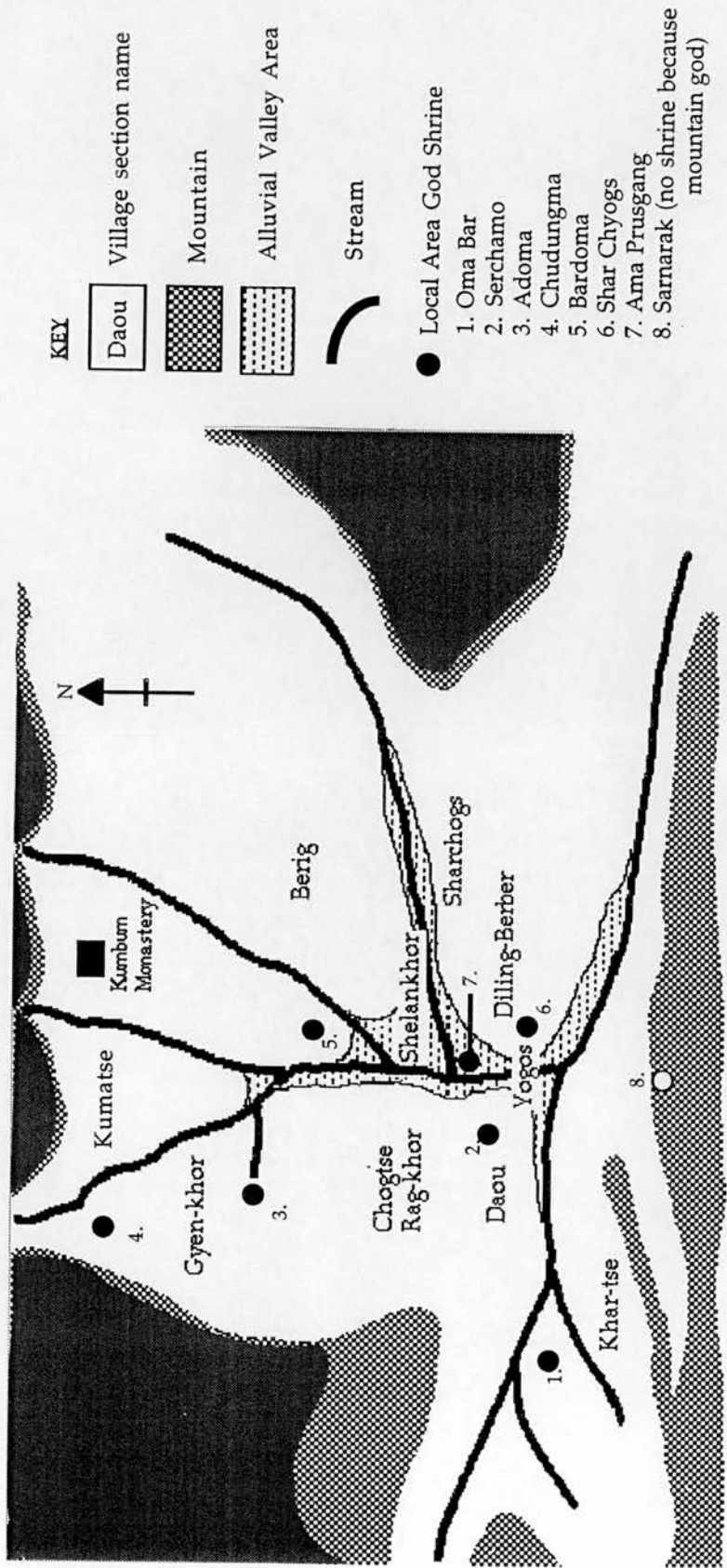


Fig. 5.1: Village Sections and local area god shrines.

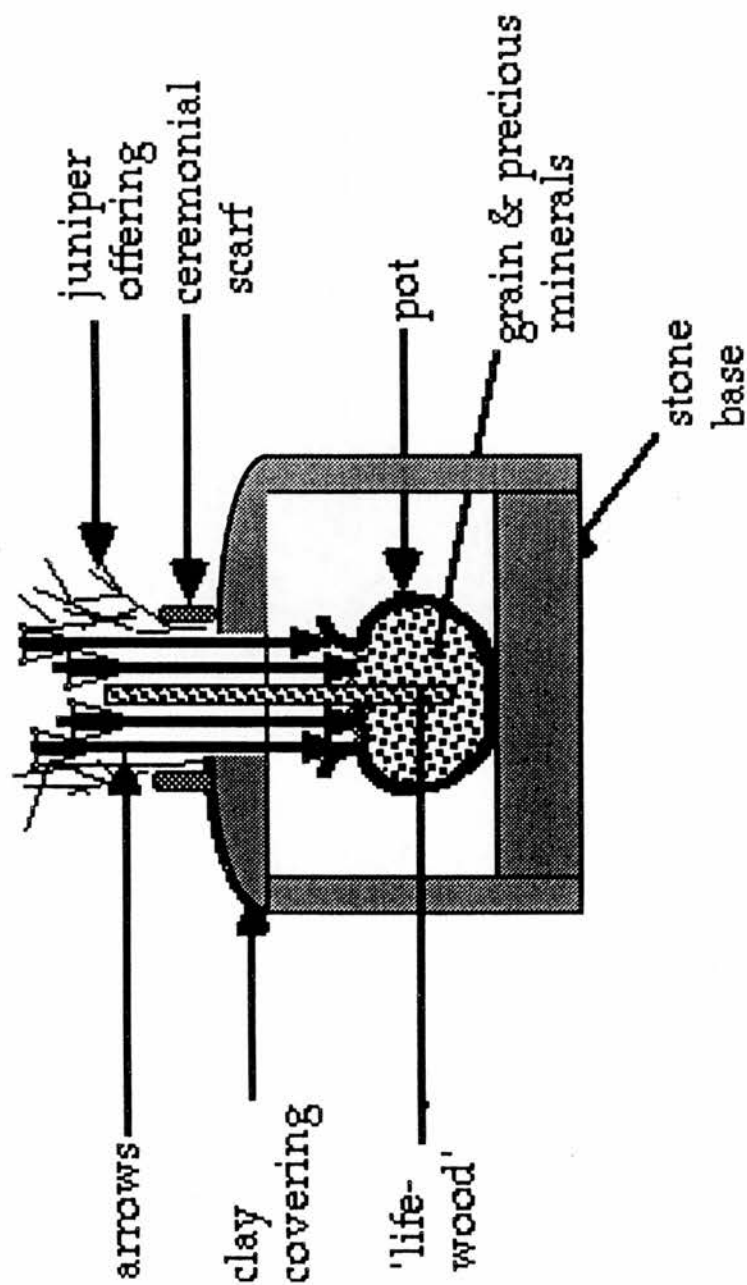


Fig. 5.2: Local Area God and Household God Shrine Construction.

5.1 - Misfortune and Local Numina

Staring out of the monastery on a summer's day, it is easy to get the impression of living in some strange Buddhist paradise, a world where the lives of villagers and monks alike are given in service to the religion. Even the village itself, far below the monastery, appears as a landscape of religious devotion, dotted with Buddhist monuments. Gracious stupas catch the light, and the hills are ranked with *mani*-walls topped with a thousand stones, each carefully inscribed with mantras. Below Kumbum itself, a clutch of *rigsum gombo* - sets of triple stupas commemorating the three great *bodhisattvas* of Tibetan Buddhism, Jampal Yang, Chenresig and Chyagna Dorje- stare benignly out across the valley.

However, such an architecture of devotion distracts the Western eye from a more threatening picture. The inhabited world within which the people of Lingshed were born, grew up, grew old and died was not simply space, architecture and geology; it was a living domain, whose human and animal inhabitants were not the only denizens worthy of the note and attention of villagers. Their lives and goals existed amidst a world of threat from capricious local gods, easily angered water spirits and wandering ghosts and demons, whose influence on health, fertility, the weather, and many other fulcra of human happiness and misery demanded constant care and propitiation.

Within this context, and the broader framework of Buddhist belief, adult Ladakhis rarely regard misfortune (L. *lanchaks*) of any kind as being purely or even partially accidental, and disaster, disease and sickness is looked upon as something which has definite, if unknown, causes in factors beyond simple material circumstance (see also Lichter and Epstein 1983; Crook 1994b). Although treating the immediate symptoms of illnesses was seen as a perfectly reasonable thing to do, it did not overcome the need to address the fundamental, and usually 'spiritual' (in the broadest sense of the word) causes of the issue, a matter which was usually beyond the capacities of the average member of the laity to discern. The causes of misfortune usually fell into a variety of overlapping classes:

i) karmic retribution (L. *las-rgyu-das*) for negative acts performed in either this or previous lives (usually but not always regarded as an individual matter);

ii) problems with ritual pollution (L. *dip*), which were usually a communal issue;

iii) spirit attack (L. *gnodpa yongs*), which could take a number of forms, from the attack of water spirits that have been polluted by the victim, to the return of deceased spirits or the attack of malevolent neighbours manifesting themselves as possessing spirits (L. *bamo*);

iv) deteriorating ('low') *spark'a*, or "life-force" associated with particular individuals: very low *spark'a* could cause the departure of the *la*, or "life-essence", which can then wander away from the body, causing deterioration and death.

The prevalence of demonological thought within this range of explanations requires careful examination. Such forms of explanation are certainly not at odds with established Buddhist discourses - after all, the Buddha himself is depicted as having battled the demon hordes of Mara and called upon the earth-goddess as witness at his final attainment of Buddhahood - but at the same time their place within any Buddhist soteriology is far from obvious. Since several of the following chapters discuss Buddhist ritual practice in the light of demonological discourses which were not simply common, but hegemonic, some introduction to local and household cosmology is essential.

5.2.1- *Landscape and Local Cosmologies*

The various numina of the Lingshed region were felt to inhabit a series of three levels within the landscape (Dollfus 1989: 103; Phylactou 1989; Day 1989). The upper regions, the mountains and high passes were called *stanglha* ("the upper domain of gods") and are inhabited by *lha* ('gods'). These are non-corporeal unless temporarily inhabiting a human oracle, and are attributed wide-ranging powers: being without bodies, they are capable of seeing things far beyond human sight, and acting in accordance. Of these local *lha*, the most important were the *yullha*, local area gods that could often hold sway over vast tracts of territory. Villagers

identified seven *yullha* that had dominion over the realm of Lingshed, and particularly its streams, weather, harvests and prosperity.

As a large village, Lingshed was divided up into a series of "sections" (L. *yul-cha* - **Fig.5.1**), separated from the others by the various tributary streams that fed its central alluvial plain. Although the power of particular local gods could in some cases extend over the entire valley, individual *yullha* were particularly associated with certain areas of the village, within which their shrine, or *lhat'o* ("god-pile") was built (**Fig. 5.2**). These *lhat'o* were stone cairns between 4 and 10 feet high, the top section of which contained a cavity housing a pot (L. *bumpa*) filled with grain, minerals and other precious substances. In this pot would stand an arrow shaft called the *srogshing*, or "life-wood". Around this were tied other arrow shafts, all pointing downwards into the pot, along with juniper branches (used as incense), all bound together with white ceremonial greetings scarves (L. *katag*). The power of such local divinities made them objects of patronage by many Tibetan Buddhists, who propitiated them alongside explicitly Buddhist divinities and Buddhas.

The domain below this is the human realm, or *barsam*, where the village and monastery are situated. Amongst the lesser denizens that inhabit these areas and form part of this 'spiritual barony' of the *lha* are the *sadag* and *zhidag*, animal spirits who live in notable geographical features, such as large boulders, mountain springs and cross-roads. Such spirits, like people, are seen as capricious and vengeful, and can attack people and cause disease as well as prosperity according to how they are treated and whether or not they come under the sway of more powerful entities.

Finally, below *barsam* is the realm of *yoglu*, which is the domain of the water spirits, the *lu*. These congregate around springs and pools, and are associated with human, agricultural and animal fertility: fish and other aquatic and semi-aquatic animals are the manifestation of such *lu*. Fragile creatures very prone to damage especially by ritual pollution, their care is extremely important to villagers who depend upon them for the fertility of the soil during the summer months. Small square shrines called *lubang* - containing offerings of grain - marked the sites of water sources: being water-bound, the *lu* were believed to retire to these 'houses' to sleep during the long icy winters. More than this, *lu* are also associated with the fertility of women, who wear *perag* (large hood-like head-dresses covered in

turquoise and coral pieces) to symbolise this identity, and with the process of food production.

5.2.2 - *The Household and Local Cosmologies*

Maria Phylactou, Pascale Dollfus and Sophie Day, recent anthropologists who worked closely on the organisation of Buddhist household estates in Lower Ladakh and Leh, have argued that this triple-tiered cosmology is replicated within the structure of the house as a symbolic entity (Phylactou 1989; Day 1989; Dollfus 1989). Since the construction of houses in Lingshed followed a pattern very close to those described, and had considerable influence on the way in which households were treated by monks as ritual officiants, a review of their ideas in the Lingshed context is certainly worthwhile.

House construction involved a combination of mud brick walling interlaced with wood support beams. Between support beams, smaller sticks were slatted to support a layer of dried mud and gravel, upon which stone slabs were placed as flooring (Osmaston, Frazer & Crook 1994, and Pommaret-Imaeda 1980). *Khangchen* houses were usually three storey structures, topped by a shrine-room (L. *chodkhang*), a fact which necessitated the use of wide wall bases if the mud brick constituents were to support the weight above them. This lent them a bottom-heavy look distinctive of the drier Tibetan regions. *Khangbu* and *shak* - containing fewer members than the central house, and not requiring an apical shrine-room - usually had two floors. The design of these smaller peripheral houses closely resembled the monastic *shaks* described previously, so for this chapter I would like to concentrate on the larger, and symbolically more complex, *khangchen*.

5.2.3 - *Ritual Space in a Lingshed Khangchen*

As a broad generalisation, each level of the *khangchen* house was designed to accommodate a certain type of inhabitant, and be given over to a particular kind of activity. As a corollary, each floor contained a separate shrine or set of shrines dedicated to different kinds of numina, all of which

received quotidian offerings as well as specific attention on certain days of the month or year.⁵⁰ By floor, these can be listed thus:

i) **The highest floor** of a relatively wealthy house would be dominated by the Buddhist shrine-room and one or more guest rooms. These were all elaborately furnished in comparison with the rest of the house. In certain cases a small shrine to the household god (L. *p'alha*) could be found either beside or often above the shrine-room.

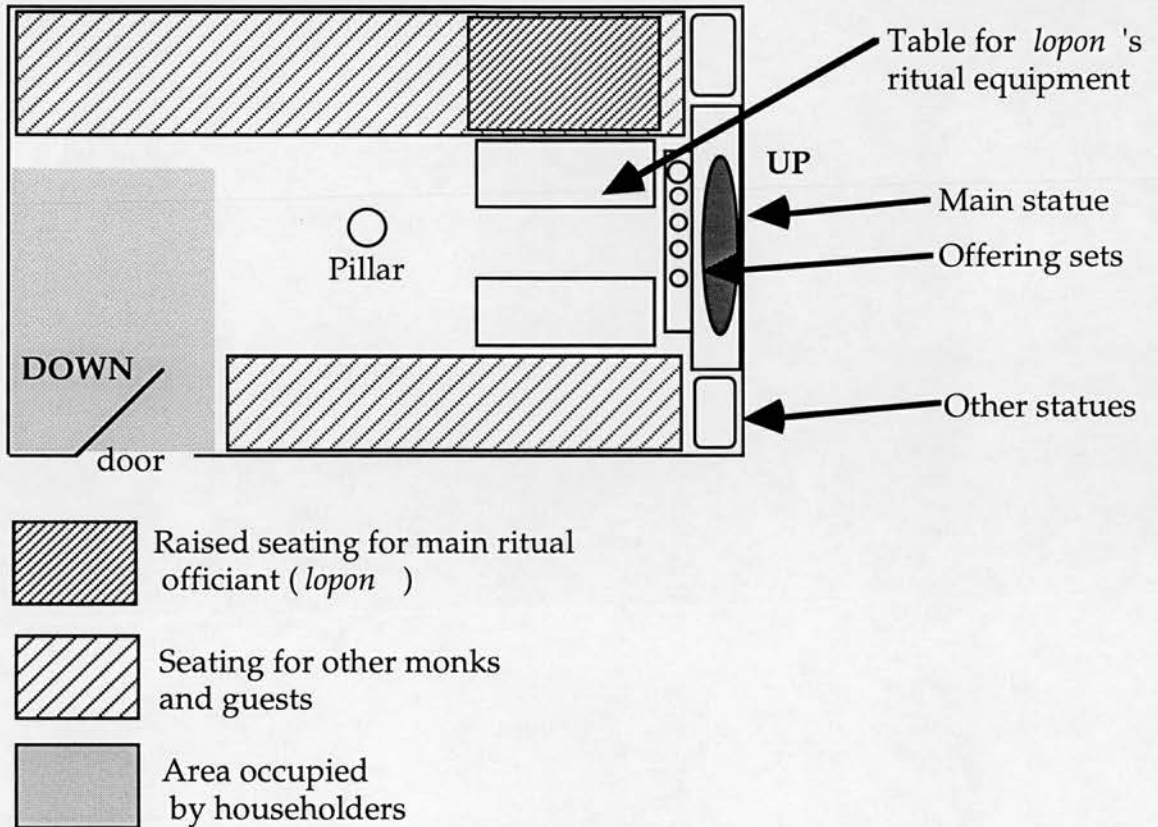


Fig. 5.3: Typical Household Buddhist Shrine Room

The offering room (L. *chodkhang*) was the site of most rites performed by visiting monks, and was usually large enough to seat 4-7 people. The layout of the average household shrine room (**Fig. 5.3**) was a smaller version of the monastery *dukhang*: as usual, there was a determinate up-down rationale with the most important statues and offering sets at the end away from the door. The shrine room in a wealthy

⁵⁰By 'shrine' I mean a place where offerings were made and which was associated with certain types of being who require ritual attention.

khangchen would often contain one or more statues of Buddhist divinities (the most common of which being the Buddha Śākyamuni, Dolma and Chenresig), plus several cloth hangings depicting Buddhist divinities. Also in the room, near the main shrine, a series of arrows would be kept to be used during *yang-gugs* rites throughout the year. These rites, which will be discussed later, were intended to “nail down” the wealth (L. *yang*) of the household, keeping it within the estate (see Day 1989: 152; Brauen 1980b; Kaplanian 1981; Karmay 1975: 209-11).

Guest rooms on this floor were for visiting dignitaries and monks, rather than for everyday visitors from around the village. Usually elaborately furnished in comparison with other rooms, they would often have large windows or a balcony.

On the same floor as these, or on top of the shrine-room would occasionally be the shrine (L. *lhat'o* - “god-pile”) for the house’s *p’alha*, or household god.⁵¹ As with many areas of Ladakh and Zangskar, single *p’alha* would be shared by several household estates, constituting a corporate group called the *p’aspun* (“father’s siblings”) who would share important ritual duties concerned with birth, marriage and death (Ch. 9). Amidst this group there would usually only be one *p’alha* shrine, located in the oldest *khangchen*. *P’alha* shrines were similar in construction to local area god shrines (Fig. 5.2), constructed around the central motif of the arrow plunged into the pot of grain.

This symbolic construct appears in a variety of guises in Ladakhi ritual life, all associated with notions of fertility, and therefore requires some preliminary consideration. In a rather obvious way, the arrow was a male symbol *par excellence* and, in combination with the pot of grain, had strong connotations of both wealth and fertility (Phylactou 1989: 243; see also Levine 1988: 103): for example, the plough-beam (L. *sholda* - ‘plough-arrow’) that first cuts the soil of the “mother-field” (L. *mazhing*) during the ritual first ploughing of the year (L. *saka* - see Appendix A) was explicitly spoken of as being like an arrowhead; similarly, the V-shape made by the mountain sides as they pass down into a fertile valley was called *da*, the

⁵¹In Leh, *p’a-lha lha-t’o* were almost universally placed on top of the main shrine-room.

basis of the word for arrow.⁵² Perhaps most importantly, the arrow's strongest connotations are related to its extensive ritual use during the virilocal wedding ceremony (L. *bagston*), in which the groom's representative would use an arrow brought from the groom's house to snag the prospective bride before carrying her off to her marital household, representing the 'choice' of the husband's household god. In general, therefore, the combination of arrow and grain can be looked at as embodying a consummate act of divine fertilisation.

ii) **The central floor of the house** was given over to everyday household activity. It centred on a large kitchen (L. *t'abzang*), where the main stove (L. *t'ab*) burned almost perpetually, tended by the mother and her daughters. Here those actually living in the house would spend most of their time when not working in the fields or pastures, especially during the long and bitterly cold winter months, when they slept huddled near the warmth of the stove.

The hospitality of a household was strongly focussed within this room, and particularly on the hearth: all food progressed from the single central stove, whether to be eaten in the kitchen or to be taken upstairs (usually by the next inheritor of the household estate) to be given to guests or visiting monks. As a result, much of the role of the household as a corporate social actor was associated with the identity of the hearth-god (L. *t'ablha*), who is in turn strongly linked to the wife/mother who prepares most of the meals.⁵³

This main room would give on to one or more store rooms (L. *dzot*), containing the year's supply of ground barley, butter and dried peas which form the staple diet in Lingshed.

iii) **The ground floor** was given over to the keeping of animals at night or during the winter months, and the carrying out of any work such as the making or fixing of agricultural implements. A predilection towards using

⁵² The valley also acts as a visual image with strong sexual connotations - a term occasionally used for promiscuous women glosses as "one whose legs are like a valley".

⁵³ See also Dollfus (1989: 142), who notes that after a virilocal marriage, the newly arrived wife pays homage and performs prostrations before the household stove, in obeisance to the *t'ab-lha*.

the basement as the place for child-birth was also expressed, although the kitchen was also an option; with reference to this, Norberg-Hodge & Russell (1994) record that the after-birth was traditionally taken and placed under a stone in the basement. Also in the basement would be an undecorated *lubang* shrine to the water-spirits. It resembles the *p'alha* shrine except that it has no associated "life-wood" (Day 1989: 164).

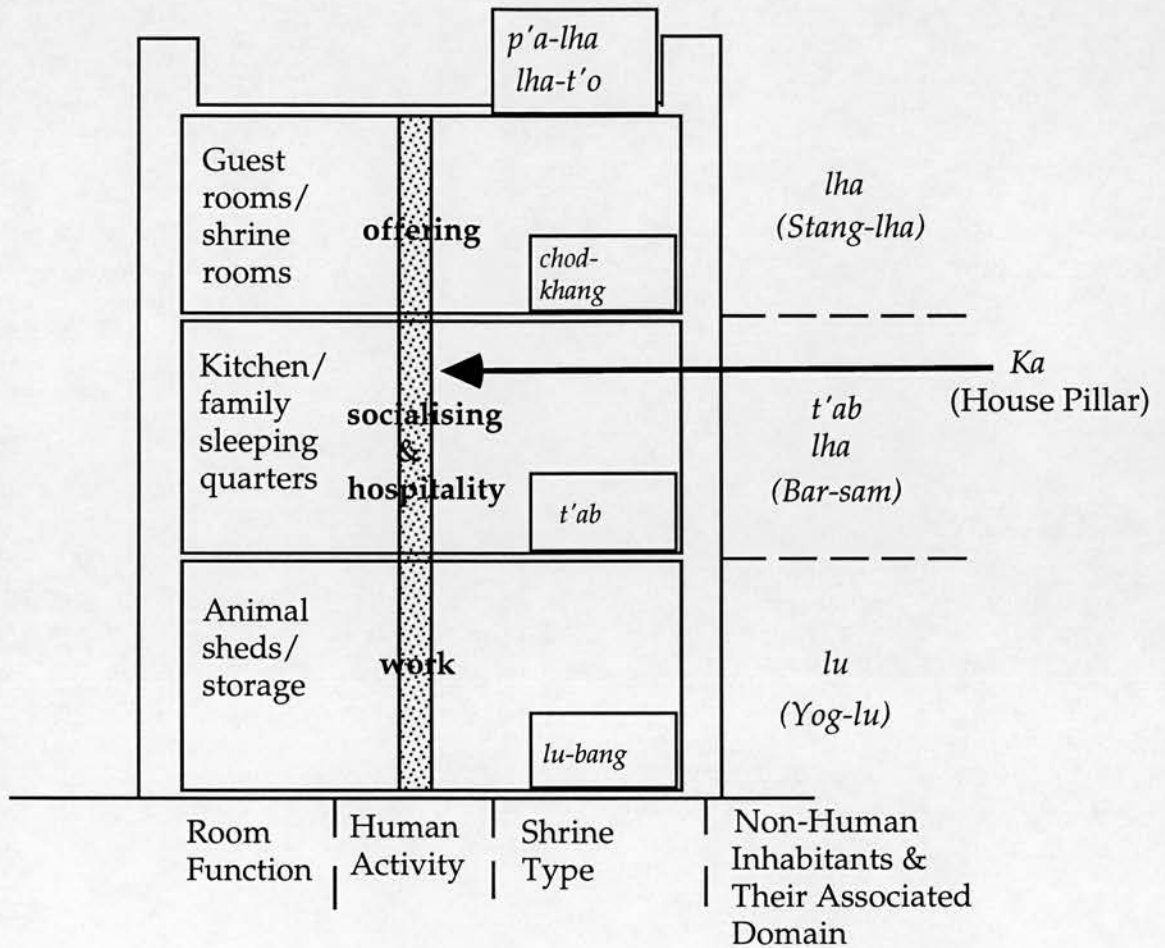


Fig. 5.4: Khangchen Levels

Thus, the house was organised according to a set of three levels in which the dominant activities of the household as a social, ritual and economic unit (production/reproduction; hospitality; offering) were spatially embodied (Fig. 5.4). The similarity between this schema and that of the three realms of *stanglha*, *barsam*, and *yoglu* found within the mythic landscape of Ladakh cannot be ignored. As Phylactou (1989), Day (1989: 162) and Dollfus (1989: 103) all note, this allocation of household layers acts

as an encapsulated microcosm of the triple-layered outside world within which it exists:

Lived space simultaneously constitutes one of the spatial divisions described, and also reproduces these hierarchies within its boundaries (Phylactou 1989: 67).

Of course, this is not an absolute distinction: many houses could not afford three floors. Rather, these contrasting activities and associations are expressed in hierarchical opposition *to one another*, inasmuch as that is possible within the format of specific houses: single-floor dwellings often emphasised horizontal constructions of such hierarchy rather than vertical ones. Furthermore, it is very common for households which may lack (for example) guest rooms, simply to build new ones in response to the arrival of an important guest, or to erect temporary accommodation on the roof.

The relationship between these layers is further embodied within a single central pillar (*L. ka*) or set of pillars, linking the three floors. Like the central wood in the shrines and statues of Buddhas, local gods, and household gods, the pillar represents a *srogshing* or "life-wood" (Day 1989: 78). Inhabited by a pillar-god (*L. kalha*), it was the focus of quotidian offerings, and the receiver of the first-cut sheaths of barley at the harvest festival (*L. shrubla* - see **Appendix A**), which would be tied around it. In a certain sense, the central pillar was the heart of the house as a symbolic entity, and houses could not be inaugurated until the central pillar was successfully in place.

5.2.4 - Household Protection

Internally, therefore, the household as a symbolic entity replicated the external division of local cosmological space as a three-tiered structure. At the same time, many of its functions as a social entity were strongly centralised, with acts of offering and hospitality emerging from the central hearth and those that tended it, which in turn arose out of the productive and reproductive functions of the house as a single unit of wealth. Certainly, the *khangchen* lacked the kind of economic and social atomism that characterised the monastery. This unity with reference to external matters was also found within the construction of the house as a single

ritual object: no matter how many people inhabited a house, it always had a single usable hearth and a single shrine room.

Similarly, in a world populated by a vast range of potentially malevolent numina, the external symbolic protection of the house was as a single entity. This protection was of enormous concern to many householders, and combined the permanent protection of the inside of the house from malevolent or polluting outside influences with a more positive process of regular and episodic purifications of the household as a whole, particularly after birth, death and the harvest. These latter forms will be dealt with in subsequent chapters: for the moment I wish to concentrate on the former of these - static forms of protection which emphasise boundary maintenance rather than purification.

The external protection of particular houses was strongly linked to its immediate physical domain. For example, on the gateposts to the main yard outside a house, one or more triangular red-painted stones were often to be found (**Photo 5.3**). Two-dimensional versions of such red triangles are also painted on the sides and corners of the house (**Photo 5.3**). Red triangles are used in a wide variety of Buddhist ritual practices, largely as 'traps' to capture malevolent forces, and thereby destroy them, and the employment of red paint is associated with the protection given to the Three Jewels of Buddhism by the *choskyong* ('Dharma Protector') divinities. In the case of the house, such protective paint would encircle the windows and doors of a dwelling, preventing entry. On the main door itself, or directly inside it, protective sigils and amulets would dangle in the face of newcomers as they entered.

Similarly, around the wall at first floor level is often painted a horizontal red line (sometimes decorated with warrior-like figures and crossed swords) intended to lead the warrior-like *tsan* spirits along the course of the line, from the front to the back of the building, instead of actually entering it.⁵⁴ Often, the wooden facsimile of a penis would be hung from the upper level of the house, designed to avert the eyes of women and thereby potentially harmful gossip about its inhabitants,

⁵⁴These strange figures were felt to haunt roads during dusk: lacking a back, their organs flap in the wind, causing illness and insanity to those that see them. They are however not regarded as very powerful, and individually are often afraid of men.

gossip (L. *mi-ka*) which could, it was felt, eventually manifest itself as spirit attack.

In case of such attack, many *khangchen* have a *sago namgo* ("earth door, sky door") mounted on the wall above the front door or near a main window. This complex construction of a painted sheep/goat skull on a mounting of straw, surrounded by a set of thread-crosses, is intended to catch unwanted spirits, which become lost in the interminable spirals of thread (see also Phylactou 1989: 67-74; Day 1989; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 371) and can later be taken out and burnt.

Certain forms of symbolic protection were ameliorative rather than simply protective. The roofs of almost all houses were adorned with a mixture of prayer flags (L. *lungsta* - "wind horses") and victory banners (L. *gyaltsen tsemo*), cotton flags with mantras and other protective symbols printed on them. Both types of flag were designed to raise the *spark'a* of the inhabitants of the house above which they were placed.

Such protections were rarely standard as such, but instead were often recommended following incidents which either demonstrated the occurrence of supernatural attack, or were felt to predispose household or its members to such attack. Thus, for example, Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994) note that the period after birth was felt by Zangskari informants to be very dangerous for children, and ritual protections such as the red line against *tsan* spirits were often advised.

Thus, alongside established Buddhist ideology about misfortune as a function of karma and ignorance, there is a much more location-specific set of understandings linked into propitiation of, and protection from a whole cosmology of local supernatural forces.

5.3.1 - Diagnosis

However, as Lichter and Epstein (1983) note, the cause of any particular misfortune is rarely felt to be entirely karmic, or entirely demonological. The manifestation of many misfortunes was regarded by villagers as extremely complex and different explanations often interpenetrate, being regarded as more or less useful ways of addressing the same problems. Certainly, any radical distinction *in principle* between demonological and karmic explanations was quickly denied by villagers and monks: the karmic repercussions of negative actions in previous lives

were often evoked as the primary cause of attacks by local spirits, which in turn might manifest themselves as illness.

The question of whether the existence of such “supernaturalism” amidst Buddhist communities is syncretic, and thus either an absolute or partial corruption of the ‘pure’ tradition of Śākyamuni, is and will probably always be an abiding preoccupation of Western observers of Buddhism (Spencer 1990b: 131-2). Nonetheless, the fact that ‘supernaturalism’ and Buddhism did not simply coexist but intertwine makes any distilling out of a ‘pure’ Buddhism a futile and arguably misguided project.

However, this complexity of diagnosis - the uncovering of the causes and conditions of misfortune - was of little intellectual concern for the people of Lingshed: like the Buddha’s allegorical man impaled upon an arrow, they had no deep wish to debate the nature of the arrow and who fired it and from what angle, beyond the point of finding out the best way to remove it. Concern with the Buddhological credentials of certain kinds of explanation was secondary to their wish to cure or prevent misfortune.

Here, they looked to a variety of practitioners in order to examine, diagnose, and suggest solutions to their difficulties. Such practitioners come under two basic classes, fulfilling subtly different roles. These are the oracles on the one hand, and the “knowledgeable ones” (L. *haspa*) on the other.

5.3.2 - Oracles

Oracles (L. *lhaba*) are human vessels for one or more divinities who possess them temporarily and, in the case of trained oracles, on demand. Oracles will have been ‘chosen’ by a divinity, usually through an initiatory illness. This is followed by years-long training and ritual purification by monks, incarnate *lamas* and other oracles, that ‘secures’ the oracle’s relationship with the divinity, assuming that is desirable. Oracles have regular “surgeries” in which an established clientele will visit them, and will also visit households of wealthy or immobile clients.

Lingshed had two main oracles, both of them laymen. The first (an army man resident in Leh) was a vessel for both Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo - a very high worldly divinity of considerable power and reputation, who acted as one of the Dharma Protectors of the monastery (3.2.1.2) - and the

main spirit's minister (L. *lonpo*).⁵⁵ The second oracle (who lived in the nearby village of Dibling) was possessed by a variety of local area gods (L. *yullha*) and spirits, in particular the local area god Shar Chyogs (Fig. 5.1).

Once possessed by a spirit or divinity, the oracle's consciousness is "pushed aside" and the oracle should theoretically remember nothing of the intermission. Both Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo and the local spirits were regarded as "worldly deities" (L. *jigtenpa'i lha*), although Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo was regarded as a *bodhisattva* of the tenth ground (L. *sa chu* - that is, one about to leave cyclic existence). The power (and wish) to violently force their presence upon oracles is associated with such "worldly gods". Buddhas and other gods that have escaped cyclic existence (L. *khorwa*) are regarded as not manifesting themselves in such dangerous and potentially polluting ways (Day 1989).

As manifest divinities, both could "see" much more than ordinary people about the reasons and causes of misfortunes and major events, and were therefore called on to pronounce on a variety of issues. Their position as *manifest* divinities also meant that they were able to make manifest the cause of illness, and treat it: Dibling's local oracle would regularly "suck out" pollution as black liquids from patients' bodies, whilst the Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo oracle (whose far higher position and greater power meant that he both should not and did not have to pollute himself with people's bodily poisons) used his ritual implements (a sword and a hook) to 'dislodge' pollution, which would later leave the body in the faeces and urine. In many cases oracles would recommend cures which would be combinations of oracular ministrations, the performance of specific rites, and a visit by the local doctor. Such human experts in specific ritual and medical traditions were referred to as *haspa*.

5.3.3 - *Khaspa*

Khaspa ("knowledgeable ones") include those traditional practitioners whose powers were acquired, not through divine selections, but personal tutelage and study. In Lingshed they included:

⁵⁵See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993).

- i) traditional medical practitioners (L. *amchi*), who were trained in the use of the *rgyu zhi* (“four tantras”) - the four main Buddhist medical texts;
- ii) astrologers (L. *onpo*), who consult a series of *rtsispa*, astrological and geomantic texts;
- iii) non-monastic tantric practitioners (L. *ngagpa*), whose power lies principally in their capacity to intone mantras;
- iv) monks; and
- v) incarnate *lamas* (L. *tulku*).

Each type of *haspa* has access to certain lineages of ritual practice and the knowledge related to them, and thus represents a resource for access to that lineage. Many practitioners hold a combination of lineages (thus, many monks and incarnates are also astrologers or doctors, for instance). These lineages were usually held to derive originally from certain Buddha figures: thus, the medical knowledge of the *amchi* derived from the Medicine Buddha (L. *Smanla*); the astrological and geomantic knowledge of the *onpo* from the Buddha Duskhor.

Haspa were differentiated from oracles largely on the grounds that being an oracle implied nothing about one’s moral status, only that of the divinity that possessed him or her; *haspa* were described as ‘knowledgeable’ in that they had themselves received the blessings of those Buddha figures and the lineage associated with them, and were thus by definition moral figures. The morality associated with the acquisition of a divinely-constituted discipline (in both senses of the word) made knowledge holders religious by definition. This was held to be particularly true on the case of monks, who received their religious lineages from powerful incarnate *lamas*, whom monks and laity often referred to as *t’amchad kkyenpa* (“omniscient”), the archetypal *haspa*.

5.4 - Cure

These various practitioners, whether *haspa* or *lhaba*, represented a complex resource available to laity for the diagnosis of specific forms of

misfortune. However, they also presented a variety of solutions to such misfortunes. We have already seen how oracles acted forcibly to remove dangerous pollution from the bodies of villagers. They also recommended particular solutions, which brought into play a complex web of 'pastoral care' formed from the interaction of monastic and non-monastic traditions of knowledge and ritual/medical capacities in the area. Within this web, the monastery did not have an exclusive claim to ritual authority, but it certainly acted as its focus and mainstay for such processes of diagnosis and cure: the monastery as an institution saw to the testing and training of many oracles, and worked in close collaboration with astrologers and medical practitioners.

The most visible signs of such collaboration we have already noted. Transcending the mundane triple-realm of the worldly gods (L. *jigtenpa'i lha*) that we looked at earlier are those divinities that have passed beyond the cycle of existence (L. *khorwa*): beings such as the Buddhas, who are collectively referred to as *jigten lasdaspa'i lha* ("gods that have surpassed, or died to, the world"). Technically, such divinities have no *direct* influence on human affairs (Day 1989), acting instead as objects of instruction and sources of blessing to those that seek release from the cycle of suffering. Nonetheless, village relations with the volatile cohorts of local and worldly numina were mediated principally through the symbolic intervention of these very supra-worldly Buddhist figures. In particular, the variety of Buddhist monuments to be found in Lingshed were not simply there to remind the villagers of their Buddhist faith, but performed a variety of apotropaic functions. Such monuments included:

a) *chorten* (Skt. *stupa*), Buddhist shrines representing the mind (L. *t'ugs*) and teachings (L. *chos*) of the Buddha, stood at the entrance-ways to the village, monastery, and more important houses, protecting them from non-Buddhist enemies and realigning certain negative geomantic influences. Following very heavy falls of snow that led to a series of deaths in the winter of 1994, villagers began plans to build a *chorten* at the monastery to ward off bad influences.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Stutchbury (1994) records the building of *chorten* in nearby Spiti to ward off avalanches.

b) *rigsum-gombo* ("the three types of protector"), triple-*chorten*, representing the respective wisdom, compassion, and power of རྒྱུ་གུ་འཇམ་མགས་པོ་འཇམ་མགས་པོ་ the *bodhisattvas* Jampal Yang, Chenresig and Chyagna Dorje, similarly protected places from definable malign geomantic influences, such as when a far mountain "overlooks" a nearby mountain range.

c) *mani-walls*, crested by stones engraved with *mantra*, would often connect several *chorten* together. As with *chorten* and *rigsum-gombo*, these were objects of reverence to be passed by to the left, something which often made nearby paths into tacit 'one-way streets' for villagers.

Such monuments were placed with extreme care at places pre-determined by the lie of the land and the astrological and geomantic calculations of astrologers and monks, in consultation with other *khaspas* and oracles. The precision of such calculations allowed for the full efficacy of the ceremonies performed by the true ritual practitioners of the area - the monks.

The monastery itself performed a variety of rites on behalf of laity, on either an occasional or instituted basis, which came under five basic types:

i) *Skangsol*: rites to the *choskyong*, the Protectors of the Buddhist Doctrine.

ii) *Gyazhi* and *cha-sum*: - general exorcistic rites based around the creation of a *lud*, or 'ransom offering'.

iii) *Sangsol*: offering rites to divinities, especially local and household gods.

iv) *Trus*: cleansing rites, often performed after birth, death, and other causes of household pollution.

v) *Chosil*: the recitation of scriptures.

All such rites, either explicitly or implicitly, involved the ritual evocation of divine forces within the world, whose purified and effective agency is used to perform certain functions. This evocation occurs either through enticement, coercion or direct control. It is these monastic rites (or

at least a selection of them), and the understandings that inform and surround them, that I would wish to examine in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 6:

Tantric Buddhahood and the Divine Feast

**Photo 6.1: Yamāntaka, tutelary Buddha of Kumbum monastery.
Photo by A. Anderson, courtesy of Tibet Image Bank.**



Overleaf:

Photo 6.2: Monks constructing mandala.

Photo 6.3: Monk wearing rigs-linga crown during funeral empowerment.



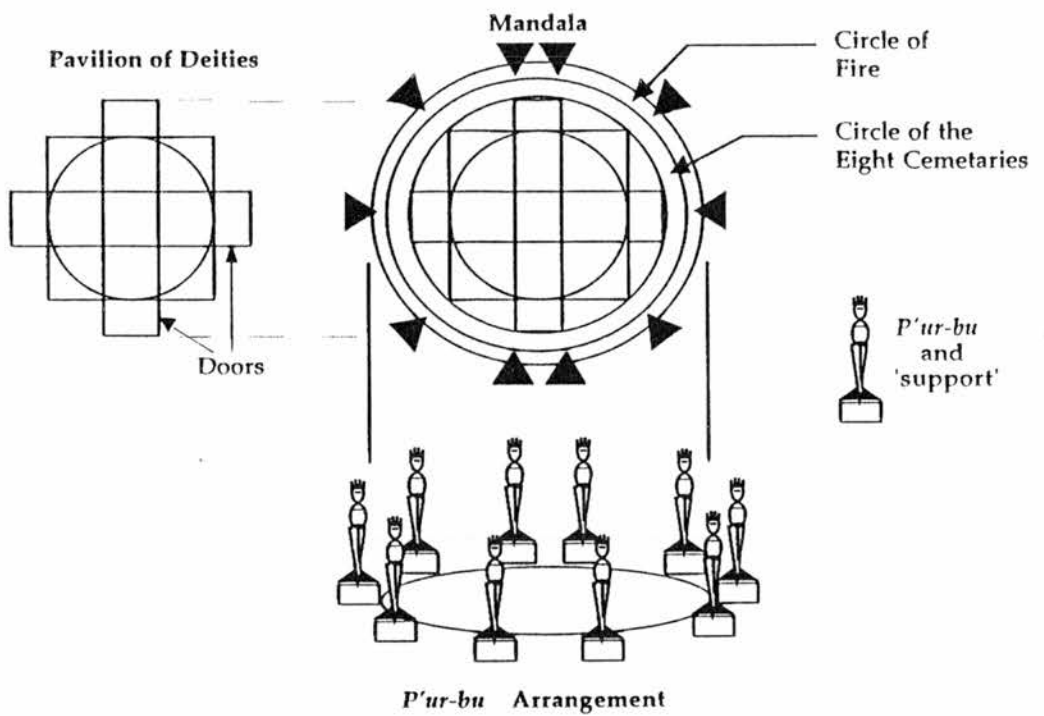


Fig. 6.1 (above): Arrangement of *p'urbu* (ritual daggers) around mandala.
 Photo 6.4 (below): Preliminary offerings prior to mandala construction.

Overleaf:

Photo 6.5 (left): Fully completed Yamāntaka mandala

Photo 6.6 (right): Dagon Rinpoche performing *Zhin-Sreg* Fire offering



Overleaf:

Photo 6.7 (left): *Lama Chodpa* offering *Ts'ogs*.

Photo 6.8 (right): *Ts'ogs* at closing of *Smonlam Chenmo* (see Fig. 6.2).



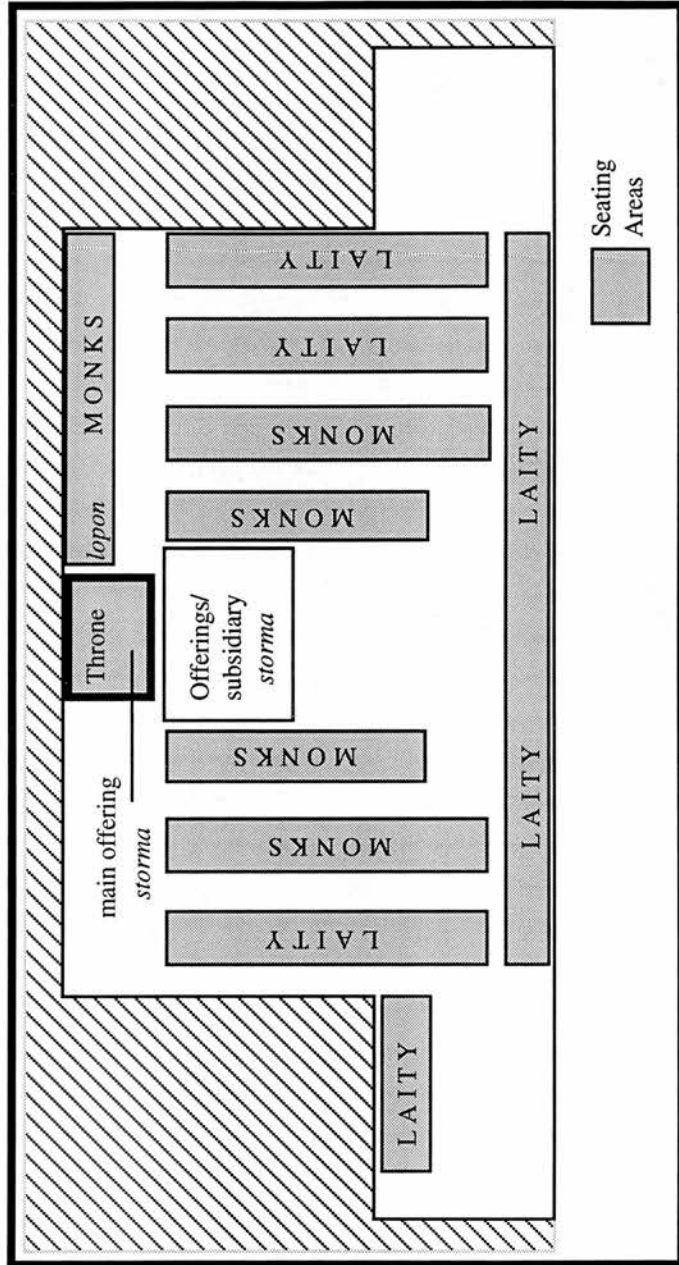


Fig. 6.2: Seating for Ts'ogs in Main Courtyard of Kumbum.

6.1 - Introduction: Placing Tantra

Before beginning a detailed ethnographic description of some of the prominent features of ritual life in Lingshed, some considerable space must be given over to introduce the Buddhological context within which they take place. More particularly, attention must be paid to the position that Buddhahood holds within framework of Gelukpa tantric ritual, since it is markedly different from the role attributed to it in more familiar Theravadin material.

Traditional representations of Buddhism's role as a soteriological system concentrate on a gradual training in the "perfections" (giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom), in which the Buddhist practitioner gradually strives through a multiplicity of lifetimes to gain mastery of his understanding of emptiness or selflessness, and the moral attributes associated with this understanding. In Tibetan Buddhism, this process of spiritual transformation is termed the "path" (L. *lam*). Perfecting these, the practitioner attains enlightenment - the "fruit" (L. *drey*) of the path - and is released from the wheel of suffering that is *saṃsāra*, never more to be reborn.

In this model, the relationship between practitioner and Buddhahood becomes mapped out primarily in temporal terms. Spiro (1970: 12) famously divided the religious aspirations of Theravadin Buddhists in Burma into three forms (which he allocated to differing forms of religious practice):

- i) *apotropaic Buddhism*, concerned with a person's "worldly welfare" in *this* life;
- ii) *kammatic Buddhism*, associated with improved future rebirths through the accumulation of karmic merit; and
- iii) *nibbanic Buddhism*, concerned with final release from the endless rebirths of *saṃsāra*, usually conceived of as being a vast number of lifetimes in the future.

Even in Theravadin terms, Spiro's analysis is problematic, and he has been taken to task by a variety of anthropologists, most particularly

Tambiah (1970; 1984). Nonetheless, it serves well to demonstrate the abiding conundrum associated with the ideal of Buddhahood: sociologically, how should analysts deal with ^{the} vast spans of time normally associated with the attainment of Buddhahood for individual Buddhists, when we most commonly think of 'popular' religious practice as being aimed at the satisfaction of immediate goals? Conversely, how do ordinary Buddhists think about, much less actively relate to, a spiritual state which is by definition so vastly beyond their reach and comprehension (Welbon 1968; Collins 1992)? Another Theravada scholar, Richard Gombrich, represented this problem in terms of the Buddha's involvement in the world: if Sakyamuni entered *nirvāṇa* - was "snuffed out" with reference to all worldly concerns - some 2500 years ago, then how can he be an appropriate or meaningful object of propitiation now? Gombrich concluded that, although *cognitively* this was the case, many Buddhists - through the cult of relics and so forth - treated Sakyamuni as effectively divine and present, in *emotional* terms (Gombrich 1971: 4-5).

These issues have a different resolution in Mahāyāna Buddhism, which became the dominant context of Buddhist practice in Tibetan areas. The Mahāyāna ideal of the *bodhisattva*, the spiritual hero who struggles for enlightenment as a means not of departing from the world of suffering beings, but of aiding them, transforms both the notion of Buddhahood itself, and the manner in which it was to be attained. Primarily, in the Tibetan Buddhist context, it placed a wedge between the release from suffering (L. *t'arpa*) on the one hand, and the attainment of actual Buddhahood (L. *changchub*) on the other, with only the latter representing the perfection of the ability to aid all suffering beings.⁵⁷ Samuel (1993a: 25-26) sees this distinction as salient to the understanding of Tibetan Buddhist spiritual goals, replacing Spiro's *nibbanic Buddhism* with the more flexible *Bodhi Orientation*, which encompasses both the desire for *nirvāṇa* and Buddhahood, but emphasises its altruistic motivation. Nonetheless, although the presentation of motivation, and hence the ideal goal of Buddhist practice, has shifted subtly but crucially in the move from Theravadin to Mahāyāna Buddhism, the temporal dialectic of a gradual progression towards Buddhahood over potentially vast tracts of time remains the same, compromised, in Samuel's new terms, by subsidiary

⁵⁷By comparison, see Carrithers (1983: 271 n.1).

preoccupations with more immediate *Karma* and *Pragmatic* orientations (Samuel 1993a: 31).

It is arguable however to what extent Samuel's recasting of the Buddhist path in the Tibetan context is a comprehensive one. Modelled as it is around the assumption of a progressive movement towards a personal Buddhahood whose presence is a *future* possibility rather than a present fact, Samuel's typology does not account for some of the dominant modes by which the Mahayana philosophy of the *realisation* of Buddhahood is transferred into ritual practice, most particularly in the use of tantric methods.

Often referred to as the Vajrayāna or "Diamond Vehicle" (L. *dorje t'egpa*) of Buddhism, tantric practice involves the use of divine powers and, in certain cases, sexual practices as vehicles for spiritual progress. Having previously been a characteristic feature of popular Indian Hinduism (inasmuch as that category makes sense), tantric practices began to enter mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism several centuries prior to the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the seventh century. As a result, the Vajrayāna constituted a large section of the mainstream Buddhist doctrine and methods that first made a foothold in Tibetan areas in the seventh to the eleventh centuries. Subsequently, the various orders and traditions of Tibetan Buddhism each fashioned a particular synthesis between more conventional Buddhist forms (including monasticism) and the use of tantra.

Within the Gelukpa order, this integration took the form of a synthesis between the gradual and progressive cultivation of ethical and meditative perfections, and the generation of tantric ritual powers, in which training in the perfections acted as an essential preliminary to tantric training.⁵⁸

Although a strict definition of tantra is notoriously difficult, Sanderson provides a useful starting point. He describes tantra as

a form of religious practice which is distinguishable from the rest of Buddhism principally by its ritual character, only secondarily by soteriological doctrine, and hardly at all by specific theories of ultimate reality. The basic character of this

⁵⁸These perfections are classed as: giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom (Das 1991).

Tantric ritual is that it entails the evocation and worship of deities...by means of mantras of which the visualised forms of the deities are transformations.(Sanderson 1991)

Sanderson's "theories of ultimate reality" refer almost universally to the Mahāyāna doctrines of 'emptiness' (L. *stongpanyid*), a variant of the more familiar doctrine of selflessness (see Collins 1982). In the Gelukpa context (which, for the sake of convenience I will stick to for the rest of this discussion), this refers to the argument that phenomena of all kinds (both selves and external objects and persons) are 'empty' of inherent existence: they exist, but not in and of themselves.⁵⁹ In Gelukpa doctrinal literature, the emptiness of a conventional phenomenon (such as a chair) is regarded as an "ultimate truth" (L. *dondam denpa*), in comparison with the "conventional truth" (L. *kundzod denpa*) of that phenomena's attribution as "a chair" (Thurman 1989; Hopkins 1983; Klein 1986: 64). Since "emptiness" is regarded as the true nature (or lack of nature) of all conventional phenomena, but at the same time conventional phenomena are asserted as being the *basis* of any understanding of emptiness, then the two are integrally intertwined.⁶⁰ For Mahāyāna Buddhism, the realms of *samsāra* (cyclic existence) and *nirvāṇa* (its cessation) - originally regarded as two different planes of existence - are no longer seen as being distinct as objective realities (Snellgrove 1957: 27-37; 1987: 66-67).

This rather arcane point has important ritual ramifications. If *nirvāṇa* and *samsāra* are indistinguishable in objective terms, then the reality of a Buddha is not one that is necessarily "snuffed out" at enlightenment, removed forever from the world of ordinary beings. Therefore, Buddhas in the Mahāyāna context can respond (within certain limits) to the entreaties of men.

⁵⁹Gelukpa doctrinal material is generally a product of the Prasāṅgika Mādhyamika school of Buddhist philosophy. Other orders differ in their presentation of emptiness.

⁶⁰Lama Daboom Tulku, a prominent Gelukpa incarnate, explained this point thus:

We may say that a cup is empty, but this does not mean that there is no cup. Although the truth about the cup is that it is empty, it does not make sense to talk about the emptiness without the cup. (Lecture - 28/8/96, Edinburgh)

6.2 - Vajrayāna and The Paradox of Buddhahood

The possibility of the ritual *presence* of Buddhahood in the here and now has obvious implications for the study of the veneration of Buddhas as a popular practice in the Mahāyāna. But even for those deeply involved in the pursuit of enlightenment, the reality of Buddhahood remains elusive in the kind of goal-oriented terms suggested by Samuel's "orientations". As Thubten Jigme Norbu, a Gelukpa incarnate, points out:

As monks, our efforts are accompanied by...material hardships and physical discomfort, but by a steady and sure increase in the well-being of our mind and spirit which renders our physical being insignificant to the point where physical discomfort no longer exists, where we are in reach of our goal: Sanggye Sa (Nirvana). Yet it is a goal that we cannot desire in itself, for in itself it is the annihilation of desire, the cessation of suffering, which comes through desire. Our minds, then, are not so much set on the goal as on the path. (Norbu and Turnbull, *Tibet*, quoted in Carrithers (1983:269)).

This does not mean that Buddhahood as a future goal is *not* meaningful to Tibetan Buddhists. Indeed, Mahāyāna perspectives on spiritual striving are relatively clear: through training in the cognition of emptiness, the practitioner gradually develops the "wisdom" (L. *yeshes*) of a Buddha; through training in the ethical perfections, they develop the "form" (L. *zugs*) of a Buddha. Both of these are the "fruit" of the "path".

However, Vajrayāna as a method turns the conventional logic of temporal striving on its head: here, the "fruit" of conventional spiritual practice becomes the central "path" of tantric practice (Tucci 1980: 52). Since the ultimate nature of reality (emptiness) is regarded as being the same in both tantric and conventional meditation, and direct cognition of the emptiness of all phenomena is regarded as the wisdom of Buddha, then the emptiness cognized by the ordinary practitioner must logically be the same as that cognized by a Buddha. Since this cognition is the basis of both the form and wisdom of a Buddha, the tantric practitioner uses his meditation on emptiness as the basis for "generating" (L. *skyedpa*) the "form body" (L. *zugs sku*) of a Buddha as a visualised object of meditation (see Dalai Lama and Hopkins 1985: 24-30). Specifically, the practitioner meditates upon him or herself having the form and wisdom of a full

Buddha, thus accumulating spiritual merit (L. *sonam*) at a much faster rate. In this manner, the conceptual reality of Buddhahood becomes immediately present, not as a potential which will be realised, but as one which *is* being realised.

Thus, the conventional 'goal' of Buddhist striving is reassessed through the immediate possibility of Buddhahood within the ritual and meditative environment. As we will see in the next two chapters, this radically alters the sociology of Buddhist ritual, centring it on a Buddha figure who, in Gombrich's dichotomy at least, unifies the emotional need for an enlightened presence as well as a cognitive understanding of a Buddha's transcendence.

6.3 - *Yidam: The Tutelary Deity*

The visualised "generation" of the form body of a Buddha as the basis of tantric meditative practice is called "deity yoga" (L. *lha'i naljor*). Such deity yoga takes a variety of forms: in preliminary training, the deity is visualised as physically separate from the practitioner (L. *dunskyed* - "generation [of the deity] in front"); later the practitioner visualises themselves as actually *being* the deity (L. *dagskyed* - "generation of self [as the deity]").

Buddhas visualised in deity yoga are called *yidam*, or tutelary deities. *Yidam* are the highest form of deity in Tantric Buddhism, and particular *yidam* represent the principal focus of particular cycles of tantric rites. Although referred to as *lha* (gods), this should not be confused with the meaning found in Judeo-Christian cosmology, since the connection between practitioner and *yidam* is much more explicitly implied. The term *yidam* literally means 'that which binds of the mind', and Guenther has referred to it as "an overarching unity theme", a symbolic structure which organises a myriad of drives, themes, goals, motivations into "one main direction" (Guenther 1971: 28, and Decler 1978: 117).

This active relationship between practitioner and visualised divinity cannot be ignored even in a more sociological analysis. In Highest Yoga Tantra (L. *lanamed naljor*) practices - such as those commonly used in Kumbum - evocation of the *yidam* is through the meditative act of *dagskyed*,

or "generation of self [as divinity]"⁶¹ Here, the practitioner meditates upon emptiness, out of which first the mantra and then the form of the tutelary deity are visualised as arising (L. *jungwa*), as a manifestation of that emptiness. The *yidam* and the practitioner's 'wisdom' (L. *shesrabs* - the capacity to understand emptiness) are seen as being identical. This visualised tutelary deity is then visualised as summoning into itself the actual wisdom (L. *yeshes*) of the tutelary deity, and Buddhas in general. These two understandings of emptiness - the practitioner's and the evoked Buddhas', are seen as identical, meshing "like water poured into water" (see also Stablein 1976). In many tantric visualisations, the practitioner as divinity then receives consecration from the Buddhas (see below). This is followed by repetition of the mantra of the deity, which both monks and laity described as being its essence or "summation" (L. *sduspa*). From this, the practitioner is empowered to view events surrounding him as being aspects of the tutelary deity (see also Jackson, Sopa and Newman 1985: 23; Samuel 1993a: 233-236).

Thus, rather than meditation on selflessness being the simple passive cognition of a certain state of affairs, the tutelary deity implies the active qualities that the understanding of emptiness has in rearranging the practitioner's understanding of him or herself, and the world. By virtue of 'adopting', or being 'empowered' by, the moral attributes of Buddhas, the time taken *actually* to attain Buddhahood is greatly reduced in comparison to that of a simple practitioner of the perfections.

The status of such divine transformation is far from clear-cut. Aziz, for example, describing what appears from her description to be a *skangsol* rite, refers to the *dagskyed* stage of divine invocation as a form of "shamanic possession" (Aziz 1976: 356). This equation of meditative transformation and divine possession has been rejected outright by certain Buddhologists (Cantwell, pers. comm.) and certainly the monastic authorities firmly contrasted this kind of meditative visualisation with the more obviously shamanic possession of oracles described earlier (5.4.1).

⁶¹The Gelukpa order, along with most of the other orders of Tibetan Buddhism, classes tantra into four types: *ja* or "action" tantra; *shod* or "performance" tantra; *naljor* or "yoga" tantra; and *lanamed naljor* or "highest yoga" tantra. The last of these generally are the most complex and elaborate.

The latter distinction was felt to be one of type: Buddhas do not possess, almost by definition (see Mills 1996). Analytically, the two are also distinct in that the consciousness of the practitioner is not replaced by the tutelary deity, but transformed in terms of it, as he or she more and more perfectly manifests the ethical and meditative presence of a Buddha. Far more than a simple external deity which is supplicated, the *yidam* is explicitly represented as the enlightened aspect of the practitioner's mind in a particular ritual form (Snellgrove 1987: 131; Samuel 1993a: 247-250). Nonetheless, the degree to which both *dagskyed* and oracular possession represent the manifestation of divine properties in the world has led more cautious commentators (Samuel 1993a, b) to term such activities as broadly shamanic.

Whether such practices are shamanic or not, the role of central and peripheral divinity in Tibetan Buddhism should be strictly qualified. Unlike Judeo-Christian religions, divinity is not seen as ultimate to the object of spiritual practice: rather, the adoption of tutelary deities, or any other ritual practice was described by monks as simply a "means" (L. *t'abs*) to attaining "wisdom" (L. *shesrabs*), defined as the knowledge of the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena. Indeed, the assumption of an enlightened spiritual identity in *dagskyed*, and the consequent visualisation of everyday events as being aspects of that divinity, is not seen as being "true" in the normal sense of religious doctrine: rather, it is a means of overcoming the "ordinary" appearances of the world that inhibit spiritual powers.⁶² This point may seem obscure, but it is one that is regularly stressed by teachers giving initiations into tantric practice (*wang* - see below). Its importance lies in the fact that it implies an extremely flexible approach to what Beyer referred to as "public non-reality" (Beyer 1973): that the tantric "transformation" of personal identity and lived experience into divine form, is not, in its specifics, an essential part of Buddhist doctrine: individual tantric practitioners can have, simultaneously, a variety of tutelary deities, and the ability to visualise the world as an aspect of one tutelary deity does not obscure the possibility of subsequently visualising it as an aspect of another.⁶³ The assumption of tutelary deities is not exclusive: being by definition of Buddha status, and

⁶²See Jackson (1993: Part 1).

⁶³See Snellgrove (1987: 202).

representing the indivisible and enlightened cognition of emptiness, the *yidam*'s essential nature is seen as being identical with all other Buddhas and *yidam*. The assumption by single practitioners of several *yidam*, each as an 'ultimate' divinity, seems to present no contradiction since each is perceived as a different "face" (L. *zhal*) or aspect of the essentially identical and indefinable quality of ultimate Buddhahood.⁶⁴

Although all tutelary deities are seen as *in essence* identical, different tutelary deities represent different emphases in spiritual and meditative training. A practitioner's use of a particular *yidam*, and the ritual practices associated with it, is usually decided not by a practitioner, but by his *lama*, after some consultation and occasionally the use of divination. The purpose of divination in such cases is often to uncover hidden karmic connections (L. *rtendrel*) between practitioner and tantric deity (see for example Tucci 1980: 169).

Ideally, the proposed tutelary deity will then "fit" the spiritual propensities of that practitioner, and certain monks will have received empowerments and training in the ritual cycles concerned with particular *yidam*, becoming experts in those practices.⁶⁵

Yidam therefore have both a central and extremely mutable position within Buddhist practice. Rather than simply being an object of belief, they are more akin to a personified ritual function, actively and consciously assumed by the practitioner for particular purposes. A specific *yidam* is the cornerstone of a whole cycle of rites associated with that deity: individual practitioners can become adept in performing several such cycles during the course of a single lifetime, thus becoming ritually associated (or 'empowered' - *wang*) with several different *yidam*. The "self-generation" of the *yidam* by officiating monks places the divinity's powers at the disposal of that monk and by extension, at the disposal of the monastery and its lay supporters.

⁶⁴Dr. Tsering Norbu, interview, January 1995.

⁶⁵Certain *yidam*, most notably Chenresig, the patron deity of Tibet, are regarded as suitable for all, and I occasionally heard monks referring to the Buddha Śākyamuni as "the first *yidam*".

6.4 - Tantric Practice amongst the Gelukpa

If institutionalised tantric ritual is one of the most distinctive features of Tibetan Buddhism in general, we must not forget that the growth of Buddhism in Tibet involved the practice of both tantra (L. *rgyud*) and the perfections (L. *p'archin*). Within the Gelukpa order, these two modes of ritual and religious practice and training are usually found in conjunction, unified within the system of *lam rim* ("stages of the path"). This synthesis of tantra and sūtra practices is characteristic of many Tibetan Buddhist traditions, although the Gelukpa synthesis that arose very explicitly out of the works of its founder, Tsongkhapa, is perhaps the most self-consciously formulated (Tsongkapa 1977; 1981; Thurman 1982; 1985; 1989). Within the Gelukpa, tantric practice was circumscribed by a context of sūtra practices: trainings in the perfections, teachings in Buddhist philosophy and ethics, and the various traditions of *lozhong*, ("mind training"), a series of ethical meditations and teachings. Above and beyond the central criteria of observing the monastic rule, and going for 'refuge' (L. *skyaps*) to the Three Jewels of Buddhism, all of these trainings concentrated on ensuring that monks had a provisional knowledge of the various arguments concerning emptiness, and a firm grasp of the notion of *changchub-kyi-sems* ("the mind of enlightenment") the altruistic wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings .

6.5 - The Structure of Tantric Ritual

These non-tantric trainings, along with the renunciation of samsaric pleasures, Samuel identifies as the "clerical" aspects of Buddhist practice (Samuel 1993a: 16-18). Such preliminary practices were deemed essential if the powers evoked within tantric practice were not to be misused. Geshe Changchub's career highlights this caution: his entry into rGyud Stod tantric college occurred after twenty years of philosophical study in Gomang College. This does not mean he had *no* tantric training prior to this, but that its perfection was seen as subsequent to clerical training. In Kumbum however, where tantric practice was the mainstay of those practices performed on behalf of the monastery, monks received major tantric empowerments as early as their mid-teens.

If the clerical context to tantric practices determines the individual spiritual and ritual histories of Gelukpa monks, the same is also true of the ritual practices themselves. Deity yoga - the heart of tantric practice - was surrounded by a series of preliminary and closing prayers and offerings, which situate it within a broader clerical context (Beyer 1973: 30-33; Samuel 1993a: 233-235; Tucci 1980: 149). Thus, standard preliminaries included:

- i) *Chodpa*: initial preparation of offerings and purification of the ritual space;
- ii) *Skyaps la dro*: recitation of the formula of refuge in the Three Jewels;
- iii) *Sems skyed*: generation of the mind of enlightenment, and recitation of the vow to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings;
- iv) *Chyag pulches*: prostration and homage to the Three Jewels;
- v) *Chodpa*: giving of offerings (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993; Tucci 1980: 116; Beyer 1973);
- vi) Confession;
- vii) Prayers requesting blessings for the attainment of spiritual accomplishments according to the *lam rim* system.

and were followed by:

- viii) Rejoicing in accumulated merit (L. *sonam*);
- ix) Requesting the Buddhas to preach the Doctrine for the sake of sentient beings;
- x) *Sngowa*: dedication of merit.

In tantric rites, these stages (or variants of them) are fitted around bodies of tantric visualisation. Certain sections may be reiterated within other sections, repeated several times, or given greater emphasis in order

to stress the particular purposes of the officiant or sponsor. Thus, the tantric evocation of a tutelary deity between stages (vii) and (viii) usually involves a further “seven-limbed prayer” to that deity - including once again prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, requesting Buddhas not to depart, and dedication.

The texts from which tantric rites were recited usually had two to three versions of varying lengths, which could be used on different occasions. Discussing this, Kumbum’s *u-chung* (trainee Master of Ceremonies) insisted that, despite the reduced elaboration of shorter texts, the basic internal structure remained unchanged. Sharpa Tulku, a prominent Gelukpa incarnate and commentator, commenting on the English translation of a concise *sadhana* (the Sanskrit term for the ritual texts to deity yoga) to Yamāntaka:

The short sadhanas are intended for the use of advanced yogis as a guide for their meditation, much as an experienced speaker would use only brief notes as a reminder, and the elaborate sadhanas are meant for beginners who cannot meditate properly without them. (Sharpa Tulku and Guard 1990: preface).

In Lingshed, longer rites were requested or expected on occasions on which it was of some importance that they were performed correctly and without omission.

On a wider scale, several individual ritual or meditation practices were often combined into sets over several days or weeks (especially during lengthy prayer festivals and retreats) with opening and dedication prayers performed at the beginning and end encompassing them all. Within the Gelukpa order, the religious new year is marked by a two-week prayer festival (*Smonlam Chenmo* - **Appendix A**) that involves introductory prayers for the entire year.

6.6 - Empowerment and the Lama

This systematised approach to ritual practice - where preliminary ritual forms progressively frame and contextualise core practices, and where the structure of rites were specifically tailored to particular requirements - was combined with a strictly regimented series of

permissions and trainings that had to be received in a particular order. In general the right to replicate all religious practices depended on having received them from a qualified source. This was particularly true of the visualised assumption of divine powers or enlightened Buddhahood involved in tantric meditations. Such practices were seen to be based on a spiritual and ritual inheritance (L. *rgyud*) with which they are “empowered” (L. *wangpo tangches*) through the direct permission and training of previous legitimate holders of that particular tantric tradition. These holders were referred to as the *tsawa'i lama* (“root lama”) of new initiates.

Restrictions on the transmission of tantric material were designed to ensure the maintenance of a direct lineage of empowerments leading back to the Buddha Śākyamuni's mythical tantric counterpart, Dorje Chang (Cozort 1986: 21), or some other Buddha figure. This emphasis on lineage is far from incidental to indigenous understandings of tantra: the Ladakhi/Tibetan term for tantra, *rgyud*, also refers to family lineages in a broad sense (see also Clarke 1980).

Tibetan religious literature is replete with stories and references to the dynamics of this relationship, especially as part of the biographies (L. *namt'ar*) of important religious figures, who have had to undergo enormous trials to present offerings to their spiritual guides in order that they might receive empowerments.⁶⁶ The idea of the enormous devotion that students should show towards their *lama*, and the closeness of the bond that links the two, is one that has a karmic element, in that relationships between teachers and their closest disciples are meant to span the gap between lives, bringing the two together again in life after life. However, the relationship is also seen, especially by monks, in a manner that is more mundane, but no less powerfully charged: it is often spoken of as being like the relationship between father and son, in which teachings are passed down from teacher to student.

Students receiving empowerment are exhorted to have complete faith (L. *dadpa*) in their *lama*, and to view him as a Buddha if they are to attain a complete understanding of his teachings. Within tantra the *lama* (in the sense of spiritual preceptor) thus attains a position of unrivalled

⁶⁶The most well-known of these are those stories relating to the apprenticeships of Milarepa, Marpa and Naropa, preceptors of the Kagyudpa School.

personal and cosmological pre-eminence that places him or her above both gods and Buddhas: "the gods are below the *lama*" (L. *lha lama yogga*) is a commonly stated representation of the situation by both monks and laity. Similarly, the student is at pains to treat the *lama* with utmost respect (L. *guspa*).

The pre-eminent divinity of the spiritual preceptor is encapsulated in the standard injunction that students receiving empowerment from a *lama* visualise him as being the tutelary deity of the empowerment. This visualisation of the *lama* as tutelary deity is highly context-specific. Since the nature of the tutelary deity is meant to be a function of the practitioner's understanding of emptiness, this status should not be viewed simply as a simple statement of belief. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, for example, whilst giving Chenresig empowerments at Tibetan New Year in Dharamsala in 1995, stressed that whilst he was not *really* Chenresig - since neither *yidam* nor *lama* inherently exist - he should be visualised as such for the purposes of the empowerment. Indeed, from a ritual perspective, the *lama's* pre-eminent cosmological status is a function of his being the 'source' of the student's tutelary Buddha, and by extension may well be the 'source' of several other tutelary Buddhas. Very explicitly then, the *lama* is visualised as the *yidam* because it is beneficial (L. *p'antoks*) to do so, rather than because it is actually true (see also Willis 1995: 17).

6.7 - Tantric Ritual in Kumbum

In the ecclesiastical structure of Tibetan Buddhism, the emphasis on precedent is the basis of all ritual action without exception. Although particular practitioners (both lay and monastic) maintain relations with particular tutelary deities, and often specialise in certain areas of tantric ritual as a consequence, the institutional demands of monasticism mean that the practices surrounding certain *yidam* become obligatory. Within the Gelukpa order, three principal *yidam* are regularly used in Highest Yoga Tantra training - the Buddhas Duskhor, Sangdus and Yamāntaka - the principal one of which is Yamāntaka, a wrathful form of the *bodhisattva* Jampal Yang. Yamāntaka acted as the institutional *yidam* of Kumbum, in the form of Dorje Jigjet (Skt. *vajrabhairava* - "Adamantine Fearful One" - **Photo 6.1**), and it is to the tantric ritual forms associated with them, and

particularly to the initiating empowerment into the deity yoga of Yamāntaka that I will now turn.⁶⁷

6.8 - Sand Mandala Empowerments

The transmission of empowerments from *lama* to student is used to consecrate the novice with the 'seeds' of the physical, verbal and mental attributes of the *yidam*, thus transforming the novice into a qualified tantric yogin. Ritually adopting the identity of the divine yogin, the novice is thenceforth entitled to 'generate' the *yidam* in meditation, and wear the *rigs-nga*, the ceremonial head-dress representing the five types of Buddha wisdom (Photo 6.3).

Empowerment takes place chiefly through 'empowering' the student with a mandala (L. *kyil-khor*), a stylised assembly of divinities centred on the *yidam*, who is usually depicted in sexual union with a divine consort. Collectively, the mandala represents the Body (L. *sku*), Speech and Mind of the tutelary deity. Such mandalas are objects of meditation but are also physically represented on a painted canvas or, more usually, constructed out of coloured sand (L. *rdul*) built afresh by specially trained monks at the monastery, under the guidance of a trained tantric initiator.

There has been a tendency for some analysts (Paul 1976; Moacanin 1988: 69-71) to equate the mandala and the religious forms associated with it with some kind of Jungian archetype, a "model of the psyche" writ large. Herein, mandalas become, as Paul argues of Sherpa temples, "an objectification of the subjective internal experience of the Sherpa experiencing his religion" (Paul 1976: 133). In a realm where complex symbolic structures are so closely married to dense literary and philosophical traditions, this kind of intellectualist stance is at first sight appealing. The assertion that such "symbolic statements" carry an available "message" (ibid.), that their principal reality lies in what they tell us and what they tell Tibetan Buddhists, seems an obvious way of conceptualising this marriage. It is an equation which fits nicely with the view of Buddhist monks as "the argonauts of inner space", detached in our

⁶⁷Most Buddhist deities to have a variety of forms, each having a different title and ritual function.

peculiarly Cartesian understanding from affairs of practical, physical import. But this kind of picture - emphasising the ritual presentation of a certain psycho-cosmic understanding, a certain statement of set and visually formalised beliefs - neglects the manner in which the mandala as a consecration object is a focus not simply of sublime reflection by monks, but of practical ritual power. Although it is impossible within this thesis fully to describe or do justice to this most complicated and technically sophisticated of ritual forms, I would like, for present purposes, to draw attention to some of the broader features of the rite performed at Kumbum that highlight this function.⁶⁸

Although having a reasonably uniform structure, sand mandalas vary extensively in their details, according to the identity of the tutelary deity and the exact provenance of the specific tantric tradition. The Yamāntaka sand mandala empowerment I observed being performed at Kumbum in the Summer of 1994 was that of the *Chug-Sum-Jigjet*, “the Thirteen Fearful Ones”.⁶⁹ Although Yamāntaka has pre-eminent status within the monastery, the performance of other tantric empowerments and other sand mandalas had occurred in previous years. Larger Gelukpa monasteries in Ladakh would perform several sand mandala rites every year, with different tutelary deities on each occasion. Production of mandalas is extremely labour intensive, and as a comparatively small monastery, Kumbum only performed one a year. Lingshed does not have planned teaching facilities of its own, and training for this was provided by a visiting tantric *lama* from nearby Karsha monastery. Technically proficient in tantric rites, the visiting teacher was not in this case an incarnate *lama*, a distinction which was to prove crucial later.

The Yamāntaka mandala observed was, like many others, a stylised representation of the *yidam*'s four-door divine pavilion (L. *p'otang*), surrounded by representations of the eight cemeteries and blazing fire (**Fig. 6.1**). Empowerment should not be seen as centred simply on Yamāntaka

⁶⁸ A broad literature of varying quality covers the structure and principal points of this type of Highest Yoga Tantra rite: examples include Snellgrove (1987: 213-277); Sharpa Tulku & Perrott (1985); Dalai Lama and Hopkins (1985). On the Yamāntaka cycle see Sharpa Tulku & Guard (1990; 1991) and Siklos (1990).

⁶⁹ This was during the summer monsoon retreat (**Appendix A**) when labour requirements on the monastic population were at their lowest.

himself, but his entire divine palace. Fully consecrated, this palace was seen as being an aspect of the divinity himself, rather than a separate entity: the doors and walls of the palace were all associated with certain qualities of the enlightened Body, Speech and Mind of Yamāntaka. As such, the symbolic 'housing' of Yamāntaka was integral to his ritual presence.

This 'housing' had certain ritual corollaries. The mandala itself, as both a physical and symbolic object, was felt actively to occupy a certain definable territorial space. This occupation of territorial space by the mandala was at the expense of other, local divinities (referred to by the collective term *zhidag* - "foundation owners") who would normally occupy and hold dominion over that space. Thus, prior to the sand mandala's construction, the *lama* bestowing the empowerments performed the preliminary rite of *sa-chog* ("excellent ground"): dancing on the raised platform in the Maitreya Hall that was the site of the proposed mandala, he brandished a *p'urbu* - a three sided ritual dagger. Summoning all the local numina together as the catch-all divinity of the earth goddess (L. *sa-lhamo*), he presented them with offerings and requested permission to use the site. Thereafter, those numina inimical to the mandala rite were asked to retire beyond the boundaries of the site: any that did not were threatened with the powers of the tantric master and the subsidiary Dharma Protectors, whose presences had been summoned into the *p'urbu*, and if they still did not retire, were symbolically destroyed by them. Following this, the borders of the room were symbolically marked off with coloured sand, drawn in the earth outside the door, thus preventing any return by hindering spirits (L. *gyeg*).

Once this was completed, the lines marking out the basic form of the sand mandala were drawn out by the officiating tantra teacher, whereupon offerings were made to each of the various divinities to be evoked within the rite, including the Directional Dharma Protectors (L. *chyogs-kyi-choskyong*) and the earth goddess (who, along with Yamāntaka, receives a rice offering placed in the very centre of the mandala (**Photo 6.4**)). The teacher then consecrated the coloured sand to be used in the mandala and inaugurated the "painting" by drawing a wall in each of the colours. A set of trainee monks from Kumbum then joined in the construction. 'Painting' the mandala took several days, with four monks working from dawn to dusk under the watchful eye of the tantra teacher

and Kumbum's Master of Ceremonies. Grains of coloured sand were painstakingly poured out of hand-held muskets, gradually filling in the design (Photo 6.2).

Once finished, the mandala was then empowered with the visualised 'wisdom mandala' of Yamāntaka. A series of ten further *p'urbu* were then placed in each of the ten directions around the mandala: these are the *chyogs-gyi-choskyong* ("Directional Dharma Protectors"), each dagger topped with a set of heads depicting the protective deities. The daggers were placed point down in ten triangular red *rten* ("supports"), one for each of the ten directions (Fig. 6.1 and Photo 6.5). These were seen as "binding down" the earth around the mandala (see also Cantwell 1989: 230).

The empowerment itself is extremely complex, and I did not have access to many of the meditative subtleties involved, either in textual or verbal form. However, comparable tantric systems such as the Duskhor (Skt. Kālacakra) empowerments involve 'entry' into the mandala by the visualised entry of the student into the mouth of the officiating *lama* (visualised in this case as the Buddha Duskhor in sexual union with his consort). The student then visualises his passage through the body of the *lama* and into the womb of the consort, where his 'ordinary' identity is 'dissolved' into emptiness.

From this emptiness arises the seed-syllable of Duskhor, and thence a second figure of Duskhor himself. After being consecrated by the five types of Buddha wisdom (see above), the student (as this second Duskhor) is "reborn" from the womb of the consort, thus completing the basic empowerment. Similarly, each of the physical, verbal and mental qualities of the student are seen as being meditatively regenerated from this emptiness as the corresponding qualities of Duskhor, with each quality being visualised as one of the deities of the mandala (Dalai Lama and Hopkins 1985: 106-8).

In this almost archetypal rite of passage, the student is symbolically reborn as the deity, whilst taking the *lama* as his or her spiritual father. But the student also takes on qualities redolent of the mandala itself: one monk in Kumbum warned that anyone taking empowerment should henceforth treat their body as a temple (L. *lhakhang*) to the *yidam* and the *lama*, and that they should be especially careful not to harm or kill themselves deliberately, as this would be an act of desecration.

6.8 - Subsequent Rites

Following the transmission of the empowerment, two concluding rites were necessary. The first, *zhin sreg*, was a fire offering made to atone for all mistakes which occurred during the course of the empowerments. Here, a second, less elaborate mandala was built in the monastery's courtyard, next to a small mud-brick shield inscribed with the protective syllable BAM (Photo 6.6). On top of the mandala, a circle of dried dung was piled, creating a hearth. Nearby, tables were set out with food offerings, whilst the 'fire mandala' was lit.

When all the participants in the empowerments were assembled, the officiating *lama*, seated behind the shield, summoned all the deities from the original mandala in the Maitreya Hall. These deities were 'transported' in procession from the Maitreya Hall, visualised as resting on dried flowers in a pot crowned with the *rigs-nga* of a tantric yogin. The procession, headed by the *gyesgus* and comprised of monks, was very similar to those for escorting any high religious guest. The flower-pot was then handed to the *lama*, who cast the flowers into the fire, followed by a lengthy series of offerings (see Sharpa Tulku and Perrott 1987). Into the hearth he then poured a vast variety of offerings. Upon this basis, the deities now residing in the hearth were asked to purify the *lama* and each of the participants. Following this purification, the deities in the hearth were then 'returned' to the mandala in Maitreya Hall on a new set of flowers, once again carried in procession by the monks.

On the evening following the fire offering, the sand mandala site in the Maitreya Hall was gradually deconsecrated, with the sand being collected into a single pot at the centre of the raised platform. This pot was crowned once again and offerings were made to it as Yamāntaka, before it was paraded out of the monastery grounds to the West. Arriving at one of the main streams of the village, the contents of the pot were then scattered by the *lopon* and tantra teacher at the source of the stream, as blessings to the local water spirits (L. *lu*) and the village as a whole. This was followed by a picnic for all the monks in a sheltered spot near the stream.

The mandala itself thus constituted not an idealised representation of an "otherworldly" reality, but a concrete ritual presence whose function within the monastery was akin more to the presence of a new shrine room. Such an abode of Yamāntaka is 'built' in a dominant and potentially

agonistic relationship with the extant structure of chthonic numina in the area. The ceremony as a whole creates certain relations of hierarchy between monk-practitioners and the chthonic domain (L. *zhi*) that surrounds them, and thus is an essential part of the armoury of monks as functioning ritual performers. Mandalas act not as objects but as events, fulcra in the propagation of a certain kind of ritual authority. More than this, empowerments, consecrations and mandalas exist in explicit *physical* relation to the local territorial domains within which they are performed, ritually effecting that domain at a seminal level. The blessing of stream sources with the sand of the mandala implies a definite relationship of local cosmogenesis, a redefinition of relations between the fertile chthonic forces of the local domain and the tutelary deity which marks the heart of monastic authority. Far from being detached models of the psyche, mandalas are embedded in particular places at particular times, 'stabbed down' into the earth of local domains just as were the temples of Srongtsen Gampo (Introduction).

6.9 - Sand Mandalas as Popular Practice

When the sand from the mandala was tidied up prior to being taken from the stream, monks gathered round to catch handfuls, which they then ate or passed around as blessings. Oddly, laity expressed no interest in this practice whatsoever, despite avid attempts at persuasion by monks. In this, the sand mandala rite seemed to mark one of the several fault-lines in the way laity and monks treated religious activity. Although monks insisted that anyone could come to receive empowerment when it was being given at the monastery, in practice the matter was almost embarrassingly "in-house". Laity regarded the rite with neutral indifference, declaring it to be "monks' business", an important but uneventful part of a monk's training. The *nyerpa* assigned to ensure sponsorship for the rite expressed a certain resignation, noting that it had always been difficult to find local sponsors for such empowerments, although now visiting Westerners could be occasionally relied upon for some or all of the costs.

In 1994, this sense of indifference was transformed in mid-stream by the late participation of the visiting incarnate Dagon Rinpoche. His last minute inclusion as main officiating *lama* caused a rapid jostling for position amongst prominent lay families in the region, all of them hoping

for an opportunity to sponsor the rites wherein he was acting as initiator. The incarnate's participation apparently changed the sand mandala rites from being objects of little interest to a considerable source of blessing.

This distinction was most starkly highlighted during the course of the *zhin sreg* fire offerings, in which Dagon Rinpoche had agreed to act as officiant (**Photo 6.6**). As with the other days where he had presided, a considerable lay presence was in evidence, cramming the courtyard behind the seated monks. When the pot containing the divinities was processed by the monks from the Maitreya Hall to the courtyard, where Dagon Rinpoche waited next to the burning hearth, laity simply sat and watched. But when the new flowers, which had been "generated" as tantric deities by Dagon Rinpoche himself, and held by his very hands, were returned by the same monks to the Maitreya Hall, laity rushed to touch their heads to the bottom of the pot, to receive blessings from it.

This is not to say that laity had lacked respect for the rites of ordinary monks. Rather, they were simply acutely aware of the possibilities of blessing, and the manners in which it flowed. When the source of monastic authority was located in so important a figure as an incarnate *lama*, distinguishing between ordinary monastic authority and the authority of the incarnate was crucial to the chain of respect.

6.9.1 - Inclusion and Exclusion: Reassessing Ts'ogs

This chain of respect and the influence it had on lay participation in monastic rites, is crucial to understanding their function. This is, of course, hardly a new suggestion. Anna Grimshaw, in her description of ritual practice at Rizong, a Gelukpa monastery in Northern Ladakh (Grimshaw 1983), saw the boundary-orientated construction of mandala practices and monastic gatherings as one which forced laity to the margins of ritual practice:

Its internal meaning and significance is far more esoteric and confined since it involves a participation in that sacred inexpressible realm which is the goal of all spiritual practice. This is an area only for the properly trained and initiated, primarily the celibate male practitioner...The laity cannot participate in the highly charged ritual space, but they are the beneficiaries of the merit thereby generated. (1983: 164)

Grimshaw was particularly referring to the *ts'ogs* rite which formed part of the Namgyal Stonchok Festival at Rizong (1983: 160), in which laity took away sections of sacrificial offering cake at the conclusion of the rite. Here Grimshaw argues that, like rites performed by monks in lay households, "the laity is situated at the periphery, to be barely present even as spectators" (1983: 165). Grimshaw regards the construction of such bounded ritual spaces as essential to the signification of the male monastic population as a corporate entity (1983: 170-4).

Grimshaw's description of Rizong is flawed by an apparent lack of familiarity with Tibetan Buddhist practice, and by her apparent wish to portray Buddhist monasticism (including its ritual aspect) as fundamentally exploitative. Nonetheless her assertion requires some assessment, simply because it conveniently expresses a certain kind of anthropological opinion about such religious organisations, and because, in ethnographic terms, certain monastic practices lend weight to her interpretation. During ordinary sand mandala rites at Kumbum, the involvement of laity was sporadic at best, limited in the lay imagination to "monks' business". Similarly, other practices relating to Yamāntaka emphasised this lay-monastic divide, in particular the annual meditation retreat of the monastery's *lopon*.

6.9.2 - *Skam-Ts'ogs*

The initial empowerment given to monks allowed them meditatively to generate the Buddha Yamāntaka, but only in a limited form. Until monks had performed an "approaching retreat" on the deity (L. *ts'ams nyenpa* - a meditation retreat lasting several weeks), they were not allowed to perform full generation of themselves (L. *dagskyed*) as Yamāntaka and were only permitted to generate the deity "in front" (L. *dunskyed*). Since the performance of retreat by every monk would represent a significant drain on resources for a monastic community with many ritual responsibilities, not all the Kumbum monks did so. Instead, the maintenance of a pure ritual relationship with the monastery's *yidam* depended upon the performance of an annual meditation retreat by its main ritual officiant, the *lopon*. This took place during the *Skam Ts'ogs* Festival in the last two weeks of the Tibetan calendar (**Appendix A**), when

the *lopon* entered closed retreat in his quarters and performed four offering and prayer sessions to Yamāntaka every day, thus purifying his capacity to perform *dagskyed* for the rest of the year.

This retreat did not simply affect the *lopon* individually: during the *Skam Ts'ogs* period the entire monastery became ritually bounded. Boundary markers in the form of small white offering cakes with flags marking each of the directions, inscribed with mantras, were placed at the boundaries of the monastery, and women were not allowed to enter the grounds, a restriction similar in nature to the laywoman's exclusion from the area of the Main Prayer Hall in front of Yamāntaka's statue. This exclusion was not entirely a gender-based one: whilst laymen were allowed into the physical proximity of the Yamāntaka statue, they (along with all other laity) were only allowed to *see* the statue (which was in a locked cabinet) on one day of the year (**Appendix A**).⁷⁰

The accumulated ritual power (L. *lasrung* - "karmic capacity") of the retreat allowed the *lopon* to perform established tantric rites throughout the year. These rites were essential to the monastery's ongoing ritual care in the Lingshed area, and particularly included *skangsol* rites to the various Dharma Protectors (Ch. 7), which, as we shall see, performed central exorcistic functions.⁷¹

Certainly, in these cases the monastic community participated in an exclusive sacred space, one which was crucially linked to their access to ritual authority within Lingshed and the rest of the surrounding sponsor villages, all of which were described as being "under the might" (L. *mnga yog*) of Kumbum, and particularly of the Yamāntaka statue located there. But such exclusions far from exhausted the instances of direct ritual involvement *on a communal and institutional basis* between laity and *yidam*.

One of the most important such occasions, which Grimshaw herself describes (1983: 160), is the so-called *ts'ogs* ("assembly" or "unified multitudes") offering. Grimshaw's analysis of the event centres on the disparity between monastic participation in the ritual arena, and lay

⁷⁰This also included female animals, although special dispensation was made for the working animals of the monastery.

⁷¹The fact that the *lopon* changed hands every 2-3 years meant that quite a few senior monks were able to perform *dagskyed*, and thus could stand in for the *lopon* during smaller rites such as funerals.

marginalisation from it: in her interpretation, laity benefit by essentially picking up the sacred leftovers.

The practice of *ts'ogs* as a tantric rite is common to most orders of Tibetan Buddhism, and certainly there is little ethnographically that separates its practice in Kumbum from that in Rizong monastery. Arguably, however, Grimshaw misinterpreted the levels of symbolic participation by laity involved in the rite, perhaps by failing to look at comparable rites. In the *Skam-Ts'ogs* festival, relationships with the tutelary deity were very restricted. In the next two examples, both from the *Smonlam Chenmo* Prayer Festival at Lingshed that immediately followed the *Skam-Ts'ogs* retreat, we will see that the relationship that links laity to the centre of divine power in the *ts'ogs* rite was comparatively fluid, and certainly did not present any *exclusive* access by the monastic community to centres of ritual power.

6.9.3 - The Closing of *Smonlam Chenmo*

On the final day of the *Smonlam Chenmo* Prayer Festival in February 1994, a large *ts'ogs* ceremony was carried out in the main courtyard of Kumbum monastery, as a blessing for the whole year at the conclusion of the Prayer Festival. The ceremony occurred in the main courtyard of the monastery, where monks and laity had laboured most of the morning to produce around a hundred *storma*, offering cakes topped with red dye, which were to be give to the arriving laity. These were arranged on a mat in front of the teaching throne, on top of which was a further, more complex *storma* for the *lopon* (**Photo 6.8**). The monastic community sat on either side of this central body of offerings, with the *lopon* directly to the right of the throne (**Fig. 6.2**). Beyond them were seated the attendant laity: all were senior men, household heads (L. *khyimdag*) from each of the villages.

The focus of the *ts'ogs* performance at Kumbum lay in the provision of blessed food offerings by the monastery to lay spectators, but this apparent reversal of the normal flow of food provision hid a more complex ritual dynamic. Food offerings (including beer and meat as well as the *storma*) were progressively consecrated by the *lopon*, and then offered to three types of natural and supernatural "guests" (L. *donpo*) at the feast (see also Beyer 1973: 312; Sharpa Tulku and Guard 1990), as follows:

i) Offerings were first made to the *lopon* as Yamāntaka and to all the Buddhas: this offering was in the form of a teardrop-shaped headpiece to the main *storma* (Photo 6.8), which was detached and held up before the *lopon* by an assistant monk before being taken to the main prayer hall.⁷²

ii) Offerings were then made to the human guests, who were to be visualised by the participants as a *ts'ogs-kyi-khorlo*, an “assembly circle” in which all human guests were Buddhist heroes (L. *pawo*) and heroines (L. *pamo*) in Yamāntaka’s retinue. The *ts'ogs storma* were then handed out (by one of the lay sponsors and a young monk) to the monks and then the laymen. These were accompanied by various edible seeds. A portion of these seeds was consumed, the remains being returned to a communal plate;

iii) Finally, these collected leftovers were carried back to the *lopon* who, as Yamāntaka, blessed and consecrated them, offering them to the various spirits and inimical demons, along with the demand that they aid and not hinder the religious community in its duties.

Following the offering to inimical spirits, the remaining quarters were handed out, with each household head receiving a quarter for each declared household member, and each monk receiving one for absentee members of his monastic quarters. After the *ts'ogs* assembly was disbanded, household heads handed out these quarters to wives, children and other household members, many of whom had been waiting beyond the confines of the courtyard. Sections of them were often kept to be used as medicine during the coming year.

6.9.4 - Offerings to the Spiritual Guide

On the eighth day of the first lunar month, a unusually large number of laity (perhaps sixty to seventy) made their way up the tracks of the snow-bound mountainside to the monastery. The eighth day is dedicated to Smanla, the Medicine Buddha, and prayers and offerings

⁷²Participants told me that the *lopon* eats this section later in his quarters.

made to him on this day were felt to be especially efficacious. To coincide with this event, a special *Lama Chodpa* ("Offerings to the Spiritual Guide") rite was to be performed, a central component of which was a substantial *ts'ogs* offering. The majority of this event took place once again in the monastery's courtyard, where a large red *storma* had been prepared (**Photo 6.7**) on the teaching throne (L. *tr'i*), along with other offerings of meat, beer and breads.

The main bulk of the monastic community took their seats in lines on either side of the teaching throne, behind which laity congregated, sitting in rows. On this occasion, laity arrived in families, dressed in their finest clothes. Although somewhat cramped, everyone sat in rows in the courtyard, with older laymen nearest the monks and women and children slightly further out. At the height of the *ts'ogs* ceremony, the offerings (including the vast offering cake which had been constructed in bricks of ground barley) were broken up and offered out, first to the monastic community and then to all the laity. As with the *ts'ogs* described above, offerings were progressively consecrated by the *lopon*, and offerings made to the three types of guest (see above). Long life prayers (L. *zhabs-stan*) were then carried out by both laity and monks for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, head of the Gelukpa Order. For this purpose, a large photograph of His Holiness was carried out of the *dukhang* by the two main lay sponsors of the rite, and placed on the teaching throne. Both monks and laity then made prostrations towards this image, and a series of prayers in homage of the Lama were chanted by the monks.

In essence, the structure of each of these two rites was the same, but the difference in their placing and intended 'function' created marked variances in lay attendance. The reason for this is found in the actual nature of *ts'ogs* as a general ritual practice. We saw earlier how tantric rites rarely function as stand-alone entities, always appearing to fit within broader constructs of ritual practice. *Ts'ogs* is a case in point, always acting as a component of a larger rite: indeed, its role appeared to be to emphasise or augment certain aspects of its wider ritual context (see Gyatso 1992: 148). *Ts'ogs* offerings differed from certain other ritual segments (such as *dagskyed*) in that they were optional, a non-essential elaboration which depended upon the wherewithal of sponsors (see also Sharpa Tulku and Perrott 1985: 48).

These various positions of *ts'ogs* within larger ritual structures each determined the manner in which they were performed, as well as the specifics of lay attendance: indeed, rather than always creating and recreating the same groups, their constitution appeared to be linked more firmly to the intended purpose or role of the particular rite itself. In the Offerings to the Spiritual Guide, laity appeared to act as individuals who represented themselves in relationship to a particular high *lama* (the Dalai Lama), and therefore lay attendance was more general, including women and children. In the closing of *Smonlam Chenmo*, the *ts'ogs* rite was the concluding part of a much larger ceremony, wherein *households* rather than individuals established a certain relationship with the religious capacities of the monastery as a whole, and its *lopon* in particular. Both of these can in turn be contrasted with rites such as *Skam Ts'ogs* (and indeed, the ordinary sand mandala empowerments) where the function of the performance was exclusively geared towards the capacities of the monastic community as professional ritual practitioners.

Indeed, Grimshaw's assertion of exclusion is not simply mistaken: arguably, it is the precise opposite of the intended purpose of *ts'ogs*. Stephan Beyer's early discussion of one variant of the *ts'ogs* rite notes that *ts'ogs* acted to purify broken tantric vows (Beyer 1973: 314), infractions that might impede the relationship of blessing and spiritual tutelage between *lama* and student.

This integrative function of *ts'ogs* rites is closely linked to its idiom - that of the divine feast. In particular, *ts'ogs* rites involve a radical reversal of normal eating and hospitality behaviour. While left-over food was regarded as polluted (L. *dipchan*) by the saliva of the participants - a consideration which meant that everyday hospitality practices tended progressively to segregate participants through an outward flow of food (3.4.1) - in the *ts'ogs* rite we find that polluted food is brought *inwards*, to be consecrated en masse by a source of divine purity (in this case, Yamāntaka). Rather than being kept separate, the enlightened purity of the tutelary deity and the pollution of lay and monastic individuals (and groups) are placed in direct correspondence to one another.

This kind of sharing is not unprecedented in Ladakhi social life: the sharing of food as a ritual act was also practised in the marriage ceremony, when bride and groom shared from the same bowl (Phylactou 1989).

Similarly pollution was a concern that was most often communal to the household as a corporate unit (Ch.9).

However, *ts'ogs* should not simply be viewed as a monastic or ritual alternative to marriage and household existence. As we saw above (6.9.3), household units, through the representation of their household heads, are also integrated into the *ts'ogs* relationship with the tutelary deity as a centre of religious power.

6.9.5 - Non-Monastic *Ts'ogs*

Above, I have criticised Grimshaw's assertion that monastic rites somehow assert the dominance of the monastery by systematically excluding laity from the domain of religious power. It is, of course, perfectly reasonable to argue that although the borders of the central ritual domain may be fluid in the way we have seen above, they are nonetheless consistently centred on the *lopon* as the dominant representative of ritual authority in Lingshed: ritual and monastic authority coincide, enforcing monastic dominance within the religious domain.

In fact, this is not the case: many senior laity have personal ritual practices centred on their own *yidam*, the most popular of which are Chenresig - the patron deity of Tibet, mythical father of the Tibetan race and Buddha of Compassion⁷³ - and Guru Rinpoche, the legendary yogin whose magical activities were essential to the foundation of the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet. Guru Rinpoche maintains a substantial following amongst laity in all sections of Tibet and the Himalaya, and particularly amongst Nyingmapa Order institutions (see Cantwell 1989; Snellgrove 1957).

In Lingshed, celebrations were held in Guru Rinpoche's honour on the tenth day of each month (Appendix A). Meetings were held in each of seven groups of houses, called *tsechu-alak* ("tenth day groups"), each comprising between 3-4 *khangchen*, following similar territorial units to those of the village sections (5.1). The tenth was said to be the day upon which Guru Rinpoche bound the local gods of Tibet to accept Buddhism, and it was particularly effective to propitiate him on this day: for those

⁷³In common forms, Chenresig is often referred to as a *bodhisattva*, or would-be Buddha; but as a tutelary deity he holds the position of Buddha.

who do, explained a local layman, he arrives riding the first rays of dawn, a familiar epithet for the attainment of enlightenment which, as the Second Buddha, he shares with Śākyamuni.

Each month, one of the *khangchen* acted as host and sponsor for the other households in the group on a rotation basis. At the gathering, offerings were made to Guru Rinpoche, including a single red *ts'ogs storma*, meat, barley beer and so forth. This was followed by a reading from his biography, the *Padma Kat'ang*. Laity discussed and treated this text with an affection that marked it out as something different from the writings of the monastic tradition. It was, they said, easy to understand, written in the language of ordinary people; for many it represented their first real introduction to textual Tibetan, a place to learn the language that had none of the obscure complexities of the high Tibetan of the Gelukpa Order. During the reading, the *ts'ogs* cake would be divided up and distributed to all the participants, and barley beer handed out as the "blessing" (L. *chinlabs*) of Padmasambhava, who was said also to have drunk it.

Tsechu was a non-monastic occasion almost by definition. Monks who had received ordination were not allowed to attend, although many remembered the celebrations from their youth with a certain wistfulness. Its major officiants (reading the texts and so forth) were the household heads. In this and other ways it represented a mode of access to the powers of Buddhahood unmediated by monastic authority. For many, Guru Rinpoche is the consummate tantric *lama*, a figure of and for the laity, but paradoxically also a figure whose primary act was one of support for the foundation of monasticism (**Introduction**). His presence was not therefore antithetical to the hegemony of monasticism in ritual life, but simply alternative to it.

Thus, the process of socio-religious binding that characterised *ts'ogs* encompassed more than simply those relationships of religious capacity exclusive to the monastery: rather, it represented a *generic* ritual mechanism for binding both groups and individuals into a divine circle, a kind of 'tantric marriage', in the sense of an act centred on the creation of symbolic kin. Certainly, the sensual elements of the *ts'ogs* rite were lost on no-one, least of all the monks, for whom this represented a rare opportunity to drink beer, that staple of the marriage feast (see Phylactou

1989).⁷⁴ The image of the 'tantric' family here is a strong one: as we have seen, the process of tantric empowerment often revolves around powerful images of kinship and birth; in the same way, those practitioners bound by empowerment to the *lama* as tantric Buddha become linked as religious siblings, "vajra brothers and vajra sisters" (L. *dorje mingbo dorje singmo*) with similar responsibilities to one another (see Samuel 1993a: 124-5).

The *ts'ogs* therefore marked the establishment of various kinds of offering relationship between particular groups or individuals, and certain apical *lama* figures (both monastic and non-monastic). It "bound" individuals and groups both to one another and to a central religious figure, through their communal sharing and participation in a mandala-like *ts'ogs*. This relationship - whilst hierarchical - was anything but exclusive.

6.10 - Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, we saw how tantric practice inverts the 'normal' Buddhist dialectic of the gradual growth of wisdom and karmic merit towards the goal of enlightenment, replacing it with the active generation of a more or less complete 'presence' of Buddhahood within the ritual environment. The ritual authority associated with such acts of generation is restricted to established lines of pupillary succession, largely (but not entirely) maintained within the confines of the monastic population. Similarly, such acts *are* predicated on hierarchical relationships with a central religious core within the monastery (the "*lama*"). Within the Gelukpa Order, this *lama* figure is located ideally in incarnates such as Dagon Rinpoche, but, in lesser monasteries like Kumbum, is more often represented by more clerically elected figures such as the *lopon* or a specially trained tantra teacher. In all of these cases (whether incarnate or clerical), the centre of religious authority is located within the monastic community, but this represents neither an exclusive access to ritual

⁷⁴Beyer (1973: 312) notes the explicit reference in tantric texts of the *ts'ogs storma* as being shaped "like the breasts of *dakinis*" (the sky-going female spirits of wisdom, many of whom are summoned and propitiated during the *ts'ogs* rite): certainly, this imagery was also a source of considerable bodily humour in the kitchens of Lingshed monastery when the older monks' backs were turned.

participation, nor an exclusive control of divine presence. Within the monastery's cycle of rites, it involved an annual dynamic between inclusive rites (such as the *ts'ogs* offering) which distribute blessing, and protection within a local group that is both monastic and lay, and exclusive ones (particularly the *lopon's* retreat, but also the monastic sand mandala empowerments) which accumulate and transmit the capacity to act as a source for such ministrations within the monastic community.

Chapter 7:
Dharma Protectors and Skangsol Rites -
The Wrathful Protection of Tantra

Overleaf:

Photo 7.1 (left): Monks consecrate the *drugchuma* (left) and other offerings during *skangsol*.

Photo 7.2 (right): Throwing the *drugchuma* into the fire at Leh Dosmochey, February 1995.



7.1 - Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that Buddhahood in Mahāyāna thought had a role which encompassed a greater possibility for the intervention in *samsāra* than is orthodoxly the case in the Southern Schools of Buddhism. This role should not be overstated. Whether tantric or not, Buddhas still maintain a definite non-involvement and impartiality towards the events of the world.

Geshe Changchub explained this issue in terms of the doctrine that Buddhas do not technically have a *sems*, or “mind”, in the way ordinary sentient beings (L. *semchan* - literally “those with the quality of mind”) have minds. This does not imply that they are mindless, but that the nature of their thought lacks the discursive qualities or assertive will associated with the thoughts of ordinary sentient beings. Being entirely free of ‘obstructions’ (L. *barchad*), Buddhas act spontaneously and without effort of will for the benefit of others.⁷⁵ Their agency, however, cannot be directly compared to that of ordinary sentient beings: rather, they emanate (L. *trulwa*), or “show” (L. *stonpa*) other ‘lower’ forms, which perform actions. This occurs in a variety of ways:

- i) the manifestation of “emanation bodies” (L. *tulku*) - physical and historical figures such as the Buddha Śākyamuni or various incarnate *lamas*;
- ii) the manifestation of ‘lower’ divine forms, which can act within the world.

For the purposes of this chapter, I would like to concentrate on the second of these methods, and in particular the section of ritual activity given over to the *choskyong*, or “Dharma Protectors”, those divinities sworn to protect the Three Jewels of Buddhism - the Buddha, the Doctrine, and the Spiritual Community.

⁷⁵Discussing this issue, Lama Doboomb Tulku, a prominent Gelukpa incarnate, compared the Buddha’s role in coming to the aid of sentient beings as like that of an echo in a cave: “the cave appears to respond to your shout without actually doing anything”. (Public Lecture, Edinburgh 1996).

7.2 - Dharma Protectors in Lingshed

As a group, *choskyong* have only one major distinguishing feature: they have, at some time in the past, been “bound” (L. *damchen*) to protect Buddhism by one of the many possible Buddhas. As a result, they are not so much a static class of deity, as representing a certain cosmological dynamic with reference to Buddhism. As a result, in principle at least, any numen can be a *choskyong*. In practice, their status as protectors means that either

- (i) they were at some point of such power as to warrant the attentions of a Buddha-figure, or
- (ii) their relationship with Buddhism has occasioned a substantial and on-going promotion in their status.

In either case, the practical status of most *choskyong* is quite high, being either supraworldly Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* or important and powerful local area gods charged to protect specific monasteries. Inherent in this hierarchy is a subtle distinction in the terminology of protection: generally, supraworldly protectors are titled *gombo*, which Das (1991) renders as “protective lord”, as opposed to the general term for worldly protectors - *srungma* - implying a “guardian” or “watchman”. Indeed, *srungma* was more broadly used by householders to refer to their own household gods and village gods, and carried the implication of the partisan protection of particular groups, something laity saw as an advantage. Monks deemed this partiality - which was still linked to the lower *choskyong* - as one of the major drawbacks of worldly divinities, whose protection was deemed unreliable, fickle, and lasting only as long as one was within their ken or - in more Buddhist terms - for the length of this lifetime.

In Kumbum, monks identified nine *choskyong*, of both worldly and supraworldly status. These were:

Supraworldly Dharma Protectors (Gombo)

Yamāntaka, the main tutelary deity (L. *yidam*) of the Gelukpa Order, in the form of Dorje Jigjet (“Adamantine Fearful One”).

Gombo (also Mahākāla - “Great Death”) in his six-armed form: a wrathful manifestation of Chenresig.

Gonkar (“White Gombo”), another wrathful manifestation of Chenresig (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 64).

Chosgyal (“Religion King”), also called Shinje (Skt. Yamā), the Lord of Death.⁷⁶ Chosgyal is specifically associated with Yamāntaka, who is meant to have originally bound him to Buddhism. As Yamā, the bull-headed Lord of the Dead, this wrathful divinity is meant to have laid waste to much of the world. In order to put a stop to the killing, the *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī (L. Jampal Yang) took rebirth in the same bull-headed form as Yama and, following a mighty battle, converted him to Buddhism. As a result the bull-headed manifestation of Mañjuśrī took the title of Yamāntaka (“Vanquisher of Yamā”), and in turn renamed Yamā as Dharmaraja (L. Chosgyal).⁷⁷

Palden Lhamo (“Glorious Goddess”) one of the major protectors of the Gelukpa Order.⁷⁸

Zhal Zhi (“Four Faces”), most probably another form of Gombo, although I could not confirm this.

Nam Sras (Skt. Vaiśravaṇa): the guardian of wealth and treasure.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Depicted in his “outer attainment” [phyi.sgrub] form (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993).

⁷⁷See Siklos (1990).

⁷⁸In her “Glorious Queen [with a] War-Sickle” [dpal.ldan.dmag.zor.rgyal.mo] form (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 24)

⁷⁹Depicted in the form “great yellow Vaiśravaṇa” [rnam.sras.ser.chen] (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 68).

Worldly Dharma Protectors (*Choskyong Srungma*)

Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo: the deified spirit of a monk whose main task was the protection of Tsongkhapa's monastic discipline.⁸⁰

Shar Chyogs ("Easterly Direction"): a *yullha* from the Lingshed area who was "promoted" to the rank of local *choskyong* for the monastery. Originally banished from Tibet, Shar Chyogs was the village of Nyeraks' king's household god (L. *p'alha*) in the period prior to the Dogra invasions of 1842. According to some laity, this deity was originally from Tibet, but was banished by a high *lama* to a place "where the earth and the sky are triangular", which the people of Nyeraks felt described their village.

The majority of these Dharma Protectors were widespread within the Gelukpa Order, with the exception of Shar Chyogs, who was indigenous to the Lingshed area. The policy of "promoting" local divinities to the status of being monastic protectors is widespread in Ladakh, and often these local *choskyong* will act as representatives of other local gods and spirits. As we have seen (5.3.2), both Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo and Shar Chyogs possessed oracles from the area. These oracles, although occasionally working in conjunction, cannot be viewed as equal in their role in the village. Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo, although still a worldly divinity, was seen to be a tenth-ground *bodhisattva*, and therefore of infinitely greater power and authority than a high-ranking local area god such as Shar Chyogs. As a result, the Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo oracle's position was much more strongly linked to the authority of the monastery, and to the activities of the monks, upon whom he depended initially to invoke Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo as the preliminary to each possession.

The protection afforded by *choskyong* is ambiguous in a variety of ways. Historically, the parameters of the "Spiritual Community" (L. *gyedunpa*), the Third Jewel of Buddhism, have always lacked definition in a religious world where a lay householder can as easily be an established tantric master as a man in the robes of a monk can be a semi-professional

⁸⁰For a variety of reasons, this is a pseudonym.

soldier.⁸¹ The term *gyedunpa* can be defined strictly as the monastic community (the more general use of the term) or, more broadly, to encompass all spiritual practitioners or those that go for refuge in the Three Jewels. Snellgrove for example describes a *choskyong* rite in Jiwong Monastery, Nepal in 1957, which was explicitly aimed at defending the local area against the anti-Buddhist Chinese Communist forces in Tibet (Snellgrove 1957: 259-60). Conversely, in Lingshed I was present on an occasion when the *choskyong* Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo oracle threatened Buddhist laity with illness, suffering and death if they undermined the moral discipline of the monks by offering them drink and cigarettes.

However, the protection of the Three Jewels also involves the protection of the Buddhist Doctrine itself: as a result, those that defy the Doctrine in whatever way are seen as coming within the purview of the potentially wrathful acts of Dharma Protectors. In general, *choskyong* are evoked as a means of protecting the spiritual practices of religious practitioners from deteriorating. Cantwell has argued that such protection potentially extends without contradiction to the death of the practitioner him or herself (Cantwell 1989: 143), if that represents the most efficient way of protecting the Doctrine. Thus, a Dharma Protector might precipitate the death of a monk if, through living, the monk's religious practice would suffer more than through dying (and being reborn).

Such variations in the sense in which the Three Jewels are 'protected' revolve around the ambiguity between protecting Buddhists from manifest harm (physical pain and discomfort, poverty, loss and bad reputation) in this lifetime, and protecting them from harm in a broader notion that emphasises karmically-determined future lives, and the complex relations that link a practitioner to his or her established representations of Buddhahood.

7.3 - *Skangsol Rites*

Those rites centred on the *choskyong* deities were some of the most important and common performed in Lingshed. Called *skangsol*, they varied in size from short quotidian rites performed in the monastic *dukhang*

⁸¹ I am referring here particularly to those pre-diaspora sections of the monastic universities of Sera, Drepung and Ganden that were effectively fighting monks, the *dab-dob* (see Goldstein 1989).

and each of the subsidiary *gonlak* shrines, to elaborate all-day rites encompassing the entire village at the King's New Year (*Losar*).

Unlike many other ritual forms, *skangsol* had to be performed in an established shrine-room (L. *lhakhang*), and was principally centred on the symbolic purification of the shrine room and those areas associated with it through the intervention of the *choskyong*. This purification was enacted through the forced expulsion of those influences inimical to the practice of religion. In this sense, it was identical in function to the preliminary rites performed prior to the establishment of the sand mandala described earlier. In the case of the sand mandala, the borders of the sacred space were demarcated by the presence of Directional Dharma Protectors in the form of ritual daggers (6.8); similarly, in *skangsol*, the borders of the shrine room as a purified sacred domain are re-established through the presence of the monastic Dharma protectors.

Skangsol, like many other rites in Tibetan Buddhism, does not simply involve the recital of texts and the presentation of material offerings: most verses were accompanied by complex mental visualisations, elaborate and fluid hand gestures (L. *chyag gya*) and the constant accompaniment of music. Each of the senior officiants had a personal set of bell (L. *drilbu*) and vajra (L. *dorje*), which formed an integral part of many hand-gestures, with the bell being rung at the end of every set of offerings. More substantial musical accompaniment came from drums, cymbals and copper and conch-shell horns.

As with all rites performed at Kumbum, *skangsol* followed a definite and pre-established pattern. Sonam Wangdus, the assistant Master of Ceremonies (L. *u-chung*) at Kumbum, described the structure of the *skangsol*, as following these stages:

i) *Dagskyed* ("self-generation"): instantaneous visualised transformation of the officiating monk into the tutelary deity Yamāntaka. Technically, this was a separate rite preliminary to *skangsol*. Nevertheless, it was indispensable, forming the source of the practitioner's ritual authority to perform later sections: the capacity to coerce divine powers emerged only as a result of *dagskyed* being correctly and authoritatively performed. This being so, only the monastery's *lopon*, having performed an extensive annual retreat on Yamāntaka, could fully authorise the performance of *skangsol*. Although other monks were necessary for the recitations, the

success of the rite depended upon the accumulated ritual power (L. *lasrung*) of the *lopon*, which channelled itself through his use of the *dorje*, the principal ritual implement in tantric rites.

ii) *Ngotoks* ("direct perception"): the invitation to all the *choskyong*, who would be visualised arising as forms "shown" by the tutelary deity.

iii) *Shagspa* ("adjudication"): confession to the *choskyong*, and their demarcation of positive from "obstructive influences" (L. *gyeg*). Obstructive influences were then removed, usually having been trapped within a large red votive offering cake (L. *storma*). This *storma* was physically carried away from the site or thrown beyond the perimeter. If such obstructive influences remained, they would be threatened with the power of the Dharma Protectors, who would eventually be called upon to destroy them. Other, less malevolent spirits, such as *zhidag* ("Lords of the Domain") were also given offerings, which are placed on the roof.

iv) *Skangwa* ("expiation"): 'compensation' is made for those things lacking, both within the ceremony and generally, such as incorrect offerings, the breaking of tantric commitments or any lack of concentration on the part of officiating monks. The term refers to the metaphorical refilling of a cup with liquid after some has been taken from it, in the form of a secondary offering.

v) *Zaspa* ("repetition"): recitation of the names and mantra of the *choskyong*, and the making of offerings.

vi) *Stodpa* ("eulogies"): expressions of praise and descriptions of the properties of the *choskyong*.

Thus, during *skangsol*, obstructive forces are expelled from a site dedicated to religion, while the interior of the site is purified and created as a fitting receptacle for divine presence. Here, *skangsol* seems to act as a powerful form of boundary maintenance and ritual separation, wherein consecrated shrine rooms represent foundations (L. *rten* - "support" or "container") for the Three Jewels. The term *storma* is enlightening here, and monks took pains to explain it to me as being "that which is scattered".

More concretely, it referred to the red offering cakes used in *skangsol* and *ts'ogs*, where offerings were not concentrated for use at a single location, but *distributed* to various places and groups (either human or numinous), thus creating a complex ritual space.⁸² In this sense, the ritual separation that occurs through the activities of the *choskyong* is primarily aimed not at destroying influences inimical to Buddhism, but at simply removing them from the vicinity of religious practice.

Whether or not this is the *initial* intention, antiseptic terms such as separation and demarcation cannot mask the violent and coercive imagery that accompanied many *skangsol* rites. For everyday *skangsol*, or even those performed in village households, the *storma* is most usually a simple round dough offering cake made of barley flour, cane-sugar and butter, and dyed red. However, during large *skangsol* rites performed at crucial moments of the year (see below), the principal votive offering cake, called a *drugchuma* was far more elaborate (**Photo 7.1**).⁸³ Designed in the shape of a red flaming pyramid, it would be topped by a flaming skull and *dorje* (representing the adamantine nature of enlightenment). Monks described this complex ritual implement as the skull-club of the Dharma Protector Chosgyal, the Religion King, Lord of the Dead, one of the principal deities in Yamāntaka's retinue. Following the summoning of obstructive spirits into the *drugchuma*, it is taken beyond the perimeter of the site and thrown into a large pyre, symbolically destroying the accumulated "enemies" (L. *dra'o*) of religion. The *dra'o* are thus "liberated" within the *skangsol* by being killed and having their consciousnesses transferred to Buddhist heavens, presenting their manifest bodies as offerings to the Three Jewels of Buddhism (Cantwell 1996b).

⁸²The more general term *chodpa* ("offering") was used for other types of offering cake. I appreciate that *storma* is less rigidly applied in Tibetan areas, where it is used for a wide variety of offering cakes (Cantwell, pers. comm; Cantwell 1989).

⁸³The term *drugchuma* means "sixty", but is seen as being an abbreviation of the word for sixty-four, in that it represents a total of sixty-four offerings, although these were never explained to me in full.

7.4.1 - The Annual Cycle of Skangsol

The degree to which *skangsol* was linked both practically and symbolically to certain sacred spaces determined much of its use as an instituted ritual form. However, its performance was also associated with crucial moments in the agricultural and religious year in Lingshed and to the manner in which time was structured and allocated. Although this distinction is certainly false in an absolute sense, the practical performance of *skangsol* could be divided into the quotidian responsibility of performing *skangsol* in the monastery, and the larger and more noticeable rites performed to mark specific occasions.

7.4.2 - Everyday Skangsol at Kumbum

In the monastery the daily performance of *skangsol* was the monastic community's first duty.⁸⁴ *Skangsol* rites required four monks including either the *lopon* or a suitable substitute who could authoritatively perform *dagskyed* (either a designated *ex-lopon* or an incarnate *lama*). If this was not possible, or if time constraints on the monastic community were severe, then the abridged *skangshags* rite, including a confession for non-performance of the full rite, was performed by the monastery's caretaker (usually a senior monk). The continuous performance of *skangsol* throughout the year not only maintained the positive involvement of the *choskyong* in the religious life of Lingshed, it also ensured their continued adherence to the Buddhist faith, and with it guarded against the possibility that (particularly worldly) Dharma Protectors would turn against the very people they were meant to be serving.

In Lingshed's surrounding villages, the *gonlak* caretaker monks (2.5) also performed daily *skangshags* throughout the year. They ensured, in the words of Kumbum's *umdzat*, "an unbroken chain of prayers surrounding each village's year". The relationship between the *skangsol* performed in Kumbum and those performed in the *gonlak* was one of dependence: the success of the latter depended on the performance of the former.

⁸⁴This did not include the laying out of offerings by the *gomnyer*, or the preparation of morning tea by his assistant.

Neither of these ritual cycles could simply be regarded as maintenance in the mundane sense. As we have seen, great emphasis was laid on the order of ritual events, and as the principal divinities who oversaw all ritual practice by the monks, the evocation of the *yidam* followed by the *choskyong* was logically primary. As the first activity of the day, the performance of *skangsol* was felt to set the tone for the rest of the day.

7.4.3 - New Year *Skangsol*

Certain annual performances of *skangsol* followed the same rationale, being performed at the new year in order to ensure blessing for the coming year. In Ladakh, calendrical calculations were complicated by the fact that there were two New Year (*Losar*) Festivals: the religious and the agricultural. The religious New Year was the turnover of the traditional Tibetan calendar, between the twelfth and the first lunar months, and was celebrated in Lingshed by the *Smonlam Chenmo* Prayer Festival at Kumbum. The agricultural, or King's New Year, is on the turnover between the eleventh and the twelfth months, and is very much regarded as a lay festival (Phylactou 1989). Nonetheless, both events merited large *skangsol* performances.

The *skangsol* rite at the religious New Year was performed on *namgung*, a day which was referred to as simultaneously the last day of the old, and the first day of the new, year. It was also the day upon which the *lopon* emerged from his two-week retreat on Yamāntaka, thus freshly empowered to evoke the power of the tutelary deity at this crucial juncture. The rite lasted all day, and was described by the monks as destroying the accumulated negativities (L. *sdigpa*) and obstacles (L. *barchad*) of the previous year, thus ensuring that none of them carried on into the new year. At the end of *skangsol*, the *storma* for the obstructive spirits was carried out of the monastery, and deposited at a deserted site in Berig village section, where no *khangchen* were to be found. Laity from all the surrounding villages visited the monastery, to present ceremonial scarves and make prostrations. In return, each of them was presented with a *srung-skud*, a protective blessing ribbon blessed by the *lopon* during *skangsol*.

At the King's New Year, *skangsol* represented the final part of a much wider agenda of exorcistic practices, performed by both monks and

laity. Beginning on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month, the celebration of Tsongkhapa's birth and enlightenment, and lasting to the twenty-ninth, laity would build bonfires in each of the central village sections⁸⁵, from which they would take firebrands to the bottom of the village, and cast them beyond the village perimeter. This culminated on the evening of the thirtieth day, when each *khangchen* lit a large bonfire, and at about 4am its occupants carried torches and food to the bottom of the village, and cast the torches beyond the village perimeter. A feast was then held until the dawn of the first day.⁸⁶

On the first day of the year, villagers went to pay their respects to the *lopon* at his monastic quarters, and that evening the *lopon* hosted a large feast for villagers and monks. The next five days were then taken up by visiting, as everyone took turns to visit certain sections of the village. On the sixth day of the new year, archery and horse-riding competitions were held, accompanied by the beginning of a lengthy three-day *skangsol* rite. This began in the shrine-room of one of two prominent households in the heart of the village, from where the monks made a steady round of all the village sections, performing *skangsol* in representative sponsor households. As the monks moved from house to house, much of the village followed along, and this was widely felt to be an occasion for much feasting and the show of elaborate hospitality by prominent village households, as the troubles of the previous year were progressively expelled from the community. On the ninth day, a large bonfire was lit at the bottom of the village, and a large *drugchuma* offering cake cast into it by the *lopon*. Should the dough skull-piece of the *drugchuma* fall out of the fire into which it had been cast, villagers would often scramble for it, to be kept as a means of curing intractable illnesses in the household throughout the following year. Most laity attended this final throwing of the *drugchuma*, and a large feast and much drinking took place to celebrate the exorcism.

7.4.4 - Harvest Skangsol

⁸⁵That is Daou, Yogos, Diling-Berber and Khartse (Fig. 5.1).

⁸⁶ It was customary at this time to talk about how all the bad things of the previous year were finished with, and how the upcoming year would be much better.

In Part 1, we saw that the harvest period had particularly negative moral connotations. Associated with the killing of multitudes of insects, the storage of the harvest (and its subsequent consumption) within the household was seen as necessary, but extremely dangerous, inviting the wrath and interference of local deities and spirits, who would “bring mischief” (L. *gnodpa yongs*), such as causing illness and overturning teacups in the house.⁸⁷ As a remedy for this, *skangsol* was performed by visiting monks performed in each *khangchen* soon after the harvest.

Villagers regarded this as one of the most important ritual services that monks provided during the year. Indeed, since the Kumbum monks had to perform these rites - which could last up to three days each (depending upon the wishes of the sponsor), and required the presence of 4-5 monks, including a senior ritual practitioner - in all of the six sponsor villages, almost the entirety of the ninth and tenth months (**Appendix A**) of the monastery’s ritual calendar was taken up with this marathon endeavour, which was collectively called *dulja* or “subduing”. Held in each of the household shrine-rooms (L. *chodkhang*), the expelled *storma* would be placed outside the house itself, (rather than simply outside the shrine-room), whilst a further offering to less inimical spirits would be placed on the roof. Both monks and laity agreed that the rite had to be performed before the King’s New Year at the beginning of the eleventh month.

Kumbum monastery was essentially emptied during this period, with the entire monastic community travelling from village to village, and sleeping in the outlying shrines. The only occasion when they returned during this time was to perform a single large *skangsol* on the 29th day of the 9th month at Kumbum. Called *Gustor* (“votive offering of the [2]9th day”), this rite was the equivalent of those larger monastic festivals held throughout Ladakh which are publicly marked by colourful masked dances or *cham* (Schrempf 1994; Cantwell 1992; Marko 1994; Hoetzlein 1991). Kumbum, however, never attracted the attention of the royal sponsorship necessary to buy the expensive silks and fineries preferred for

⁸⁷The image of the overturned teacups and dishes has also been referred to by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 135) as being a potent sign of malign divine intervention in the Tibetan context. Beyond obvious comments regarding such interference’s the household’s ability to provide hospitality, there are also more sinister cultural overtones: the dishes and teacups of the recently deceased are also turned over in the period following death.

the dances and thus did not perform them. The dances, though desirable for the benefit they procured for laity through seeing the various Buddhist deities (Cantwell 1995), were not regarded as essential by the monks, who emphasised the recitation of the relevant *mantra* and the ritual capacities of the *lopon* as being the most important part of the rite.⁸⁸ At the conclusion of the rite, a large *drugchuma* would be taken out of the monastery and burnt in a bonfire in Berig *yul-cha*, the deserted village section to the East of the monastery.

7.5.1- Sacred Space in Skangsol

In each case, the ritual action of *skangsol* was centred on the exorcising of harmful influences from defined territorial spaces. This was not a protective act, but one that purified a domain of influences whose presence was already felt to be established. However, although ritual activity was always centred on established shrine-rooms (whether monastic or household) the domain cleared was not coterminous with these established sacred spaces. Thus, for example, household *skangsol* performed following the harvest did not simply purify the household shrine-room - the *storma* was removed from the house *as a whole*. Similarly, the performance of household *skangsol* in each of the shrine-rooms of the village at the King's New Year was followed by the throwing of a *drugchuma* at the lowermost limit of the entire village.

This is more than coincidental: such territorial structuring of Buddhist rites occurred elsewhere. In January 1995, the Kumbum monks were called upon to act as representatives for the Gelukpa Order monasteries in Ladakh at the annual King's Festival of Dosmochey just before the Religious New Year in Leh. Performing *skangsol* in one of the lofty upper temples affiliated to the King's old palace, the monks (who had been supplemented by monks from Karsha and sTongde monasteries) carried the large *drugchuma* down through the town to the Polo ground, which marked the lower limit of the old town. Here, the *drugchuma* was cast into the fire (**Photo 7.2**). At the same time, representatives of the other main orders in Ladakh performed equivalent rites, with the Nyingmapa

⁸⁸This was not simply sour grapes: monks from Ladakhi monasteries which performed very elaborate dances also asserted the sufficiency of the recitation and meditation.

monks (who had been working in the next door temple) casting a large *dos* (thread cross) into their own fire fifteen feet away.

Thus, though centred on shrine-rooms as the axis of purification, the purified area itself encompassed the whole inhabited domain (the household, the village, the regional capital) of which that shrine-room was the "highest" part, with the *storma* or *drughuma* (if that was involved) being thrown at its "lowest" point. Here, therefore, the demarcation of sacred space that occurred in *skangsol* also served to define boundaries around the household and local area. In this sense, purification was felt to "flow downwards" from the shrine in the form of *chinlabs* (blessing, or "waves of magnificence"), which consecrated those things within the ken of the shrine.

In this way, *skangsol* recreates certain domains as bounded ritual spaces. Such a ritual act is in direct response to the perceived compromising of bounded units such as the household and *yul*. Thus, in the autumnal household *skangsol* rites, performance was felt by villagers to avert possible supernatural harm arising out of the violation of domestic space that occurred when the harvest was brought into the house. These violated domestic boundaries needed restoring if householders were to maintain symbolic control of household processes such as hospitality, and the *skangsol* rite was felt to fulfil this function.⁸⁹ As Day notes,

Now that the crops have been stored and all sins excluded, the house is shored up from the inside and evil is excluded. Exorcistic ritual of all kinds is generally restricted to the winter when crops and *lu* [water spirits involved in the processes of fertility] cannot be damaged. (Day 1989: 128).

It is not clear whether Day's assertion can also be applied to the performance of the large Gustor *skangsol* at the monastery. Certainly, just as the households had gathered in the potentially compromising harvest, so had the monastery. Monastic rents and interest payments (usually due in barley) were annually collected after harvest but prior to the performance of household *skangsol*. Also, in a manner similar to household *skangsol*, the *storma* from Gustor was not taken to the bottom of the village

⁸⁹This argument very much follows Favret-Saada's discussion of the role "unbewitching" plays in symbolically reconstructing the communal agency of domestic domains (Favret-Saada 1989).

but deposited in the deserted Berig village section to the direct East of the monastery. It is feasible therefore that just as household *skangsol* is performed ritually to “shore up” the boundaries of particular households following harvest, so the monastic Gustor is used to shore up the symbolic boundaries of the monastery itself after receiving the annual harvest.⁹⁰

Whether or not this is so, the purification that occurs in *skangsol* seemed to be unequivocally aimed at the symbolic re-organisation of particular spaces, rather than the simple existence of polluted or impure substances. Although the initial problem was related to the negative moral act of actually harvesting the crop, it was its physical movement to the household that was so potentially dangerous.

Monks and villagers referred to the autumn visits of monks to the outlying temples and villages of the Lingshed area as *dulja* (“subduing”), and the ritual process of taming and separating chthonic forces from religious forces, establishing each in their place, shares much of the imagery of the mandala construction - the exclusive creation of a religious domain, around which chthonic forces are tamed by the “dagger” of religion. Indeed, in monasteries where the large *skangsol* was elaborated by ritual dances called *cham* (which includes many of Kumbum’s sister monasteries in Ladakh and Zangskar), the distinction between the mandala as a ritual device and the activities of the Dharma Protectors is collapsed entirely (Schrempf 1994), when the dancers, dressed as *choskyong*, summon the *dra’o* or “enemy” into a small figurine at the centre of the dance circle. This figurine is itself trapped in a red triangular box, very similar in motif and function to the triangular supports into which the ritual daggers surrounding the mandala are traditionally plunged. Sharing the same fate, the *dra’o* at the heart of the *cham* dance is stabbed and dissected by a variety of similar weapons (including *p’urbu*), and its remains thrown into the fire in advance of the arrival of the *drugchuma*.

7.5.2 - Sacred Time?

⁹⁰This attractively total argument is far from water-tight: Karsha monastery, for example, holds its annual Gustor at some point around July (a month before harvest).

However, the analysis of *skangsol* is not complete without a consideration of its temporal placement within the year, and within people's lives. As we have seen, *skangsol* was routinely performed as a manner of purifying domains. In certain crucial cases, this was done in preparation for certain events or acts. Most obviously, it was performed to herald the new year, and to exorcise negative influences that had compromised the previous year. However, individual performances of *skangsol* were also requested episodically to mark the inauguration of important or potentially dangerous enterprises - such as pilgrimages and trading journeys or the founding of organisations and business agreements - that required as little lingering 'baggage' as possible. Thus, journeys down the frozen Zangskar Gorge in the winter - regarded as particularly hazardous - were almost always occasions for sponsoring a preliminary *skangsol*. Whilst making the journey along the frozen Zangskar gorge in early 1994, a trading party of my acquaintance were bedevilled by a series of mishaps and arguments which, whilst trivial in themselves, eventually came to endanger the entire group. Discussing this some time after the event, two villagers from Lingshed commented that one of the party, through the recent misuse of wealth in Zangskar, had caused some jealousy in the town of Padum. In their rush to complete their journey, they had neglected to sponsor a *skangsol* prior to departure. The villagers felt that the nature of the mishaps they suffered demonstrated that the spirits associated with the animosity caused in Padum had followed them up the gorge to cause trouble.

But if this understanding of *skangsol* as a means to ensure good beginnings informs much of its use, the converse is also true. The separation effected by *skangsol* was felt to be potentially detrimental to a whole variety of factors conducive to ordinary life. In particular, whilst *skangsol* was felt to be crucial to the continued maintenance of the household following its compromise as a bounded entity during the harvest months, that very compromise was itself felt to be indispensable. The ordinary processes of fertility associated with the household were closely linked to the activities of the *lu* water spirits, who ensured productivity. These very water spirits would be harmed or killed by *skangsol*, and therefore monks felt that ideally at least, the rite should be avoided during the summer months, when the *lu* were awake and mobile.

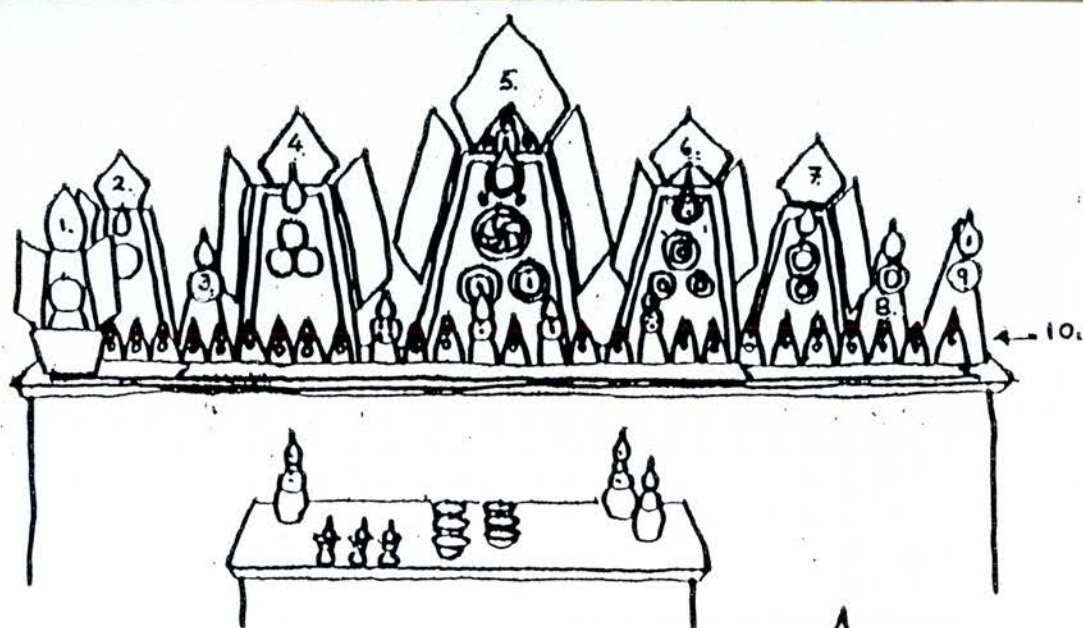
Only once the winter had come, and the *lu* “were asleep” could the rite be safely performed.

Therefore, we cannot assume that the construction of organised sacred space associated with *skangsol* is by necessity an ‘absolute good’, to be desired at all times by all Buddhists in Lingshed. By extension, its performance cannot simply be a vehicle for those values and beliefs ‘held’ absolutely at all times and places, by Buddhists. Rather, *skangsol* was a strategic symbolic action which fitted into place with other symbolically-bounded actions - such as agricultural production - as part of a series of temporal and territorial structures (the household, the *yul*, and the agricultural and religious years) which themselves served to structure social life.

Such an assertion should not be taken to mean that the rite has no Buddhological content or that its purpose was purely instrumental in the sense of being unrelated to the personal structure of Buddhists’ spiritual disciplines. Instead, emphasis on the territorial purification of Buddhist sites hid a more subtle narrative about the mind as a sacred space. To examine this in greater detail, I would like to turn to the complex relations that link the performance of *skangsol* to those that pay for it - the ritual sponsors.

Chapter 8:

Sponsorship and Benefit in Skangsol



Drugchuma
(red)



yugu
(red)



zhi dag
(white)



wangpa'i m. tog

Key

1. Dragpo Zhalzas
2. Chosgyal
3. Gonkar
4. Gonbo
5. Yamāntaka

6. Palden Lhamo
7. Zhal Zhi
8. Nam Sras
9. Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo/
Shar Chyogs
10. Lha Sunchu

Photo 8.1 (above): Skangsol offerings at Smonlam Chenmo, 1994.

Fig. 8.1 (below): Allocation of offerings by divinity, including drugchuma, yugu, zhi dag chodpa and wangpa'i m. tog.

8.1 - *Skangsol and the Buddhist Practitioner*

In Chapter 6, we examined briefly the metaphor of the tantric practitioner as *lhakhang*, or shrine-room, to the tutelary deity. The salience of the consecrated shrine-room as a metaphor for embodied religious practice similarly informed the structure of *skangsol*, which, unlike other rites, had to be performed in an established *lhakhang*. This semantic relationship between the shrine-room and the practitioner's religious identity was more than a complex doctrine associated with purely tantric practice. During teachings on everyday ritual practice (tantric or otherwise) it was commonplace to hear advice that the shrine-room should always be brushed clean prior to meditation, and that such an act was not simply hygienic, but representative of cleaning the mind of obstructive influences prior to religious practice (see also Dalai Lama 1996).

The correspondence between temple and tantric practitioner is thus more than simply a pleasing philosophical elaboration: it is an understanding with structural consequences. Just like the *ts'ogs* divine feast discussed in the previous chapter, *skangsol* was not simply performed by monks, with passive laity watching gratefully from the sidelines. Rather it had certain structural features which fed into the lay domain, regardless of their physical or liturgical involvement. In its most obvious form, the features of such involvement can be traced in the ritual relations between the technical performance of *skangsol* and those people who have requested and paid for its performance, the *zhindag*, or "sponsors".

8.2 - *Sponsorship and Offering*

In February 1994, soon after my arrival in Lingshed, I had the first of several opportunities to act as ritual sponsor at the monastery. The *skangsol* to mark the religious New Year was imminent, and the *nyerpa* for the rite, Tsewang Jorgyas, called upon Karma and me late the previous evening to request us to be sponsors. The rite began the annual *Smonlam Chenmo* Prayer Festival, and therefore required more than the average amount of sponsorship to fund: in this case, three sponsors were being sought simply for the next day's rites. Although I initially worried that my only contribution could be financial in the strictest sense of the word, this proved to be not only unproblematic, but a welcome opportunity for

Tsewang's family to convert household produce into cash, a not un-lucrative deal which formed much of the essential business of being a *nyerpa*. Agreeing on a final donation, Karma and I were immediately presented with prayer scarves, draped around our necks as a sign not simply of respect, but of a clinched deal.⁹¹

Preparations for the New Year *skangsol* had begun two days previously, with monks labouring away in the freezing winter air to produce the large offering cakes and *storma* necessary for the rite. By the time Karma and I arrived at the *dukhang* the next day, the prayer hall was full of monks, and the central aisle decked with elaborate and colourful offerings (Photo 8.1 and Fig 8.1). Careful examination of these offerings and their meanings, during the rite itself and during the months that followed, illuminated much of the relationship between sponsor and ritual.

The central table contained the most elaborate offerings. There were eight main *storma*, which in this case were not to be expelled, but rather were to be presented as temporary 'bodies' for Yamāntaka and the various *choskyong* during the course of the rite:

i) The largest, central offering cake was to Yamāntaka as "chief" of the Dharma Protectors. Twenty-eight smaller *storma* were lined up in front of the main cakes to represent his retinue.

ii) A *storma* was also prepared for each major supraworldly Dharma Protector.

iii) The two worldly protectors - Sangwa'i Zhin Chenpo and Shar Chyogs - were presented a single white offering cake.

iv) In front of all of these was placed an elaborately decorated red wall (L. *chaks ri* - "iron mountain"), covered in butter-sculpted skulls, which, monks told me, acted like a 'house' for the divinities.⁹²

⁹¹In the months to come, I was to grow to understand that there is nothing as financially dangerous for a layman as a monk bearing prayer-scarves.

⁹² Nebesky-Wojkowitz refers to a similarly-named mountain near Lhasa which protected the city from the posthumous magical influence of the

On a table next to these main offering cakes were arranged several further of offering. These were too complex to discuss in entirety here,⁹³ but their more prominent elements demonstrated much of the way in which the identity of the offerer - on whose behalf the rite is being performed - is symbolically represented within the rite itself. Prominent amongst them was the complex *wangpa'i metog* ("flower of the senses"), an offering of each of the senses of the practitioner to the Dharma Protector Gombo. This offering, made once again from dyed flour, is shaped and painted like an upturned skull, with each of the sense-organs arranged within like flowers in a bowl.

Next to this, a further set of offerings had been laid out on a tray (**Photo. 8.2 and Fig. 8.1**). This involved three kinds of offering:

- i) *drugchuma*: three conical red offering cakes, in this case about seven inches high;
- ii) *yugu*: flat red triangles likened by the monks to small *drugchuma* in their function; and
- iii) *zhidag chodpa*: uncoloured - or "white" - triangular offerings to local spirits.

Amongst these offerings, the *drugchuma* and *yugu* were, the monks explained, for the benefit of sponsors, and were to be thrown out later as part of the general expulsion of obstructive influences. In this way, offerings were more than simply a gift: in examples such as the "flower of the senses" or the return of polluted food in *ts'ogs*, they very explicitly represented many of the qualities of the offerer.

As I was a solo sponsor, many of the duties normally undertaken by the sponsor's household were taken over by the monks, and I had time and space to sit around asking questions. A sponsor's job was usually much more busy than this: generally, they had to provide both the basic materials

anti-Buddhist king Glandharma, for which it was propitiated during the Lhasa *Smonlam Chenmo* (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 482).

⁹³See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993: 343-404); Beyer (1973: 143) for fuller descriptions.

to be used up during rites (flour and butter for offering cakes, incense, butter and wicks for the butter candles) plus tea and meals for each of the monks and any laity that came to the monastery to attend, as well as a small cash donation for each monk. Certainly, few had the time actually to sit in and observe the rites they sponsored, much less participate in a liturgical way.

Rather, the sponsor's actual (rather than cognitive) involvement in rites beyond their productive effort - an effort whose symbolic importance in itself cannot be ignored - was focussed through two central ritual acts: prostration and the receipt of a *srung-skud*, or "protective thread".

8.3 - *Supplication and Blessing*

Earlier (3.5), we saw how prostration (L. *chyak p'ulches* - "to offer hands") meant far more than simply bowing down, involving also certain kinds of meditative and intentional disposition. When sponsoring rites, it involved far more even than this. After the *drugchuma* and *yugu* were 'expelled' from the prayer hall - carried out on a tray by a young monk, and deposited on a piece of empty land to the East of the monastery - the *nyerpa* Tsewang Jorgyas entered the monastic kitchens where I was drinking tea, handed me a clutch of burning incense sticks and told me it was time to make prostrations before the assembly of monks. Accompanying the Disciplinary Officer to the prayer hall, we entered and made the customary three prostrations at the lowest end of the central aisle. We then circumambulated the hall, each of us brandishing the incense sticks at the feet of each of the monks and all of the statues, *storma* and the incarnate's throne.

I returned to my earlier seat at the bottom of the line of monks, and the Disciplinary Officer then stood in the central aisle to make intercessions on my behalf to the *umdzat* and *lopon*. In response, the *lopon* briefly performed *sngowa* ("dedication") on behalf of me and my family, blessing a small green blessing-ribbon with mantras and wrapping it in a ceremonial scarf. This was passed down to Tsewang Jorgyas, who placed it over my shoulders. The monks clapped, and Tsewang led me back to the kitchen.

The blessing-ribbon which had been passed to me was one of many that had been consecrated earlier in the proceedings, and was a general feature of sponsoring any rite, as well as occasions of visits to high *lamas*.

The *srung-skud* was felt to have practical protective powers, and to be especially effective for those prone to attack by spirits and particularly by possessing witches (L. *bamo*). Following receipt of my *srung-skud*, I asked Karma, who had since finished making his own prostrations, what the significance of the *srung-skud* was. He replied simply that it gave protection (L. *srungwa*) for the rest of the year. On this day, many laity came to the monastery to make prostrations: each of them were given *srung-skud*, and usually they would take them home with them, and tie them to their hats to protect themselves, or perhaps to their animals, to ward off sickness or attack:

When I was a boy, my father told me that there was one man who came to Lingshed *gompa* at New Year. When he left he took some *srung-skud* with him, but the snow was very deep and he dropped one in the village. This place, where he dropped the ribbon, was a place for *bamo*, where they meet at night. But because the *srung-skud* was there, they could not walk there. Many people saw this, because they knew who the *bamo* were.

The presentation of *srung-skud* to sponsors was therefore a potent symbol of personal protection. However, if we read by all this that the sponsors offer themselves to deities simply in return for their protection, then we are forced against an ambiguity as to by whom exactly sponsors are being protected. As Samuel notes, interpreting tutelary deities (such as Yamāntaka) as being to a certain extent inseparable from the essential identity of the practitioner (or for that matter sponsor) “is not some kind of poetic statement, but a simple description” (Samuel 1993a: 247), a statement of how not simply an elite monastic contingent, but the general run of Tibetan Buddhists, view and act towards *yidam* figures (1993a: 248). Furthermore, as emanations of the central tutelary deity, a firm distinction between Dharma Protector and participant is present only on certain levels of articulation. Discussing the propitiation of Dharma Protectors amongst the Nyingmapa monks of Rewalsar, Cantwell argues that too heavy an emphasis on reciprocity is misplaced here, since it is the act of giving up attachment to the objects offered that confers the protection, rather than

any reciprocal obligation by an externally distinct divinity (Cantwell 1989: 148).⁹⁴

Certainly, we must be extremely wary of assuming any direct reciprocity between economic offering and divine protection, channelled through the mechanical act of passing the *srung-skud*. During the public throwing of the *drugchuma* at Dosmochey in Leh, for example, members of the assembled crowd took the opportunity to throw coins or rupee notes on to the base of the *drugchuma*, presenting themselves as subsidiary sponsors. No *srung-skud* were returned, but the act itself was felt to confer some form of protection. Conversely, in Lingshed *srung-skud* were handed out at New Year not simply to those that sponsored the rites, but also to those that came to offer prostrations and respect at the main prayer hall.

Indeed, monks were very strict in dictating that they were only given after prostrations were made, to the assembly of monks, the tutelary *yidam*, or to the *lama* one was visiting. But prostration is more than simply an act of supplication: it contains elements of a demand, also, for teachings, blessing, and protection. It implies not a simple statement of static hierarchy, but a dynamic relationship of responsibility and allegiance, an active 'turning-towards' on the part of sponsors, whose reality was primarily cognitive.⁹⁵

8.4 - Doing Faith

The dependence of ritual activity on a certain mental orientation towards it was constantly stressed by both lay and monk informants. All that I asked insisted that the performance of rites by another is of no intrinsic value unless one has established a basis of *dadpa* ("faith" or "trust") in the performance or the performer. If a monk were a drunkard and a sham, then his performance of prayers would still be effective for those who continue to place their faith in him, although it may be no good

⁹⁴Cantwell distinguishes here between enlightened protectors (L. *gombo*) and worldly protectors (L. *srungma*), the latter of whom could, in her view, be more adequately described as being in a reciprocal relationship with the practitioner.

⁹⁵Monks explained that physical prostration itself was not crucial, but certainly beneficial. For those that were ill or unable to perform the rigors of physical prostration, a certain mental attitude was felt to be entirely sufficient.

to him. Conversely, if one has no *dadpa*, then even the Buddha himself would be of no benefit.

The uniformity with which the laity and monks of Lingshed discussed this matter suggested strongly that the issue was one on which they had all recently received teachings, but the point has certainly been more widely claimed of Tibetan Buddhist religious culture. Eckvall (1964) notes the reasonably famous tale of the old woman who demanded of her son that he bring back a relic of the Buddha from his pilgrimage to India, claiming that she would commit suicide if he failed her. The son quickly forgot and only remembered as he was returning home. Fearing his mother would kill herself, he tore a tooth from the carcass of a dog lying beside the road, cleaned it and wrapped it in silk. Taking it to his mother, he declared that it was the tooth of the Buddha. Overjoyed, the mother placed it on her altar and worshipped it fervently every day. As the years passed, the woman received many spiritual realisations as a result of her religious practice, and many miracles were witnessed in the tooth's presence.

This emphasis on the faith of the receiver of benefit appears so central to people's understanding of ritual practice that one can reasonably ask why there is such an emphasis on elaborate ritual practices when what they do not represent that which is truly crucial to religious activity. Stein (1972: 175-6) relates the tale of the Fifth Dalai Lama who, looking out from his palace, saw the Goddess Dolma circumambulating the palace. Ordering an inquiry, he discovered that the presence of the deity coincided with the movements of an old man, who was immediately summoned to the palace. Questioned as to his knowledge of the matter, the old man said that he knew nothing of the vision, but had recited a text devoted to the goddess for forty years. When he recited it to the Dalai Lama, he was found to have got it wrong, and was instructed to learn it properly. Having learnt the correct version, however, the vision of Dolma did not return. Realising that the old man's faith, channelled through the faulty recitation, was placed on the goddess herself rather than simply getting the recitation right, the Dalai Lama authorised the old man to return to the original, faulty version. As Stein concludes:

No matter what focus is used, the concentration that results from faith, not only creates and brings before us faith's object, the deity, but generates the beneficent power of blessing which automatically ensues. (Stein 1972: 175)

It is obvious from the story of the blessing-ribbon and the *bamo* in Lingshed that an overwhelming emphasis on *dadpa* as a purely mental function would be misplaced. Similarly, understanding it as a purely static thing - something that one either has or does not have - would also miss the point. Faith was not something that one simply “had”; rather, it was something that was “done” (L. *ja*) in reference to specific events and objects. Although symbolic in form, the ‘doing’ of faith was never simply a static belief about the world and therefore expressive, but rather an essentially instrumental ritual act within the world (see Gellner 1990).

8.5 - Assessing Ritual Exegesis

This kind of discourse about ritual activity, which located much of its interpretation within the extant, lived-in world, suffused much of people’s understanding of the destructive side of *skangsol*. Villagers and monks all spoke of the true power of the *lopon*’s ritual authority (L. *las rung*) as being invested in the act of the throwing out of the *drugchuma*, and especially its destruction in the fire. The throwing of the *drugchuma*, they would cry in unison, led to “the end of demons and malevolent spirits!” (L. *lhandre dud tsar*), whose bodies would be burnt in the fire.

This was certainly not an uncommon reaction, being rather a stock phrase that I heard used both in Lingshed and Leh, but it was also not the only kind of explanation, nor were different views on the matter regarded as incompatible. Karma, for example, declared that although it was true that the *drugchuma* destroyed demons, one should think that it removed all obstacles (L. *barchad*), particularly those to religious practice. In the capital, *gyelong* Thubstan Paldan, a local scholar and writer on Ladakhi religious affairs and particularly Gelukpa rites, had less time for such interpretations, declaring that:

This is a very low explanation. In *skangsol*, we say that the *drugchuma* is the weapon of Yamāntaka, and that it destroys the ego. The ego, which we call *rang*, is very bad and causes us much pain. Therefore it is better to destroy it.

This ego was described later by *gyelong* Paldan in terms of the Three Poisons (L. *duk-sum*) of ignorance, hatred and attachment, the destruction

of which led to enlightenment. It is tempting to distinguish such statements according to the philosophical sophistication they exhibit, or for that matter in the degree to which they can be regarded as “truly Buddhist”. As others have argued, such a debate is futile at best and meaningless at worst (Spencer 1990b: 131; Gombrich 1971: 24; Gellner 1990), arguably based on a certain presupposition of the “superstition” of demonology and instrumental religion. Diversity in exegetical standpoints is far from uncommon in Tibetan Buddhist traditions (Samuel 1993a: 173), nor is it something that monks and laity I spoke to found at all troublesome. One villager from Nyeraks explained:

Of course there are different ways of explaining rites [L. *shad ts'ul* - “methods of explanation”]. As ordinary people, we do not have the understanding that monks or *lamas* have. They meditate a lot, and so their understanding of things is different.

This is an important point: many of the philosophically subtle explanations that often accompanied tantric rites did not appear to be secret in the sense of unknown to laity, or indeed systematically kept from them. Indeed, they were regularly asserted at public teachings given by high *lamas*, and many laity referred to such arguments when questioned. They often commented, however, that although they could follow the arguments, they did not *understand* them. Here “understand” seemed to refer to a far more experiential awareness of the teachings, a ‘realisation’ within their own experience, which they had not at that stage attained (see also Klein 1986: 115; Tucci 1980: 90), although they hoped to later, perhaps in other lifetimes. When they listened to the discourses of high *lamas*, it was to attain *lung*, a “handle” which acted like a seed to future realisation. They distinguished, in other words, between representational knowledge of what the doctrine as a literature contained, and operational knowledge of the truths it embodied. Of these two, the latter was regarded as not simply more important, but all that really counted in religious terms.

On my second day in Kumbum, I was sitting watching the monks recite morning prayers in the courtyard and scribbling diagrams about seating orders in my notebook. After a while, Karma sat down beside me, and passed me a ceremonial scarf: “If you wish to learn about the monastery, to be a good scholar,” he said “you must go to the head monk

and give prostrations, and this scarf as respect. Otherwise you will learn nothing." Months later, when discussing the ritual texts used during tantric rites, two senior monks found my attempt to translate their titles vaguely amusing: "How can you translate them when you do not understand them?" they asked. "Unless you have received empowerment from the correct *lama*, you will never understand them."

For monks and laity, the ability to talk about ritual practice was explicitly a function of one's personal relationship with them, and with the teachers that conferred them. Talking about rites automatically assumed a certain relationship with them, and therefore represented an exegetical extension of the ritual practice itself, rather than something separate from it. Religious practice only meant something through and in terms of its meaning to particular people at particular moments. Whilst questioning informants, my recurrent tendency to abstract meanings into general patterns caused me systematically to miss the point: that there was no uncoverable "heart of doctrine" about the world, no strived-towards valid world picture of Tibetan Buddhism.

Chapter 9:

Textual Traditions and the Reading of Religion

Overleaf:

Photo 9.1 (above) : Annual reading of the *Kanjur* and *Tenjur* in Kumbum monastery courtyard.

Photo 9.2 (below): *Chosil*, the reading of the *Kanjur* on the roof of a Lingshed *khangchen* household.



Overleaf:

Photo 9.3 (above) : Tea stop and *Kanjur* reading during *Bumskor* in Lingshed.

Photo 9.4 (below): Monks and laity carry texts round Lingshed, here passing the *lhat'o* to the local protector Shar Chyogs (centre).



9.1 - Literacy and the Gelukpa Tradition

In the previous chapter, we saw that relating ritual practice to any indigenous corpus of 'beliefs' attributable to Buddhism is made problematic by a complex relationship between the creation of knowledge and the flow of ritual respect. Relating the literate traditions of Buddhism to observed ethnographic practice has always produced discrepancies when based on simple comparison between the two (Gombrich 1971; Ramble 1990). Schopen (1991), discussing archaeological accounts of Indian Buddhism, has argued forcefully that studies have been undermined by a tendency not simply to assert, but to enforce, a paradigmatic assumption that canonical texts must represent, or at least act as the basis for, actual practice. Tambiah has criticised similar representations in anthropological accounts, arguing that over-concern with the nature of "pristine" Buddhism will almost invariably prejudices alternative forms as "aberrant" (1970: 95-96), depending on a largely arbitrary construction of a 'literary tradition'. Rather he argued that

Rituals clothe abstract philosophical ideas. The underlying rationale of ritual is that the ideas so presented and made concrete can be manipulated realistically in an instrumental mode. (Tambiah 1970: 337)

Nonetheless, the central position of "a literate tradition" in peripheral Tibetan Buddhist communities has been widely attested to (Mumford 1989; Grimshaw 1983; Holmberg 1989: 35-6; Dollfus 1989). However, as Tambiah argues, they are not simply presented as "doctrine" but clothed in a distinctive environment of ritual activity. This 'environment' does not simply add certain kind of ceremonial, but also asserts a highly restrictive method for the transmission of all religious material from teacher to student. Villagers explained that the transmission of religious material occurred in one of three ways:

i) *Trid*: to discuss, meditate upon, or explain simple doctrinal assertions, or the explanation of certain aspects of Buddhist philosophy, ethics, or practice, then all that is necessary is for one to have heard it somewhere, and for that to be a reasonably reliable source.

ii) *Lung*: to perform a particular set of prayers (of any kind) requires that those prayers were taught to you during a specific set of teachings by a religious superior who themselves received it from a source which leads back to the word of the Buddha. Generally, it applies to the exact recitation of a text for study or set of prayers: the meaning of the words is often unimportant, as long as it was actually heard.

iii) *Wang*: as we saw in Ch. 6, prior to the practice of tantra, the student must be authorised to perform practices relating to tutelary divinities. This is more than simple permission, but the authorised transference of a certain kind of tutelary relationship, from the *lama* to the student.

In this manner, the authoritative transmission of Buddhist teachings, however formulated, depended for the most part on a face-to-face (although not necessarily one-to-one) encounter between teacher and student, in which the act of transference is focussed on a spoken act which conveys permission (L. *lung*). In many cases, important texts were heavily dependent on this oral mode of transmission, depending on a commentary by the teacher, of which the text itself acted as a kind of mnemonic. In the monastery, senior monks would recite highly condensed texts to their younger charges, and then send them off to learn them syllable by syllable, along with the lineage of those that transmitted the texts to the teacher, all the way back to its enlightened source. It might be years later that the student monk actually received an explanatory commentary. Thus the meaning of the text became firmly linked to the context of teaching, and to the teacher that taught it. Texts thus represented not so much a source of religious information, as a device which condensed a whole series of notions of ritual respect (see also Holmberg 1989:183-5; Ekvall 1964: 114), acting as a support for a form of teaching tradition which was itself primarily oral.

This does not mean that texts themselves were of no value beyond their role as props. The recitation of texts replicated the permission-recitation of an individual's teacher, an avenue both to his authority and ultimately to the authority of the Buddhas (see Gyatso, J. 1992). Sets of texts were thus ideally ritually 'consecrated' (L. *rab gnas* - "firmly established") to empower them as one of the 'speech' aspect of the three types of "support" (L. *rten*) for the Buddha's speech (L. *sung*), and were

subsequently treated as such. Once recited, consecrated texts were carefully wrapped in saffron-dyed sheets and touched to the crown of the reciter as a gesture of respect. Texts concerning Buddhist matters should never be placed on the floor, or be stepped over, and should never have individual items (such as monks' rosaries or other ritual implements) placed on top of them.

In two senses, therefore, religious texts (L. *specha* - a "fragment of the exemplary") seem to embody both a diachronous and a synchronous transmission of divine manifestation: the untarnished transmission of teachings and ritual empowerment from a divine past; and the ability which arises out of that to manifest the 'speech' of the Buddha in the spoken acts of the here and now.

9.2 - *Chosil*, "The Reading of Religion"

The recitation of religious texts also had a more everyday ritual dimension beyond monastic instruction. *Chosil* (literally "the reading of religion") was a common event in Lingshed. Sponsors would often request specific texts to be recited, or (on larger household occasions) for the whole *Kanjur* collection to be recited. Although occasionally standing alone as a ritual form, *chosil* was most often performed in conjunction with other rites, such as *skangsol*. In Lingshed, it was performed on three instituted occasions (**Appendix A**):

i) At the annual two week *Kanjur* and *Tenjur* reading held in the monastic courtyard between the 15th and the 30th of the fifth month (**Photo 9.1**). During this time, the entire available set of texts would be recited, and monks absent without good reason were fined.

ii) A full day's *chosil* would be performed at the majority of *khangchen* during the third and fourth months, at the beginning of the growing season (**Photo 9.2**).

iii) Along with *skangsol* (**Chs. 7 & 8**), a half day *chosil* would be performed during the post-harvest autumnal visit (L. *dulja*) by monks to all the *khangchen* in the region.

At household *chosil*, the assembly of monks would usually recite the texts on the roof or in the household shrine-room, each simultaneously reading out different pages. As the sponsors, household members served food and tea, spending most of their time cooking in the kitchen below. The reading of the texts was not seen as being of specific intellectual benefit to the members of the household: rather, it placed the household as a corporate group in a hierarchical relationship with the speech of the Buddha as a *spoken event* as presented by the monastic community. This relationship between *chosil* and its sponsors was therefore more than simply one between a group of listeners and a certain corpus of linguistic material: rather it condensed a series of understandings about religious lineage, teaching and spiritual authority, into a single action.

Householders described the benefits derived from *chosil* in terms of blessings (L. *chinlabs*) that flowed down from the recitation to the house as a corporate entity rather than as a number of individual listeners. For household *chosil*, the minimal requirement was the recitation of sections of the *Kanjur* at the central house: from here blessing was felt to pass naturally to offshoot houses in the household estate. Households were thus the receivers of blessings through placing themselves “lower” than an event which manifests divinity through the speech act, a height relationship constituted not simply through its physical presence at the top of the house, but through the household’s sponsorship of the rite.

9.3 - *Bumskor*

Chosil therefore represented a communalisation of traditions concerning the teaching of Buddhist practices: the content of Buddhist texts was placed in this circumstance in a hierarchical relationship with the household estate as a corporate unit.

This was not always the case. In certain circumstances, the relationship between territorial domains and *chos* (the Buddhist Doctrine) as a ritual item was more obvious. Prominent amongst these was *Bumskor*, where the fields were circumambulated by the villagers and monks carrying the numerous bulky texts of the *Kanjur*.⁹⁶

⁹⁶The following was taken from notes of *Bumskor* from the 30th May, 1994.

On the 20th day of the fifth month - usually about a month after the performance of *saka*, the ritual "first ploughing" of the fields - some 15-20 laity arrived at the monastery at about 9am to collect the *Kanjur* and *Tenjur* from their respective shrine-rooms. These were predominantly men, younger unmarried women and children of either sex. Monks and laity then departed the monastery, holding the texts on their heads or their shoulders, to process round the fields. At the head of this procession, a small statue of the Buddha Śākyamuni was carried, preceded by two monks playing *gyaling* (clarinet-like instruments used to herald the arrival of important figures). Clothed in a small yellow robe, the 6" high statue was placed, alongside the *lopon's dorje*, on a mixing bowl filled with a layer of barley grains. Also carried at the head of the procession was a framed photograph of the Dalai Lama. These were followed by a variety of laity and younger monks carrying the large, wood-bound texts. Carriers were not specifically selected, with texts being passed around when carriers grew tired, but certain people - particularly adult married women - were not allowed to carry the texts. Those I asked (in this case, two men and a young nun) said that such an act would be *ts'okpo* - "unclean". The emphasis here was definitely on their role as married women: young women who were not married carried the texts without comment being made, as did a visiting nun.

The route round the village was a long one, taking all day to complete and visiting or passing through all the cultivated or inhabited areas of Lingshed village. This was punctuated every half hour by a stop at one of the *khangchen* charged with sponsoring the rite. This did not actually constitute a circuit as such, more an interlacing march throughout the village.⁹⁷ As the procession approached, married women from the village section lined up, burning incense and bowing their heads to have them touched by the texts as the procession went past. Arriving at the "prayer-site" (usually the circular area beside one of the main houses of the village section set aside for threshing), the monks assembled in rows, stacking the texts up on a prepared table and arranging offerings. Tea, beer and food were given out by the sponsors, and purificatory prayers (*L. trus*) and offerings were performed by the monks. Following this, sections of the

⁹⁷The route in 1994 was as follows (see Fig. 5.1): from the monastery, through Berig to Berber (tea-stop); through Shalan-Khor to Chog-Tse-Rag-Khor (tea-stop); to Yogos (tea-stop); to Khartse (tea-stop); to Daou (tea-stop); to Gyen-Khor (tea-stop); return to monastery.

Kanjur and *Tenjur* were recited, once again by monks, laymen and those children that could read. At the end of prayers, the texts and statue were gathered up and carried to the next site; once again, the married women of the area lined up to bow and receive blessings.

Bumskor was seen as explicitly relating to the success of the year's harvest, and specifically that of sponsoring households. From the perspective of the monks, we might note the comments of Lingshed's *umdzat*:

At *Bumskor*, the *lama's* clothes and the Buddha's Body-, Speech- and Mind-support are taken to be carried around the cultivated areas - fields and so forth. As for the reason why we do this, it is in order to bring the blessings from the Body, Speech and Mind to the harvest [and livestock], to augment the supply of water, and to bring peaceful happiness to the village. At *Bumskor*, it is customary for the monks to descend [from the monastery], and for the people of the village to ensure the provision of tea and [prayer-] food. At this time, all the monks generate bodhicitta, from which they provide purification (L. *trus*). Finally, they make prayers for the sponsor and auspicious offerings.

The *umdzat's* description highlights an important facet of relations with textuality in Lingshed. When discussing tantric material earlier (6.5), we saw how the evocation of tutelary deities - along with meditations on the selflessness or "emptiness" of phenomena, was hedged around with introductory prayers - going for refuge in the Three Jewels, generating the mind of enlightenment, making confession and presenting offerings - and concluding prayers and dedications (L. *sngowa*). The simple statement of the emptiness of phenomena - a central tenet of Buddhism - never stands alone as a bald statement of doctrine, but is 'constructed' within a ritual context.

The same appears to follow for the recitation of core texts: it was performed within a specific (indeed, almost identical) context of ritual practice. Even texts such as the biographies (L. *namt'ar*) of prominent religious figures began with a series of folios dedicated to preparatory prayers. In this manner, the recitation of Buddhist scripture or hagiography was structurally equivalent to meditation on emptiness or the evocation of tutelary deities, holding the same position in the ritual process. This should not surprise us: the recitation of religious texts was seen as the "speech" of

the Buddha, just as the cognition of emptiness was portrayed as the “wisdom” of the Buddha, and tutelary deities were the visualised “form” of the Buddha (6.2).

9.4 - Women’s Relationship to “Religion” (Chos):

But if recitation and the evocation of Buddhas were structurally equivalent, it would seem reasonable to suggest there might also be a sociological dimension to this equivalence. In previous chapters, we saw how the *lopon*’s annual meditation retreat on Yamāntaka was accompanied by an exclusion of all non-renounced females from the monastic precincts, an exclusion which continued throughout the year with reference to the section of the *dukhang* where the Yamāntaka statue was housed. Should married women break this stipulation, there was a danger they would be attacked by local spirits (L. *zhidag*), who would “bring the pollution out of them”.

It is worthy of some note that such *zhidag*, as the “lords” of local domains, included the *lu* water spirits and other numina are explicitly responsible for fertility. Conversely, married women who wanted children were known to visit Kumbum to make prostrations at the furthest end of the aisle. On the *Zhipa’i Chonga* celebrations of the Buddha’s enlightenment in particular - when the statue was open to view - such visits were said to have cured infertility.

This complex relationship between the ‘presence’ of Buddhahood and the agricultural and social ‘ground’ of fertility was replicated in *Bumskor*. The placing of the Buddha statue and the *lopon*’s *dorje* on the plate of barley grains presented the focus of a ritual act in which monastic authority was placed in a hierarchical and fertilising relationship with agricultural potential. The grain and fields were purified by the presence of the “mind of enlightenment” (L. *changchub kyi sems*), increasing their yield for the benefit of the village.

Similarly, we have also seen that married women did not carry the texts during *Bumskor* - indeed this was seen as unclean and potentially dangerous. Instead, they effected a relationship of symbolic submission, bowing their heads beneath the texts as they were brought to or taken from each prayer site, in order to receive blessing.

Thus, the fertility of women, whilst seen as impure (L. *ts'okpo*) and polluting to sources of religious power, was also ensured by maintaining respect for those sources: fertile women, like fields, were kept "below" religion in order to maintain their fertility. If this relationship was compromised, and 'fertile' women encroached into the realm of religion, their fertility could potentially turn against them. Here then, literacy and those other forms of manifest 'religion' (such as the tutelary deity) were maintained in an explicit relationship of dynamic exclusion and ascendancy over the 'low' aspects of local life, exemplified in a treatment of 'fertility' as a manifest concept. This was not however an antithetical relationship - a separation of the literate tradition from lay affairs - as authors such as Ortner (1978) might suggest: rather, its ascendancy over them ensured their very continuity.

Chapter 10:

Pollution Concerns in Lingshed

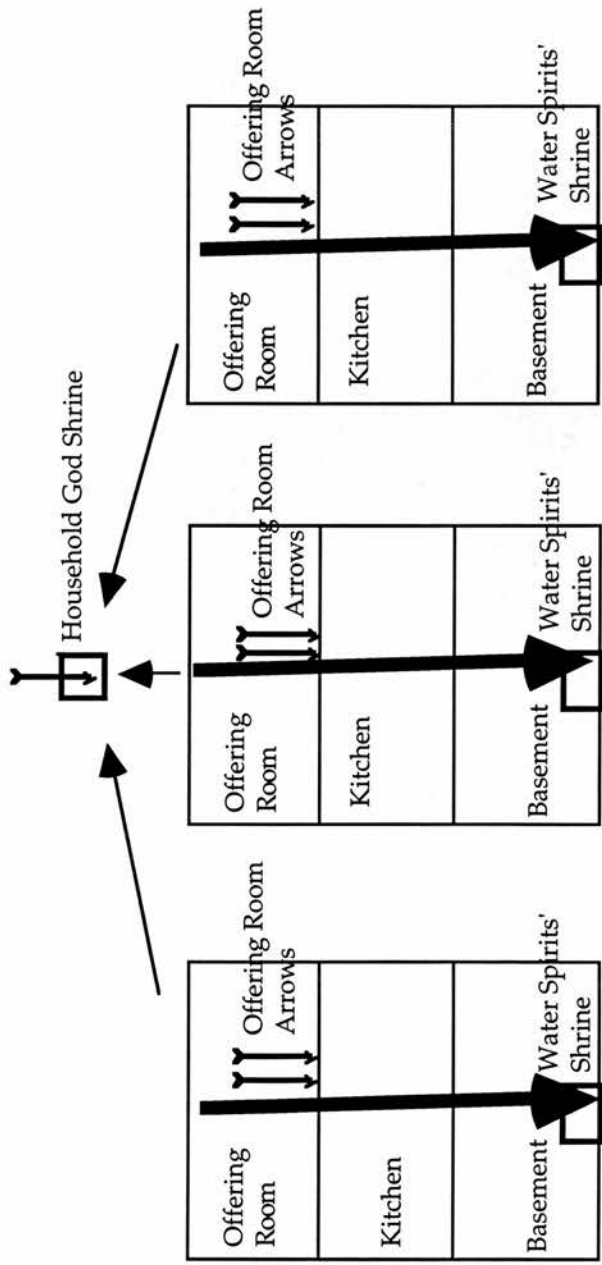


Fig. 10.1: House pillar as symbolic arrow linking offering room to water spirits shrine; household god shrine represents summation of single house conglomerates.

10.1 - Pollution and Karma

The role karma (L. *las-rgyu-das*) plays in indigenous Buddhist understandings of retribution and misfortune has maintained an imaginative dominance in Buddhist studies which, whilst controversial in the sense of its precise mechanisms, has rarely been rivalled by other indigenous models. As Lichter & Epstein (1983) have shown, however, alternative mechanisms of retribution and divine intervention are both meaningful and ethnographically important. Central amongst these was the notion of *dip*, a term which translates literally as “shade”, but which I will follow Lichter and Epstein in glossing as “pollution”. Pollution of any kind had negative consequences, from undermining the health of an afflicted individual through potentially fatal attacks by vengeful *lu* water spirits (a retribution which most often initially manifested itself as varying degrees of eye or skin infection or irritation), to large-scale communal afflictions such as earthquakes and avalanches.

Informants spoke of *dip* as an incorporeal substance which could neither be seen, smelt, nor felt, but whose presence was embodied rather than essential. Thus, although people often spoke of the mental repercussions of *dip* - stupidity, mental lethargy and so forth, it was viewed as adventitious, lacking the essential quality that karma had. Once manifest, *dip* took the form of a viscous brown poison (L. *tuk*). In either its manifest or non-manifest form, *dip* could be removed through certain kinds of ritual action by monks, villagers or local oracles, either to wash away (L. *trus*) or forcefully to remove pollution, which ameliorative methods will be discussed in the next chapter. In this chapter, I would like to look at pollution as a ritual process, an examination which will reveal crucial dimensions to the ritual treatment of divinity in the Lingshed context.

Although *dip* may at first sight appear to be a non-Buddhist form of retribution, monks at Kumbum discussed its workings with a certain professional care, remembering it as part of the syllabus of their monastic education. They themselves distinguished pollution from karma in certain crucial respects:

i) Karmic repercussion was a universal law which affected the lives of *all* sentient beings; whilst *dip* was purely extant within, and applied to, the human realms.

ii) The results of karma arose primarily out of the intention (L. *semspa*) of the individual and secondarily from their actions (L. *las*). Undesirable karmic results, for example, arose out of harmful intentions towards others. Without such an intention, no karmic fruit would be reaped. By comparison, pollution arose out of acts which could be either intentional or unintentional: thus one might not know that the place where one was urinating was close to a spring, but would still suffer the resultant *dip*.

iii) This propensity to suffer or enjoy the karmic fruits of one's activities was carried over from lifetime to lifetime, and indeed was the very basis of the process of re-birth. The repercussions of *dip*, however, were solely related to this immediate physical incarnation, and thus at death remained with the corpse. This final point was of some note, since *dip* was also felt to cause malign intervention by local gods and spirits: such attacks on particular individuals, monks assured me, would cease upon their death, and not continue in the next life.

Thus, for example, as Lichter and Epstein note, identifying the causes of a particular death was a paramount concern: if caused by karma, then many of its negative aspects related to the intentions of the deceased, and therefore would depart with him or her; if caused by *dip*, then the pollution might continue to affect those close to the deceased (particularly his or her immediate household). Such considerations were determined by the ritual capacities of local oracles and astrologers, who were regularly consulted on such matters.

This communal, shared aspect to pollution was readily admitted by those that I asked: it was a culture-specific phenomenon, which they knew varied from place to place and culture to culture. *Dip* arose, therefore, from more than simply the breaking of a particular set of rules, it seemed to act as a negative register of "how things were done" on a communal level. An example will help clarify what I mean: after (unthinkingly) polluting the communal stove in the monastic quarters one evening, I explained in my defence that the careful guarding of the purity of the stove was not a custom adhered to in my own country. With endless patience (but not a little irony) Karma quietly replied that if that was so, then there would be

no pollution...*in my country*. Here (alas), there still was *dip*, and it would affect all of us.

10.2 - *The Causes of Dip*

The fact that *dip* and karma were separable in the minds of informants does not mean that they were necessarily antithetical or unrelated approaches to misfortune. Geshe Changchub, for example, expressed the view that *dip* initially arose as a result of people's bad karma: although the immediate cause may have been unintentional, the fact that they unintentionally did things which caused pollution was the karmic repercussion of previous intentional malign acts (see also Lichter and Epstein 1983: 239). Indeed, as we will see later, rites given over to the purification of pollution were also seen as purifying accumulated negative karma. Pollution therefore had an intermediate status in Buddhist explanations of misfortune: in terms of the literate philosophical tradition of the Mahāyāna, it received little attention; but in terms of the everyday activities of monks as ritual performers, it was of signal importance.

Whilst establishing the diagnosis of *dip* lay within the hands of *khaspa* and oracles (5.3.1), most people were aware of the various types of event that caused it, from the mild pollution associated with everyday infractions of eating etiquette to the serious but unavoidable pollution that came with birth and death.

10.3.1 - *Pollution in Eating*

As one of the central activities through which the household as a corporate unit represents itself in the broader sphere of social life, hospitality was the very crucible of Tibetan and Ladakhi processes of social structuring (Ortner 1978: 61; Levine 1988: 104), encapsulating whole vistas of social meaning (Ortner 1978: 62-3). The provision of food acted as an integral register of the moral and physical health of a household, and hosts were under great social obligation to appear generous to a fault. As we saw earlier, everyday eating patterns were organised according to a hierarchical system of serving, which placed the guest higher than the host and which moved food outwards from the central hearth to the dishes of hierarchically ordered guests. This centrifugal movement passed from the

'head' (L. *go*) of the line of guests, to its 'seat' (L. *zhugs*), moving 'downwards' both socially and (since the highest guests had the thickest cushions) physically. Informants compared this downwards movement to the movement of blessing (L. *chinlabs*) during prayer rites (where blessing is visualised as a stream of light passing from the deity above to the supplicant below) or through the house during the recitation of scripture.

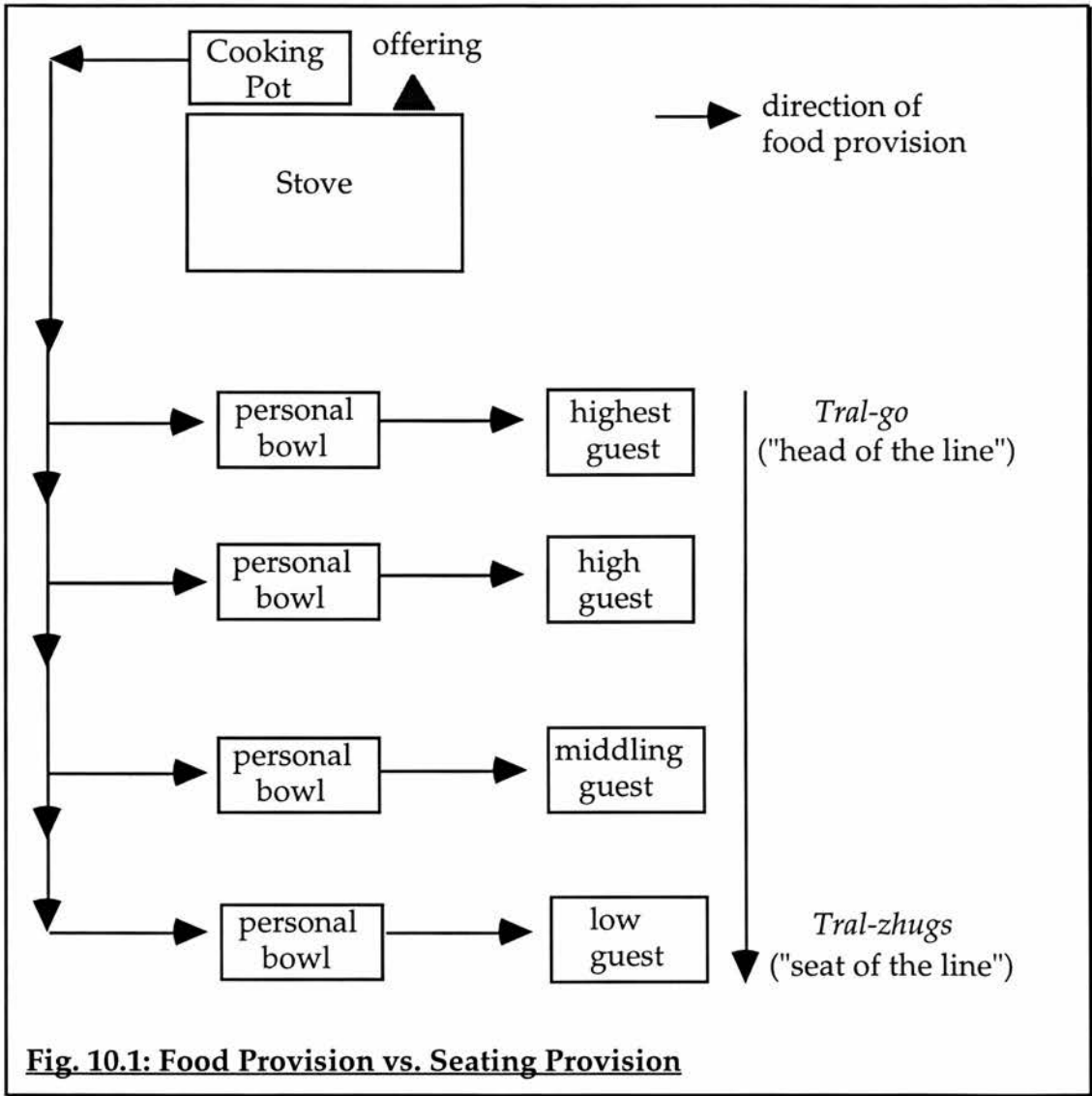


Fig. 10.1: Food Provision vs. Seating Provision

The communality of the central cooking pot thus fractured hierarchically into the individual differentiation of eaters and eating implements. These eaters were themselves divided and hierarchically

arranged, with the highest guests receiving the first portions of food.⁹⁸ Being bottom of the line was not in itself ritually problematic; what was important was the maintenance of correct order, lest it generated dangerous pollution. Conversely, extremely 'high' guests (such as an incarnate *lama*) would be provided with specially purified food - incarnates generally had their own cook - the remains of which would be regarded as a blessing, and therefore curative and purifying.

At the end of the normal provision of food was the actual process of eating, which was seen as irrevocably effecting the food with one's own 'physicality', especially in that saliva touched the food or serving implement. The return of such implements to the pot, or indeed passing it above the communal pot similarly polluted (L. *dip-choches* - 'making pollution') that communal food supply. Indeed, actions such as the passing of one's own cup over that of another was also regarded as contaminating the lower person's cup. Contaminating the hearth itself, either with saliva-touched food or with food already cooked by that stove, rendered it polluted, and requiring purification before it could be used again.

10.3.2 - *Pollution and Bodily Space*

This emphasis on the bodily presence of the guest as eater informed the entire hospitality process, leading to a constant re-organisation of seating orders, through the metaphor and moving index of the body. Above and beyond people occupying places at the "head" or the "seat" of the line, the formalisation of *zangs* (hesitancy, politeness) strategically oriented embodied actors within a bodily space which was constructed in terms of the bodies of other guests. When taking a seat, an ordinary guest would struggle along behind other seated guests (even if they were seated against the wall!) to show his or her comparative lowness. If this was impossible, they would crouch down as they passed in front of other guests. Once seated, a guest would pull in their feet in order not to point them at anyone or, worse, at the stove or any religious icons in the room, which would once again pollute those items and all associated with them.

⁹⁸Symbolically, the highest guest was not physically present, since as Buddhists, all guests would offer the "first mouthful" of food to the Buddha.

These axes of bodily space also interlaced with established structures of objective or architectural space: for example, it was a cause of mild pollution to point the soles of one's feet towards the 'upper' end of a room, or towards the hearth or a Buddha-statue, or to step over food or religious texts. Whilst discussing *dip*, one monk explained that it could even be caused by simply placing one's mattress on one's head. Therefore, it makes little sense to differentiate domains of pollution activity - such as 'food pollution' - since the various dimensions interact with one another according to a logic whose central focus is the body's movement within a malleable objective domain rather than the intrinsic structure of external space and objective taxonomies (see Douglas 1966; 1968). Through the simple process of re-orientating the elements of a room in which there was no *dip*, one could create it *ex nihil*.

10.3.3 - Assessing Everyday Pollution

As a result, the pollution created through the reversal of eating etiquette should not be regarded as an intrinsic thing, as part of a category of polluting objects, although it is surprisingly difficult to avoid such unthinking reifications (see for example Lichter and Epstein's list of polluting things: 1983: 242-244). But the ethnographic reality is much more subtle and complex. For example, saliva and personal bowls were not polluting in themselves, but rather polluting when misplaced - when they were passed in the wrong direction or moved in the wrong way - in a way reminiscent of Douglas's "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966). However, unlike Douglas's thesis of pollution as "category anomaly" (see also Leach 1964), such anomalous objects as polluted food are *not* simply intellectual conundrums which defy human attempts at categorisation: people know exactly how to act towards, and what to do with, polluted objects. Food affected by a person's saliva is designed to be digested by that person: therefore any communal food "polluted" by a specific person's saliva becomes "polluted" *only to others*, but not to the person whose saliva it is.

Similarly, pollution avoidance was not simply a domain of negative social control, wherein the concerns of wider society enforced themselves on the activities of the individual (Douglas 1968). If stoves and higher social actors were implicitly viewed as the source of purified food, and actors situated themselves to receive the maximum benefit from them, then

the prohibitions associated with pollution arose directly out of learning positive ways of doing things (see also Lambek 1992). Thus, since in all circumstances specific people are 'higher' than oneself, if one receives food after them one partakes to a certain extent in their greater purity. Hospitality arrangements for guests cannot therefore be viewed simply in terms of "the nearest to the stove is the best place" because *people* are also the sources of purity or impurity, a factor demonstrable in people's public displays of *zangs* or hesitancy, and the fact that a high *lama's* left-overs were regarded as blessings to normal monks and laity, and therefore shared out as widely as possible after he had eaten (see also 6.9). As a corollary, to confuse this order was to pollute the higher person with the properties of the lower person. People thus went to considerable effort to maintain established ranking, without any pronounced ambition to move 'up' on any particular occasion; the real concern was to avoid the taking of inappropriate places within that order, whether down or up.

Thus, pollution in an everyday context emerged as a logical consequence of the relocation of personal structures within an established social and spatial structure of sources, causing logical corollaries which confused social action. Placing one's used eating utensils in the communal bowl transforms that bowl into the source of one's own polluted saliva, only fit to be eaten by oneself and avoided by others.⁹⁹ Such actions were not therefore either *at odds* with established social values and architectural categories, nor beyond their explanatory capacities. Rather, they worked within the logic of social structuring, reconstituting the structure of space according to an established logic and pre-set 'sources'.

10.4.1 - Life Cycle Pollution

The most serious and culturally elaborate forms of pollution, however, were associated with certain moments in the life-cycle, most particularly:

i) birth (specifically the cutting of the umbilical cord); and

⁹⁹Conversely, defecating in a stream source transforms it into a source for one's own faeces, not even to be used by oneself.

ii) the death of married laity.

Such events were felt to produce severe pollution, which profoundly effected the ritual position of the households in which they occurred. Anyone present in a house at the time of a birth or death was polluted by the same *dip*, and those affected by it were not allowed to depart for fear of affecting those around them, or, more specifically, of affecting the social and chthonic environment around them. Polluted people had to be careful not to enter fields or cross streams, and were forbidden from entering shrine rooms or temples, or providing food to anyone (see also Dollfus 1989: 178), which actions would pollute others and potentially harm and inflame the anger of the quixotic water-spirits. Within the house, polluted householders could not serve food or enter the household shrine-room.

In general, then, serious pollution removed affected households from the normal round of hospitality and agricultural production, and, indeed, from most public gatherings. With certain exceptions, the house would go unvisited during this secluded period.

10.4.1 - Assessing Life-Cycle Pollution

At first sight, this more serious form of pollution is apparently unrelated to its everyday counterpart. However, a closer examination of the semantic context of birth and death pollution reveals otherwise.

The social and ritual form of life-cycle pollution was strongly linked to the structure of the corporate household as a reproductive unit, and therefore with the *khangchen* in each household estate. This is obvious in the case of childbirth, but also applied obliquely to death pollution: those members of the household who had effectively “renounced” the reproductive life did not produce death pollution. This included both monks and members of the laity who had been previously widowed (see also Prince Peter 1963: 382-3). Monks in particular had nothing to fear from the pollution generated, even if they themselves hailed from that household.

The association between life-cycle pollution and the reproductive structure of the household had several other correlates, the most important of the group of 2-10 household estates - called a *p'aspun* - with which the polluted household shared a *p'alha* or household god. The *p'alha* shrine,

which was the dominant focus of household pollution concerns (see also Lichter and Epstein 1983: 243), was to be found on the roof of the most senior house in the group (Fig. 5.2).

In cases of birth and death pollution, the dysfunction within the household was alleviated by help from *p'aspun* members, who performed those duties forbidden to householders, being immune to the effects of the pollution. However, their involvement in the reproductive cycle of member households extended beyond simple pollution concerns: during marriage the *p'aspun* must act either to choose a bride (this actually happens through a process of negotiation, but the *p'aspun* must be consulted) or, in certain cases, to provide a groom from amongst their ranks (Crook 1994b); the *p'aspun* were also responsible for much of the marriage preparation. Therefore, if we are fully to understand the logic of pollution concerns in Lingshed and other similar areas, we must look briefly at the constitution of the *p'aspun*. *P'aspun* affiliation was ideologically patrilineal, with members of the same *p'aspun* said to be *ruspa chigchig*, "of the same bone" - that is sharing the same patrilineal ancestor, with whom the *p'alha* is directly associated.¹⁰⁰ *P'aspun* membership occurred in one of two ways:

i) birth in one of the houses of a specific *p'aspun*: as with household membership, this conferred *p'aspun* status regardless of any traceable kin relationship to the household itself; and

ii) marriage into a specific *p'aspun*, with an in-marrying wife transferring allegiance to the *p'alha* of her marital estate (following which she was banned from the shrine-room of her natal *p'alha*).

¹⁰⁰A wide variance in the ritual practices of individual *p'aspun* groups - especially between groups in Zangskar and Ladakh - has been recorded. Nevertheless, a basic body of attitudes and ritual activity can be identified (Brauen 1980a). The patrilineal reckoning - or reckoning by *rus*, or bone - associated with the *p'aspun* is not however unequivocal, and few households could regularly trace direct kin relations to other *p'a-spun* houses (Gutschow 1993; Phylactou 1989; Crook 1994b notes the existence of generally traceable patrilineal links in sTongde village as exceptional), and several people in Lingshed village debated whether there was any truth to the assertion.

Analysts have differed on how to relate the group to the household god itself. Prince Peter (1963: 380; 1956: 138), for example, argued that the relationship with the *p'alha* was secondary to the actual social group itself, and merely symbolised the relevant kin-ties. This approach has been followed by other authors, including Dollfus (1989), who regarded it as a 'groupement culturel d'entraide'. Both Brauen (1980a) and Crook (1994b: 504) regard the *p'aspun* as being primarily there to

reduce the individual's and family's economic and psychic burden to a tolerable level. (Brauen 1980a)

This 'self-help group' model is not accepted by all: Phylactou for example, has argued for a more structuralist approach, treating the *p'aspun* as "the idealised household writ large" (Phylactou 1989: 159), an inviolable and therefore perfect 'household' with none of the shortcomings of the normal household group. For Phylactou, the *p'aspun* are "like kin, but closer" (1989: 158). She argues that

It is perhaps significant that *p'aspun* members come together and take over central household activities at precisely those times when realignments occur in household composition and kinship relations: at birth, marriage and death. At those times when those structures which appear to be invested with permanence are undergoing change, incorporating new members through birth and marriage, or shedding old members as a result of death, the *p'aspun* takes over as the only truly permanent social group. (1989: 158)

This concern that analysts have shown with defining the *p'aspun* as a group is perhaps misplaced, in the same way that a concern with defining the category of 'monk' was also misplaced (2.3). It is perhaps less taxing and more fruitful to look simply at what they do, an approach that, in my experience, characterised most informants' answers to the question "What are the *p'aspun*?"

From this angle, the answer is relatively simple: the *p'aspun* intervened during liminal periods when individual households in their group were undergoing re-constitution, including if necessary the performance of those activities from which affected household members were ritually prohibited. These activities were primarily offering,

hospitality, and agricultural work, activities which very much defined households as functioning social and symbolic entities (5.2.3). *P'aspun* did not simply act to relieve economic and psychic distress: their duties were associated with replacing the social and ritual agency¹⁰¹ of the household as a corporate group in the context of highly specific notions of pollution.

10.3.3 - Household Structure and the *P'aspun* Group

These three dominant functions of offering, hospitality and agricultural productivity are ones we have seen before in the context of the various architectural levels of the *khangchen* house (5.2.3), with offering structures to guests and Buddhist gods on the top floor, hospitality in the kitchen, and agricultural productivity in the basement. These floors contained a series of shrines, which were the focus of pollution concerns within the household: polluted householders could not enter or perform offerings in the Buddhist shrine room on the roof; were banned from tending the *p'alha* shrine on the roof (if there was one); could not cook, and therefore had little or nothing to do with tending the hearth god, or seeing to its daily offerings; and could not leave offerings at the *lubang* shrine to the water-spirits in the basement. In this sense, the activities from which polluted householders were banned were spatially located within various levels of the household, as well as being banned from general movement beyond the boundaries of the house itself.

The interlacing of the social and ritual role of the *p'aspun* with the spatial structuring of the household leads us on to an assessment of the fulcrum between group and spatial structure - the shrine (L. *lhat'o*) to the household god itself.

As we saw earlier, such shrines were constructed out of a set of arrows wrapped around a central "life-wood" (L. *la-shing*), plunged into a large vase of grain and precious substances. Such shrines marked the apex of a series of shrines within the house, along with a symbolically crucial central pillar, which itself housed the *k'alha*, or "pillar god" of the house. As we saw earlier (Fig. 5.4), each of these levels in the house had strong symbolic resonances of the local territorial cosmological levels of *stanglha*

¹⁰¹Following the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990), I define 'agency' as "active operation" or "action personified".

(the realm of the gods), *barsam* (the middle realm of the village) and *yoglu* (the lower realm of the water spirits).

In her analysis of this series of shrines, Day argued that they comprised not several independent shrines, but a symbolic conglomerate, within which the house pillar

might be extended metaphorically to the top and bottom levels so that it begins in *stanglha* where it is continuous with other arrows in the shrine on the roof and ends in *yoglu*, where it is continuous with implements stored there, such as the plough tip that pierces the earth. (Day 1989: 79)

Here, the substitution of the pillar for the ritual arrow gives a new understanding of the shrine to the water-spirits, as an ancillary part of an arrow and grain-bowl conglomerate - where the arrow plunges down into the grain pot - encompassing the entire household within a single image of effective and fertilising divinity (**Fig. 10.1**).

Day's portrait of the arrow as a divinely fertilising agency of the household as a whole is an attractive one. During virilocal marriage celebrations, the "best man" summons the prospective bride from her natal home by "hooking" her with a ritual arrow (L. *dadar*) taken from a pot of grain placed beside the central pillar of the future husband's natal house. Here, the arrow and pillar were strongly associated with one another (Phylactou 1989: 230). As she leaves her natal house, the bride would be taken via the household pillar, where she has her last meal before departing (1989: 251).

If the image of the arrow can be seen as male and fertilising in this context, the implied association between the bride and the pot of grain into which the arrow is placed matches the broader semantic association between married women and the chthonic water-spirits. Married women throughout Ladakh commonly wore the heavy turquoise-studded *perag* head-dress which marked their association with these spirits (**Photo 3.3**), in turn resonating with indigenous understandings of household wealth as integrally related to the reproductive functions of household mothers (**4.2.2**).

The connection between household wealth and its reproductive capacities is a common metaphorical association in Ladakhi village ceremonial: daughters marrying into another house, for example, had to be

very careful in the manner in which they departed their natal household on the wedding-day - the household wealth (L. *yang*) had to be 'nailed down' inside the grain store of the house by a *yang-gugs* rite performed by visiting monks, lest it escape with the departing bride (Phylactou 1989: 196-7). This rite - performed also at funerals and at the post-harvest *skangsol* - was part of the evocation rites of the *choskyong* Nam Sras, the protector of wealth (7.1).

In Day's argument, which I would wish to follow, the conglomerate vertical shrine structure of the *khangchen* - the house pillar, the offering room, the hearth and the water-spirit shrine - is mirrored in the *p'alha* shrine itself (Day 1989: 165), representing the symbolic unification of the three realms of *stanglha*, *barsam*, and *yoglu* in a single moment of fertilising divinity. Thus, at the agricultural New Year, the juniper of the *p'alha* shrine would be changed and new arrows added, taken from the Buddhist shrine-room of each *khangchen* in the group. During this rite, the officiant (usually the male household head or his immediate male heir) would check the contents of the bowl of grain: if the grain had swollen then this was taken as an indication that the upcoming year would be prosperous for the *p'aspun* group; if the grains were shrivelled, then the opposite would be the case (Day 1989:157; Dollfus 1989: 176-7).

In this way, therefore, the *p'alha* shrine is held to reflect the corporate agency of ^{the} *p'aspun* group as a wealth-producing entity: either as a combination of agricultural productivity and social reproduction or, in a symbolic way, as a series of multi-levelled shrines which embody acts of divine fertilisation. These embodiments of divine agency are therefore replicated within the single *p'alha* shrine, whose central symbolic agency straddles the entire group (see Fig. 10.1).

Thus, both as an architectural form and as an idealised social population, the household appeared to be the structural and ritual correlate of the shrines of divinities such as the *p'alha*. In this interpretation, the occupants of the house qua shrine were both the major ritual officiants and the corporeal manifestation of the dynamic nature of this divine act of economic and reproductive fecundity. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones argue,

The house and the body are intimately linked. The house is an extension of the person; like an extra skin, carapace, or second layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect. House, body and mind

are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishing, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, moulding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas that unfold within its bounds. A ready-made environment fashioned by a previous generation and lived in long before it becomes an object of thought, the house is a prime agent of socialisation. (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1994: 2)

As members of the corporate group, householders fulfilled functions such as offering, hospitality, agricultural production and social reproduction, all of which were symbolically linked to the supernatural agency of the *p'alha*. This should not be misinterpreted: whilst the *p'alha*, as a symbolic construct, encompassed and represented the combined sources of the social, ritual and economic discourses of the household estate and the *p'aspun* group of which it was a part, this was not the same as *determining* the actions of household members. What it determined was the manifest sense of the divinely authorised agency of householders within the broader social group - their 'office', as it were. Thus, whilst polluted household members may very well sneak out of the house in the middle of the night in order to check on their crops and adjust an irrigation ditch or two, that is not the same as having a established right to do so.

10.3.4 - Offering and Hospitality in the Treatment of Household Numina

Such a relationship, of 'source' (divinity) to social embodiment (authorised householders), was thus far from static. Houses did not simply consist of a set of stable numinal presences: rather, those presences were constituted by householders and monks through a series of on-going and repeated social and ritual acts that actively encouraged their presence in the house. Rather than standing in a certain relationship to the cosmological hierarchies of the household, people's very corporeality constituted them through active participation. Within this ritual environment, social and ritual space were not simply static givens, but constantly re-negotiated spatial *events*, constituted by the axial movement of actors within them. In such a circumstance, we can follow Bourdieu's assertion that

It is in the dialectical relationship between the body and a space structured according to the mythico-ritual oppositions that one finds the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the em-bodying of the structures of the world, that is the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world. (Bourdieu 1972: 89).

As we have seen in the Ladakhi case, certain objective taxonomic relationships reiterate themselves within a variety of social spaces because the human actor has internalised a series of practical propensities that constantly reproduce these taxonomies as objective (physical) relationships as they go about their normal activities. Central amongst these are acts of offering and prostration that structure the dynamic between householder and household numina.

The giving of offerings to household divinities was an everyday affair, performed at dawn by either the mother or father of the house, and involving most of the household shrines. Certain shrines, such as the hearth itself, would receive offerings several times a day, with the host placing a small portion of uncooked food aside for the hearth-god. Most houses also put small portions of food offerings by the window to placate any wandering spirits. Offering practices represented a manner of socially addressing specific numina, and were structured within an idiom of hospitality (Ortner 1975b). Offerings given to Buddhist divinities were discussed as being those that were appropriate to the status of a high guest, and household divinities received the same treatment, although often in a slightly less elaborate form. Essential to the success of the offering process was not so much the actual content and meticulous technical performance of offerings as much as the mental dispositions of those performing them: monks advised that it was essential that those performing the offerings evoked a strong sense that the divinity was really there, not simply as a representation, but in person, and that they acted accordingly.

The acceptance of offerings by ^{worldly}deities and spirits was felt very strongly to oblige the recipient to act in favour of the donor, and particularly to act as their protector (L. *srungma*), a term widely used by householders to describe the various numina that inhabited their houses. This protection was seen as being a blessing (L. *chinlabs*) which descended upon the offerer from above in the manner of a stream. This metaphor of

the stream and its pure source is an important one, and is a central idiom by which hierarchical relations, either in hospitality gatherings, offering practices, or religious teachings, were conceived and spoken about, emphasising once again the salience of height as designating relations with social superiors and preceptors.

However, if Bourdieu's epistemology of objectivised lived spaces explains much of how social actors create socialised spaces, and vice-versa, and thereby generate an arbitrary, but very emotive, 'sense' of the correct ordering of space and thereby action, it ignores the powerful creative role of actions which do not accord with established 'objectivised' norms. If householders pollute their established relationship with household deities, through actions which do not accord with the normal structuring of symbolic space, they undermine their own social agency, rendering their ability to perform authoritatively basic household functions. Such 'derailings' of the objectivised taxonomies of socialised space need no reinforcing to be effective: they are emergent within single acts, dislocating householders in a single moment from their established matrix of 'sources', divesting them of the supportive authority of the household god.

Here we find what could be argued to be the salient pragmatic function of the *p'aspun* group. In circumstances of household pollution, only people who share the same household god, and who have *not* polluted their relationship with it, can embody its authoritative agency and ensure the continuance of the house as a social unit. In other words, only the remaining *p'aspun* have the symbolic authority to replace the lost household labour in cases of pollution.

If the *p'alha* symbolically represents the combined agency of the *p'aspun* group as a wealth-creating body, it does so within the context of an established set of notions about household lineage. As we have seen, genealogical lineage in this context was neither matri- nor patrilineal, but rather focussed on the household as a jural inheritance structure which (in more important houses) related back to the founding of the village. In the lay context, as with the monastic one, the emphasis on "lineage" (L. *rgyud*) acted as the criterion for most kinds of 'authoritative' discourse. People were empowered to act in certain ways, to speak or act on behalf of a household or on behalf of a religious tradition, *if and only if* they were legitimate inheritors of the lineage associated with that tradition. Such licence arises out of having received the lineage from the previous

legitimate holder, and thereby back to a single apical “ancestor”. The nature of this founding ancestor was generally perceived as divine, either the *p’alha* of the household, or a Buddha figure (see Dargyay 1988). Each was integrally associated with a central act of founding: the founding of either a household, a village, or a religious tradition (Dollfus 1989: 50; Levine 1988: 101-3).

This idea of the source of ritual authority also corresponds to more diffuse notions of “life-essence” (L. *la*). More broadly, Tibetan notions of social agency invest *la* in the broader chthonic environment of actors. *La-gnas* (“places of life-essence”) are sites where the essence of particular people is invested, and destruction of those places leads to the death of the person (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 481-3). *La* here has a variety of connotations: it means not simply “life-essence”, but the source of one’s active and authoritative engagement in the world, both as a living person and as a religious practitioner. In each kind of activity, one must be “rooted” in an effective source of agency and authority. Such “sources” are located not in a single place, but in a variety of places, people and objects, each underlying a certain kind of social activity.

Such ‘sources’ of communally accepted social agency are thus not simply religious in the sense of directly located within the monastic establishment, but are found throughout village life, usually, but not always associated with the presence of *lha*, the gods and spirits that stand behind the physical landscape, and within the house.¹⁰² Indeed, it is in this sense that the pollution behaviour associated with eating etiquette and that associated with life-cycle events such as birth and death begin to share some common ground. The hearth, in other words, acts as the apex of a certain kind of household activity - hospitality - whose authoritative (that is socially sanctioned) presentation within the household depends upon the maintenance of pure relations with the hearth as an embodied ‘source’.

10.3.5 - Severance

¹⁰²Indeed, Samuel (1985) argues that the two terms, *lha* (deity) and *la* (life-essence) were originally cognate within Tibetan.

Thus, people's ability to act authoritatively in certain socialised ways was felt to arise not from themselves, but from a sanctioned and fruitful relationship with certain 'sources' of blessing. These 'sources' were themselves held to be the product of an accepted lineage of divine presence. For a person to pollute their relationship with such a source was to undermine their own social and ritual agency: indeed, since householders acted not as individuals in dyadic relations with sources of authority, but as corporate groups, such an undermining of this relationship literally disinherits all those members of the corporate group from an acceptable and accepted social agency. Thus, household pollution is rarely individual: all members of the house are affected. Unable to 'do' anything with any real social authority, the polluted become the socially silenced, confined to the limits of the house whilst others tend to their needs. Any acts they do perform, such as working in the fields or visiting others, are perceived as socially undermining, spreading pollution wherever they go.

But how is such pollution created in the first place? Earlier, whilst examining the formation of pollution in an everyday eating context we saw that *dip* was primarily created out of a dislocation of established hierarchical structures, wherein relations with symbolic sources of certain kinds of household activity (in this case, hospitality), were undermined when individual actors moved 'up' the social hierarchy or contaminated those higher than themselves (including the stove and communal cooking pot) with their bodily essences (such as saliva).

In the case of life-cycle pollution, this hierarchy was more ritual than social: specifically, it related to the hierarchy of the house as a dwelling place which represented an act of symbolic fertilisation between the gods in the upper realms and the fertile *lu* in the lower ones. In the case of birth pollution, *dip* emerged at the moment the child's umbilical cord was cut. Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994) note for neighbouring Zangskar that following birth, the discharged placenta was taken to the basement (where the shrine to the water spirits is) and hidden under a rock - an act which (I would argue) strongly associated it with other physical manifestations of the chthonic water-spirits, such as frogs and lizards. But if the placenta was associated with the *lu*, what does this imply about the status of the newborn child? Certainly, the distinction between foetus and water-spirit was

vague, and informants occasionally referred to *lu* as “like small humans”, a fact which made it extremely bad to harm them.¹⁰³

Arguably, therefore, childbirth and what follows it constituted a raising of the child from being a creation of the processes of fertility (and the water spirits) to being a human being. Soon after birth a small mantra would be painted in saffron on the child’s tongue, thus removing it from the lower world of the generally speechless *lu*, and into the world of talking humans. However, such a movement also cut the child away from its established position at the bottom of the house, radically disrupting the established dynamic relationship between the divine and the chthonic, between the household arrow plunging down from the roof and the household grain-pot in the basement.

Similar dislocations of established relations with the symbolic structure of the household occurred at the death of householders. Here death only caused pollution for married laity, in whose case death involved the severing of a householder’s established marriage ties, cutting the shared cord that linked him or her to a reproductive and fertile relationship. It was also held to constitute a symbolic move *upwards* on the part of the deceased, as their consciousness departed the body, rising up out of it through the aperture at the top of the head. Of course, if such a relationship had already been severed - through the prior death of a spouse, or through the “cutting of the topknot” upon entering the monastery - then such a severance did not occur at death, and therefore we would expect no pollution to ensue.

The pollution of the dead was also linked to concerns about the actual intentions of the deceased: whilst concerned for the well-being of the dead, considerable effort was expended in ritual methods to ensure that the deceased did not return as a ghost (L. *yidag*) to bother the living. Those that did attempt to return were not only met with frustration (Thurman 1994: 171), but actually disrupted the world of their loved ones, who would feel the attentions of the deceased as the attacks of malevolent demons (L. *dre*).

Such a return was felt to be caused by “obstructions” (L. *barchad*) standing in the way of the dead person’s departure to the next life, and the

¹⁰³For the repercussions of such acts, see Phylactou (1989: 46-7); Jina and Namgyal (1995: 30).

purificatory rites of the monks were meant to eradicate such obstructions (see next chapter). Indeed, treatment of the corpse after death indicated a similar concern: part of the preparation of the corpse for cremation involved the breaking of the spine. This allowed the corpse to be fitted into the funeral box, but also ensured that the consciousness of the deceased could not use this pathway to re-enter the body and animate it (see also Corlin 1988).¹⁰⁴ Thus, if death produced undesirable pollution, a return to life by the dead was equally, if not more, unwanted. As the movement of the consciousness into a domain with which it was not naturally suited, the return of the dead was seen in principle as extremely polluting.

Thus, all forms of pollution shared certain important features, associated with a 'dislocation' from established ways of doing things. Nonetheless, pollution from contaminating the hearth and pollution from birth and death were entirely different orders of social phenomena, even if they did accord to the same fundamental rationale. The pollution of death and birth affected the entire household, often secluding it from normal social activity for up to a month; no such stringent prohibitions informed everyday pollution.

The difference lay in the context of the 'dislocation': polluting the hearth did not imply a shift in cosmological domain in the way that birth and death did, simply a shift within the domain of a single 'source' - the hearth itself. Thus, although the pollution associated with hospitality and moments in the population cycle of households share a single rationale, this does not mean that they could be treated as identical, since the hierarchical dislocations that caused them were of different orders and different axes within the symbolic structuring of the household.

10.4 - Pollution Beyond the Household

The preceding conversation chose household pollution as a major focus of ethnographic concern. However, similar symbolic structuring was found elsewhere. We saw earlier how the basic structure of household god shrines, and indeed the house as conglomerate shrine, included a central

¹⁰⁴ Informants told me that this method of 'return' meant that such reanimated corpses (L. *ro-langs*) had very stiff and straight backs, and therefore were not able to bend down to enter the low doorways traditional to Ladakh.

“life-wood” (L. *la-shing* or *srog-shing*) which was placed within a vase of grain and precious substance. This device was not particular to households, being found throughout the “Buddhised” landscape of Lingshed. The most direct correlation was with the various shrines to the seven local area gods (L. *yullha*), whose construction was almost identical to that of the *p’alha* shrine. Such local gods, as we shall see in the next few chapters, were also a major focus of concern in cases of pollution.

Amongst such divinities was the *yullha* Shar Chyogs, the local protector of Kumbum monastery. Along with the rest of the local and household gods of the Lingshed area, Shar Chyogs was held to be very sensitive to pollution, either within the house or outside it. Thus, the fact that pollution concerns were ‘local’ in the sense of physically located within particular territorial domains, did not correlate with any ethnographic division between monastery and village in terms of pollution concerns.

More importantly, pollution concerns were also salient in relation to the supraworldly divinities such as Buddhas, and thus went to the core of monastic life. The shrines of such supraworldly divinities were built according to very much the same principle as those of household and local gods, wherein the statue’s outer shell was constructed around a central *la-shing* and a series of printed mantras which represent the ‘presence’ of the deity. The statue itself would then be filled with a variety of precious substances, including gold, silver and gems. Similar methods informed the construction of monasteries (Gyatsho 1979) and stupas (Schwalbe 1979).

The ‘life-wood’ at the centre had connotations not only of life-essence, but also of wealth and inheritance, even in monastic life. One of the central meditation visualisations that the young monk was taught for almost all ritual practice, was the *ts’ogs-shing*, or “assembly tree” wherein all the objects of refuge (the Three Jewels) rest on a huge tree, which acts as the visualised basis of the inheritance of their teachings. In this sense, the “life wood” becomes the medium through which divine presence makes itself felt as authoritative action in the world, action that is at once divine and fertilising, manifesting itself as auspiciousness (L. *tashi*) and wealth (L. *yang*).

Particular amidst such presences was that of the tutelary divinity Yamāntaka, which was also the focus of marked pollution concern. As we have seen, a married woman’s approach towards the *yidam* statue evoked

very powerful pollution, constituting as it did an infringement of the established hierarchy that placed fertility below renunciatory religion (9.4). However, monks were very careful to state that the pollution caused by such an infraction did not affect the Buddha Yamāntaka himself, whose nature, they argued, was by definition intrinsically pure and impossible to defile. Rather, the pollution affected the woman, the prayer hall and the statue itself, all of which would require extensive purification (see next chapter).

Lichter and Epstein have argued for similar ideas concerning the distribution of pollution in Tibetan areas, wherein whilst gods and demons can be polluted, it is the humans involved, rather than the numina, who suffer the consequences (1983: 243). In both cases, pollution was linked to the manifest embodiment of numina (their shrines) rather than themselves.

Such shrines were in turn the focus of human relations with numina, and Day (1989) has argued extensively that such shrines were the embodiment of a constant attempt to 'house' divinities within social structures. In this context, we might take this interpretation one step further: that is, that the act of 'housing' divinities and spirits was also the act of constantly bringing the presence, authority and ritual sanction - the agency - of the various evoked numina into the social and ritual agency of the group as a whole, whether household or monastic.

If so, then the dynamic relationship that household and monastery have with divinity as sources of authority entails a re-appraisal of the symbolic nature of both household and monastery. Rather than socialised spaces that have a certain relationship with divinity, they are effective socialised entities because they *represent* a certain active relationship with divinity. The ritual presence of such divinities, and the authorised social agency associated with such presence, are maintained within the realm of human beings through their presence in shrines (the *gompa* and the *lhat'o*) as foci of offering regimes and purity concerns. This is the case regardless of whether the numina is a simple water spirit or a tantric Buddha. Pollution concerns apply to both because they are concerned with the active placement of such presences within a worldly existence. This 'presence' to Buddhahood underlies the central rationale of tantric rites, and can also be found within the structure of those rites given over to the purification of pollution, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 11:

Purification and Offering

Overleaf:

Photo 11. 1 and 11.2: Monks at Lingshed *labrang* conduct funeral empowerments for a recently-deceased Lingshed woman.



Overleaf:

Photo 11.3 (left): One of the Kumbum *ex-lopons* presenting offerings at the shrine of the local area god Adamo.

Photo 11.4 (right): Monks perform *sangsol* on the monastery roof on *Zhipa'i Chonga Day*.



11.1 - *Time and the Anthropology of Pollution*

In this chapter I would like to discuss some of the established ritual strategies for the purification of pollution by the monks of Kumbum. Of course, any such discussion begs important questions about the anthropology of pollution in a broader dimension than the strictly emic ones addressed in the previous chapter. In particular, we must look at precisely what implications these rather ethnographic understandings have for our *model* of pollution, before we can understand any subsequent model of purification. For this we need to look briefly at extant anthropological approaches to pollution and ritual avoidance.

The characterisation of *dip* as produced by the movement of social actors to places that are “out of synch” with established sources of social agency fits largely, but certainly not exhaustively, with Douglas’s characterisation of the taboo as “matter out of place”, as elements which do not conform to established social categories (Douglas 1966: 56-7). The fact that such established categories have a problematic relationship with the objective world (Leach 1968), but are at the same time essential to the structure of social authority within particular cultures, means that such anomalous elements are both logically possible and socially undesirable. Therefore, within this picture at least, social pressure is brought to bear to avoid such anomalies (Douglas 1968).

Douglas’s thesis, though enormously fruitful in its own terms, has been criticised by writers such as Lambek (1992) for needlessly reifying the symbolic classifications she so heavily depends upon, slicing them away from the everyday business of living through those categories, and for neglecting the pro-active involvement people have in “doing” their taboos. In Lambek’s view, taboos do not simply represent enforced prohibitions, but actively embody non-practices which delineate people’s self-identity as contractual partners in a communal social life.

The diachronous relationship posited by Lambek between embodied practice and social identity is important because it implies that pollution behaviour has definite and emergent consequences - it not only is something, it *does* something. Douglas’s category anomalies on the other hand are avoided in themselves, and have no real impact upon the world: taking an earlier example, placing a mattress on one’s head may be anomalous behaviour which confuses established categories of social

behaviour, but once removed, the anomaly would disappear, and presumably (in Douglas's picture) any associated pollution would disappear with it.

Ethnographically this is simply not the case: remove the mattress from one's head, and the *dip* created remains, still requiring subsequent purification. This is because pollution concerns have a diachronous quality - a *tempo*, in Bourdieu's (1972) terms - that structuralist explanations such as Douglas's do not take into account, and thereby do not account for. Adjusting for this diachronous quality means asserting that what is confused is not *objects of knowledge* in a static world, but *processes of action* in a world in which time not only marches on, but is the very context within which action is constituted.

In the previous chapter we saw that polluted objects become avoided or restricted because subsequent *social action* towards them is profoundly undesirable in terms of a certain *indigenous* logic, and is not possible without necessarily *creating* further social structures at odds with established sources of agency and authority. Placing used eating utensils back into the pot *creates* an entirely new set of social categories, based on a new arrangement of social categories in which the less-than-pure contaminator of the utensils becomes the 'source' of subsequent food, rather than the hearth-god. Removing the utensils from the pot doesn't remove the pollution because the pollution now exists in these newly emerged generative schema. Thus it lingers, even after its cause (whether a category anomaly or not) has been removed.

In the Ladakhi context, the influence of cultural time on social action is often very explicit, necessitating the regular reading of astrological calendars and the consulting of astrologers prior to any venture of major activity. Certain acts were only appropriate for certain occasions or times of the day. Certain temporal junctures emphasised the impact of social agency: during the first and the fourth months of the year, the karmic results of virtuous and non-virtuous actions were held to be magnified tenfold; similarly, certain commemorative days of the month were especially effective for making prayers to certain Buddhas - the eighth day for the Medicine Buddha, the tenth for Guru Rinpoche; the thirtieth for the Buddha Amitabha (**Appendix A**).

Conversely, certain occasions were naturally inauspicious. The most extreme of these - "the day of the nine obstacles" (L. *tsespa'i barchad rgu*), usually during the twelfth month - was so profoundly inauspicious that nothing at all would be attempted, since it was bound to end in failure or worse. On this latter occasion, people simply sat at home, neither visiting others nor being visited, doing nothing. All plans were postponed, and no business was carried out. It was as though everyone were polluted.

Thus, if we accept that understandings about positive social agency, rather than simply negative social sanctions, are a way forward in understanding pollution and ritual avoidance activities, then the dimension of time is crucial. To an extent, Lambek's unification of symbolic categories with purposeful actions adds this temporal dimension. For him, taboos embody contractual relations that positively constitute social actors, creating "a kind of retrospective account of that person's moral career" (1992: 254). Adding a temporal dimension thus means that avoidance and pollution practices are more than simple statements about the world as it atemporally exists, but also a structure of social *memory* of anomalous events that impart emergent properties to the social world and social actors in contact with them, dislocating certain areas of social life from the normal patterns of positive interactions to which they are linked.

This context of memory - of the inevitable tangling of ordered structures within the passage of time, producing an endlessly emergent present moment - has its corollary and counterpoint in the structure of purification rites, which constantly reiterate the importance - and the ingenuity - of time.

11.2.1 - *Purification Strategies in Lingshed*

Whether one regards local concerns with pollution - either in the house, the village or the monastery - as Buddhist or non-Buddhist in nature, its sheer ubiquity brought it firmly into the ritual domain of the Kumbum monks. That such pollution, and the ills that accompany it, was a "this worldly" concern - located solely within this single lifetime - was not simply admitted, but *asserted* by the Kumbum monks who classed it firmly amongst the inevitable sufferings (L. *dugs-ngal*) of cyclic existence (L. *khorwa*), and therefore, if possible, to be removed through the ritual powers at the monastery's disposal.

The purification of serious pollution was often a long and drawn out matter: household pollution caused by birth and death, for example, required a month-long cycle of cleansing (L. *trus*) and offerings (L. *sangsol*) performed by visiting monks, necessary before members of the house could venture forth from the seclusion of their households and return to their duties.

In the case of birth, pollution adhered to all immediate relatives or those in the house at the time of the birth. For the first seven days, both father and mother are polluted, and cannot leave the house; similarly, only male members of the household's *p'aspun* can enter the house. On the seventh day (that is, after an astrological week has passed¹⁰⁵), the father will wash his lower body and monks will visit the house to perform a purification ceremony (L. *trus*) and make offerings (L. *sangsol*) to the Buddhas, local divinities and the household god: after this, the father is free to leave the house, and non-*p'aspun* members can visit, bringing food and gifts, but not eating there. On the thirtieth day (that is, one lunar month later), the monks will return to perform another *trus* on behalf of the mother, and a further *sangsol* offering. Thereafter, the house returns to normal functioning: non-*p'aspun* guests can eat there and touch the baby (see Norberg-Hodge & Russell 1994).

The combination of purification and offerings to divinities - the essential 'mechanism' for the eradication of pollution - is extremely common in Buddhist ritual, often included in ordinary daily rites, and larger consecration ceremonies (Sharpa Tulku & Perrott 1985). As a ritual method that stands on its own, however, Tibetan Buddhist systems of purification have received comparatively little attention, and so I would like to look at them in some depth here.

11.2.2 - Washing the Gods (*Trus*):

Trus rites for the ordinary purification of household and personal pollution were described to me as having two basic sections: *chandren* ("invocation") *trus* and *namjom* ("all-subduing") *trus*. These were not

¹⁰⁵As in the West, the Tibetan week is seven days.

separate: rather the first acted as the preliminary for the second.¹⁰⁶ Both used as their basic ritual implements the “cleansing mirror” (L. *trus melong*, a circular brass plate mirror) and a water vase (L. *bumpa*). The vase would be filled with water and consecrated through visualising the mandala of the *bodhisattva* Dorje Namjom (the *bodhisattva* after whom the second rite is named) descending and dissolving into the water. The water is then poured over the face of the mirror as a series of Buddhist divinities are visualised in the mirror by the officiant. The water is collected in a copper bowl beneath. Following this, the object to be purified is visualised in the mirror and washed again with the same water, which has been blessed with the presence of the previously-visualised deities.

Sonam Rinchen, one of the retired *lopons* of Kumbum, described the progress of each rite:

When giving *chandren trus*, all the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* of the ten directions are visualised. It is then necessary to visualise the Buddhas’ bodies appearing [*‘char - “arising”*, as in the sun at dawn] within the mirror. Then, [one visualises] all the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* of the ten directions descending [into their visualised bodies in the mirror]. One then visualises the Buddhas, the *bodhisattvas*, and the higher Dharma Protectors all seated, unified [with their visualised bodies] in the mirror. It is essential to think that the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* really have descended into the mirror. Then [we visualise] all the world as a beautiful glass palace, fitting and without blemish, and very beautiful inside, and all the Buddhas entering it. Then we visualise them entering into a bathing pool within, in order to cleanse them. The bathing pool’s contents are not mere water, but ambrosia water [L. *dud-tsa-chu*]. First the *lama*; then the *yidam*; the other Buddhas; the *bodhisattvas*; the *k’adroma*¹⁰⁷; and the four great protector kings are washed. Although one may be washing the Buddhas and so forth, one must not think that they themselves have any impurities: Buddhas lack even the causes [L. *tsawa - “roots”*] of impurities. Rather it is in order to wipe away our own and other sentient beings’ [L. *jig-rtenpa-kun - “all the beings of the suffering world”*] impure karma [L. *las*] and afflictions [L. *nyon-mong*]. This is the reason why we cleanse their bodies.

¹⁰⁶It must be noted that, although I have seen certain aspects of this rite demonstrated, I have never seen it performed in full.

¹⁰⁷Skt. *dakini*: these are female incarnations of the Buddha’s wisdom.

As for *namjom trus*, it is said this also cleanses the high passes and mountains, and the valleys. Before giving *namjom trus*, one pours the water from washing the Buddhas and bodhisattvas back into the vase, and uses it again. When giving *namjom trus* it is necessary to visualise oneself as being in reality Dorje Namjom and all those requesting *trus* should think of themselves as his disciples. Then they should visualise that the negativities [L. *digpa*] and pollution [L. *dip*] of their body, speech and mind are purified. From this arises reconciliation [L. *cham*] and pollution and eye-dust and so forth are removed. Once *trus* is completed, the impure water is placed in a ransom-offering [L. *lud* - an offering cake made from barley and *trus* water, which is then taken out of the house and left to be destroyed by malevolent spirits], and one should think that all the body, speech and mind's pollution enters it...If people should come with *tsadip* ["root pollution", or paralysis], then it is customary to wash this person's form [L. *zugs*] within the mirror, because if they have *tsadip*, then it is dangerous to pour it on them directly. In such cases, *trus* over many days is recommended.

Sometimes, people's divinities [consecrated images] and so forth will have been affected by pollution: on these occasions *namjom trus* is recommended [once again, washing the divinity's image in the mirror]. If the domain [L. *rgyal srid* - can be a village, or a house or an entire kingdom] is not cleansed then harm [L. *gnodpa*] will be done to the people and animals. The intent of *namjom trus* is the cleansing of mountains and valleys and it is the method of removing pollution."

The basic format of *trus* rites was an expanded and applied version of standard meditative visualisations that precede the evocation and propitiation of many Buddhist deities (see Cantwell 1989: Appendix 3; Sherpa Tulku and Perrott 1985), in much the same way that *ts'ogs* forms part of other rites (6.9.1). In such cases, the bathing-palace and so forth were simply visualised by the meditator, with no use of ritual equipment. By comparison, the centrepiece of *trus* - the mirror - is a complex symbolic device, mediating between the twin realms of visualised imagery and manifest existence. Monks at Kumbum likened the *trus melong* to the mind (L. *sems* - see also Brauen 1978; Daggyab Rinpoche 1995: 44-46) in the sense that its intrinsic nature (L. *rang-zhin*), once purified, is that of clear light (L. *od-salwa*). The centrality of light as a ritual metaphor (what Tucci (1980) calls "photism") also extended to its quality as an index of divine presence.

Within the *trus* mirror, divinities were visualised as “arising” (L. *char*), a verb which condenses references to the dawning of the sun with other more subtle ideas about the manner in which thoughts are seen as “arising” in people’s minds: minds were purified (L. *dagpa*) of impure thoughts through spiritual activity in the same way that divinities and images were purified in the cleansing process, a process which allowed for the pure nature of both divinities and the unimpeded mind to “shine out”.

11.2.3 - *Death Rites and the Purification of Karma*

In Sonam Rinchen’s discussion of *trus* above, pollution and negative karma have been collapsed into a single process of purification. This was not a universal interpretation: one monk, a scholar from the regional capital, took a different line, asserting that the purification of pollution performed during *trus* was at best unimportant, and at worst a misguided emphasis, since it detracted from the *real* purpose, the purification of the three poisons (L. *duk sum*) of ignorance, attachment and hatred leading to the end of karmic suffering. As we saw earlier, Geshe Changchub argued for a subtle blending of the two, where pollution arose from a more fundamental karmic imbalance. In practice the distinction between ritual concerns with karma and ritual concerns with pollution was often vague. One of the circumstances in which it was, in representational terms at least, made relatively clear, was the treatment of the dead, an aspect of ceremonial activity that I would like to turn to now.

Death ceremonies in Tibetan areas are generally complex and drawn-out, and rarely more so than in Ladakh. Usually, the death of laity involved monks in 4-5 days of ceremonies, including feasting of guests, and offerings made on behalf of the dead for up to a year afterwards (see Brauen 1982), as well as the various prohibitions concerning pollution. The purification of the household and affected personnel, regarded as essential to the well-being of those agents following the death of a householder, was not the only purification that accompanied the funeral process.

Tibetan Buddhist traditions concerning death and rebirth have been the subject of considerable exegesis by Western scholars (for example Corlin 1988; Brauen 1982; Evans-Wentz 1960; Freemantle and Trungpa 1987; Thurman 1994). The particulars of different practices vary from tradition to tradition within Tibetan Buddhism, but certain reference points

seem to be common to all of them. For Tibetan Buddhists, the movement from death to re-birth is not viewed as being instantaneous, as it is in ^{soma} other Buddhist traditions, but mediated by a liminal period called the *bardo*, (quite literally “in-between”), said to last at least 49 days for most people, during which the future of the deceased is determined by the weight of their accumulated karma.

This process, as an experienced event, is described at length in a central ritual text, the *Bardo T’odol* (“Liberation through hearing in the intermediate state”). There are numerous editions of this particular traditional text, which is a *terma*, or “revealed treasure”, originally attributed to Guru Rinpoche. Transmission and recitation of the text is a speciality of the Nyingmapa order, but all Tibetan Buddhist orders perform it in some form. This text is not simply a description of the *bardo*, but a spiritual teaching to the deceased which is read, either over his or her corpse, or over a representation of it. Ideally, the reading of the text is intended to guide the deceased’s consciousness to ‘liberation’ (L. *t’arpa*) or, failing that, away from any possible unfortunate rebirths (as an animal, a hungry ghost or a hell-being), and towards one of the higher rebirths (as a demi-god, a god, or ideally, as a human). The reading of the text is explicitly a social act: it involves a direct relationship between officiant and deceased, who should be lingering nearby in disembodied state and will hear the teachings incorporated into the text and follow them.

The *bardo* period itself is characterised by a series of visions, depending upon the time elapsed since death and the accumulated karma of the deceased. These visions involve a gradual decline from an initial state in which the true nature of the mind and of the world is perceived first as *od-salwa* (“clear light”), and then through a series of more and more “clouded” and darkened perspectives, characterised by differing (and less pure) lights, and accompanied by a series of visions in which the deceased is met first by peaceful Buddhas and thence by wrathful ones. This leads on to judgement by Chosgyal Shinje, the Lord of Death (7.1), who examines the sins of the deceased in his “karmic mirror”, thence exacting terrible punishment for sins committed, in advance of final re-birth.

Corlin (1988) has argued that most of the actual practices relating to the deceased in Tibetan Buddhism correspond to the representations of karmic ‘life’ of the deceased found in the *Bardo T’odol*. Corlin’s critique appears at odds with conventional anthropological analyses which would

associate funeral practices with the sociology of the living - the re-establishment of social ties and spheres of exchange - rather than the cosmology of the dead. In fact, as Holmberg (1989: 190-209) comparably points out for Tamang Buddhists in Nepal, funeral ceremonies in Ladakh seemed to address both these aspects, as the deceased is gradually but systematically removed from the present world of his or her living friends and relatives, and through the intervening *bardo* to a new life. In this respect, Ladakhi funeral ceremonies comprised two almost distinct components: the disposal of the body and the communal pollution associated with it; and the disposal of the individual consciousness of the deceased. Here the latter was almost entirely the domain of the monks, whereas the former was a combination of the activities of the monks and the household's *p'a-spun* group.

These two paths of ceremonial activity divided quite early in the proceedings. As soon as the death occurred, an astrologer would be consulted to determine the correct day for the disposal of the corpse. Unlike Tibetan communities, where the method of disposal appears to depend on social status, the general practice in Ladakh involved cremation in a *spurkhang*, a small cremation box belonging to the deceased's *p'aspun*. In the case of the death of infants the corpse was not usually burnt, but thrown in a nearby river. If the infant was judged by the astrologer to be of importance to the prosperity (L. *yang*) of the house, its corpse would be embalmed and interred within the walls of the house, so that the prosperity of the house would be retained and so that the child would be reborn within the house as quickly as possible (Brauen 1982).

Treatment of the non-corporeal consciousness (L. *nampar-shespa*) of the deceased was more complex, however, and demonstrated many of the features associated with the treatment of divinities. In particular, a series of judgements was ideally made concerning the comparative preparedness of the deceased for death, which in turn affected the structure of the funeral rites. If the deceased had been fully prepared for death through years of religious practice and virtuous living, little was expected to go wrong: in most cases, no death pollution was invoked, and many features such as the reading of the Bardo T'odol could be dispensed with as superfluous to the needs of the dead, who would be fully conversant with the teachings anyway. This was particularly the case if the deceased was trained in *p'owa*,

the meditative practice of transferring one's consciousness to the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitabha at the moment of death itself.

However, in cases where people died young or violent deaths, there was a strongly felt belief that the dead would return, being unprepared to give up their earthly life. As a result, such unfortunate figures required both training and encouragement within the death state to ensure that they took the right path, and did not interfere with the living.

In order to fulfil this training, the dead were paradoxically encouraged to return again and again, but within the confines of the funeral rite, to be given a final meal and instructions on how to make the most of the treacherous *bardo*. This was not simply a process of return but a graduated departure: following cremation, the body of the dead person would be replaced by progressively more 'refined' representations of social presence (see also Corlin 1988; Holmberg 1989: 199-200):

i) at first by a physical simulacrum (L. *sob*) of their corpse which was 'named' and treated as the deceased in order that the spirit of the deceased might also treat it so;

ii) then by an earthenware jar, wherein the deceased's spirit would reside; and

iii) finally by transference of the consciousness to a stylised block-print picture of the deceased, which is 'named' as that person. The block-print was itself attached to an arrow, which 'housed' the consciousness of the deceased for the duration of the rite (see also Day 1989: 206).

In the end, on the final 49th day of the spirit's journey through the *bar-do*, the officiating monk takes the block-print and burns it in a butter lamp (Corlin 1988). All that is left at the end is the ashes of the paper and a small sliver from the top of the skull, which represents the aperture through which the deceased's consciousness departed his or her body. These are crushed into powder and mixed with clay to make *ts'a-t's'a* - small moulded cones imprinted with a picture of the Buddha - which are then either thrown in the river or, more commonly, placed at high and 'clean' places outside the boundaries of the village.

This process of systematic rarefaction of the deceased's "presence" would be accompanied by a simultaneous process of ritual empowerment and purification, called *jangwai choga* ("purification observances"). Initially, the deceased receives tantric empowerment, being initiated into the mandala of the principal tutelary deity practised by the monks (**Photos 11.1 and 11.2**). The 'generation' and praise of that deity is then performed and recited, and the consciousness (L. *nampar-shespa*) of the deceased is summoned into the simulacra which bear its name. The consciousness is then purified through three separate rites, all of which are widely used elsewhere:

i) Purification of obstacles (L. *barchad*): here, black seeds (representing the spiritual 'obstacles' of the deceased) are arranged on a *trus* mirror in the shape of a scorpion. From here they are cast into a fire along with a set of offerings. Distinctive here is the offering of the *gye-tor*, consisting of three offering cakes ranked with three lit candles, which is removed from the site of the funeral by a junior monk (see also Dargyab Rinpoche 1995: 44-46).

ii) Purification of non-virtuous deeds (L. *mi-gye-wai-las*): this is the central purification, which is identical to normal *trus* (the bathing of visualised Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* in the mirror, water from which is used to bathe the reflected image of the deceased).

iii) Purification of inauspiciousness (L. *ma-tashi*): verses of auspiciousness (L. *tashi tsegspa*) are read out to encourage general auspiciousness.

Here, the washing of the deceased's karma in a mirror was obviously equated with the Lord of Death's own "karmic mirror", which records the sins of the deceased. But how is this purification of others' karma possible when karma classically is doctrinally portrayed as arising solely from the intentions of the perpetrator? Indeed, Gelukpa literary discourses concerning the issue assert that ritual practices cannot alter the karma of others. The prominent fifteenth-century Gelukpa scholar Gyal Tsabje, one of the two "spiritual sons" of Tsongkhapa, argued:

An intention [concomitant with] craving originates from distorted cognition; when cut, it will not lead [to rebirth],

because it is by the compulsion [of that intention] that transmigrators take birth in lower abodes. When one is born, one is enabled [by] that very [intention], because [birth] originates from just that. Because intentions are themselves karma, [rituals that do not affect intention] do not undermine the cause of birth. (trans. in Jackson 1993: 459)

It would be wrong however to conclude from this that *trus* practices for the dead are fundamentally out of line with Gelukpa orthodoxy, or that they represent an “emotional” aspect of Buddhist practice in Ladakh. The texts for the *trus* rites I saw all originated in the printing presses of Dharamsala and with the sanction of the Dalai Lama’s own Namgyal Monastery. Instead, purification practices were felt to affect the karma of the dead in the same way as they affected the karma of the living, that is by the active engagement of the deceased in a supplicatory relationship to the rites and their performers. As Corlin notes, the progression of funeral practices matched the supposed condition of the deceased’s consciousness: indeed, the regular summoning of the dead person into its various physical representations was designed to ensure its presence and observation of the rites. As with all Tibetan ritual activity, it is not so much that the rite *of itself* affects the status of the deceased, but rather it did so on the basis of the faith (L. *dadpa*) of the deceased. For this reason, advice given to those laity near to death usually focused on remembrance the teachings of the near-deceased’s personal *lama*, which in itself should build faith in the imminent performance of mortuary rites. Similarly, senior monks at Kumbum asserted the benefits of finding those *lamas* and monks with whom the deceased already had an established ritual relationship to perform the funerary rites, since this would help ensure the correct mental attitude in the deceased.

11.2.4 - Offerings to the Gods (*Sangsol*):

Thus, the salient features of the funeral rite included a combination of encouragement and warning. Their ‘obstructions’ were purified, they were given offerings, followed by instructions on their appropriate role as a deceased spirit. Their ‘presence’ in the world of living beings was strictly limited to the confines of these ritual transactions, and it was felt that, should they wander beyond these confines, misfortune would ensue for all

concerned, to be combated eventually by the destructive ritual capacities of the *lamas* and the gods they controlled (Ch.7).

A similar ritual agenda informed the regular treatment of local and household divinities in Ladakh, whose existence in relation to humans was in constant tension between providing supportive agency when treated correctly and being the source of supernatural attack if polluted. Commenting on the ambiguous status of such numina, Day has argued that for Ladakhis

there is little to distinguish [*dip*] from the demonic. When the god is dirty, it causes harm, just like demons. When demons are cleaned and given homes, they cease their malevolence and become gods again. (Day 1989: 141)

As we saw earlier, offering rites were part of the everyday life of householders, who gave regular offerings at both household and local shrines. For most householders, such rites revolved around a perceived relationship of hierarchy between patron (the deity) and client (the offerer), with the villagers petitioning the local deity for certain worldly favours. In such a situation, the local or household god was referred to by laity as their *srungma* or protector.

This was not, however, the limit of village relations with local and household deities. All the local and household divinities in Lingshed were technically *damchan*, or “bound” to Buddhism, as a result of losing a magical contest with Guru Rinpoche (1.1) or one of the many high *lamas* that followed him. Such gods were therefore morally obliged to accept Buddhist (and hence vegetarian) offerings and maintain their protection of the villagers. As sponsors of Kumbum, householders could also request monthly offerings to be performed by visiting Kumbum monks on the third day of each month. Such offerings, called *sangsol*, were felt to maintain the allegiance of the local gods, and ensure that pollution between people and local gods was kept to a minimum.

Sangsol took place at a variety of shrines throughout the village, particularly:

- i) The *p'alha* shrine for each *p'aspun*; and
- ii) The shrine to each local area god (L. *yullha*) in the village.

Usually, a single monk would go to each and perform an hour long series of offerings (**Photo 11.3**).¹⁰⁸ On ordinary village occasions, the rite was sponsored by individual households, either as part of a rotation within certain sections of the village (in the case of regular offerings), or by the affected household/s (in the case of incidental requirements such as for *dip*).

As a tantric rite, the actual offerings followed preliminary *dagskyed*, the visualised “self-generation” of the officiating monk as tutelary deity from which status he would first request, then coerce local divinities to cooperate. Local and worldly divinities would then be reminded of the vows they made when they were originally bound to Buddhism, and encouraged to accept the offerings put before them as payment for their loyalty.

Sangsol involved the giving of non-meat offerings not simply to Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, but also to all divinities and numina, both worldly and supraworldly, that were of relevance to the particular domain of the polluted household and person. Offerings were made in an explicit status order (L. *rimpa*), as follows:

- Lama* (spiritual guide)
- Yidam* (tutelary deity, of Buddha status)
- Sangyas* (Buddhas)
- Changchub-semspa* (*bodhisattvas*)
- K'adroma* (Skt. *dakinis*)
- Choskyong* (high Dharma Protectors)
- Choskyong srungma* (local or worldly Dharma Protectors)
- Norlha* (gods of wealth)
- Terdag* (owners of treasures)
- Yullha* (local area gods)
- P'alha* (household gods)
- Sadag* (“owners of the soil”)
- Lu* (water-spirits)

¹⁰⁸In the case of household *sangsol*, laity said that the visiting monk was ideally born in the household concerned. The monks denied this, and I was unable to ascertain one way or the other.

Following this, those spirits who remained potentially recalcitrant to the wishes of the officiant were progressively goaded and threatened with the tantric powers of the tutelary Buddha and his Dharma Protectors.

Sangsol by monks therefore represented an entirely different kind of relationship with local deities. Rather than propitiating them as superiors and protectors, the local gods were felt to be thoroughly at the mercy of a fully trained and authorised monk, assuming he was working within established guidelines. This was reflected in monks' general view of local divinities, whom they described not as *srungma* ("protectors"), but as *rogspa* ("helpers").

In a sense, the presentation of offerings at *sangsol* replicated the original binding, reconstructing the events in which local divinities were made totally submissive to *lamaic* power. It drew its power, therefore, through being an essentially commemorative event. This principle of metaphorically stepping back in time also determined the calendrical timing of *sangsol*, performed, like many rites, within the gradual turning of the village's life within the astrological year. *Sangsol* offerings were normally given on the third day of the lunar month, which monks described as the day of the local gods' original binding to Buddhism.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, *sangsol* and *trus* performed to purify pollution occurred on the same day as the event itself, but one astrological cycle later: in the case of birth pollution, one full week later for the husband, and one full month later for the wife. Pollution not only removes its victims from the social round, but also separates it from the divine and temporal rounds, isolating the polluted household as a moment out of *ordinary* time.

The rite thus re-created a primordial founding moment - both of Buddhism in that area, and of the local god as a newly-named entity - returning it to its state of subjugation, and thus forcing it to aid Buddhism and Buddhists in general. The ritual process thereby encapsulated both offerings to the local gods and dominance over them (see Snellgrove 1957: 239-242), re-creating within the rite a mythical moment of Buddhist

¹⁰⁹In most areas of Tibet, similar rites are performed on the tenth day of the month, following Guru Rinpoche's binding of the local gods on the tenth day (indeed, many laity in Lingshed celebrated this occasion on a monthly basis (Ch.6)); here, in a monastic order which effectively ignores the activities of Guru Rinpoche, the founding subjugation was posited as being on the third day.

hegemony, in which the local god was helplessly subject to the will of the officiant, inasmuch as he represented the tutelary deity, and thereby the founding high *lama*.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the various shrines in a house appeared to combine to create a single composite shrine, depicting the presence of fertilising divinity, akin to the arrow and grain pot found in local area god shrines. In the context of *sangsol* rites as described above, it is perhaps more accurate to describe this composite household divinity as fertilising inasmuch as it is 'domesticated', brought down to earth by the power of the monastery, to act for the benefit of specific households. Indeed, local gods recently "bound" to Buddhism are often physically bound down - chains are wrapped around the shrine to keep the divinity in place as a manifest object of offering practices. When polluted, this active domestication is fractured, such that the household members can no longer make offerings to it, or approach the shrine. *Sangsol* rites, in conjunction with *trus*, re-invest the household with the active and co-operative presence of the divinity. On a broader scale, *sangsol* to local area gods is felt to re-establish the active relationship of co-operation between the village and the power of those gods, essential to the success of the agricultural round and divine protection from demon and spirit attack.

11.3 - Conclusion

Thus, pollution and purification in this ethnographic context are not simply effected by, but constituted through a complex series of temporal 'spaces'. In the most basic sense, pollution and purification are played out within an established time-frame: *trus* must be performed a certain period (a week, a month) after the initial polluting episode.

More than this, both purification and pollution are strongly linked to notions of authority and source, to origins that are either logically or temporally prior to specific social objects and actors. Purification, in the sense of being the eradication of pollution, marks a re-establishing of relations with, or a return to, established sources of social agency, disconnection from which has undermined ordinary social activity. It implies a looking back both temporally and logically towards numinous origins, but also an eradication, or more specifically, a *re-writing*, of the social memory of pollution events. *Trus* and *sangsol* re-write the world as a

place where the Buddha's presence is near and where local divinities are bound to Buddhism and completely co-operative to human needs.

In this context then, indigenous depictions of the progress of time are integrally linked with the processes of social action. 'Sources' of agency - the *lama*, the spirits of fertility, the gods - give rise to embodied social actions and structures within the context of the inevitable progression of time, just as intentions and moral acts give rise to karmic consequences that affect the individual's embodied world, casting them into differentiated realms of suffering or delight. Similarly, pollution creates moments divorced and differentiated from the established processes of social action and its origination. Within such 'cut off' realms, time progresses, dislocated from the realms of ordinary life.

Such a departure from a 'pure reality' was reflected in many ritual relations. Whilst explaining the nature of the *lama* as spiritual guide to me, Karma explained

When we see our *lama* we must not think "Oh, he is not so good. I don't like this and that. Maybe he is not such a good *lama*." Even if there is some problem, we should think "Truly, he is the *lama*, really a Buddha. But I cannot see this, because of the *dip* in my own mind". That is *dadpa* [faith].

Thus, through definable polluting actions, people were felt to move away from a certain understanding of the world. Such a movement was reversed by faith (L. *dadpa*) and respect (L. *guspa*), both of which allowed people to "see clearly", and acted as the core cognitive mechanism to ritual process.

Chapter 12:

Local Gods and the Embodied Person in Lingshed

12.1 - Ritual Focus and the Negotiation of Symbolic Categories

In the introduction to this thesis, I defined four principal dimensions to the study of authority:

- i) the nature of the authoritative act itself;
- ii) its source;
- iii) its focus; and
- iv) its mechanism of acceptance.

In the last few chapters, we have examined a variety of ritual acts - each of which could be deemed 'an act of authority' - performed by the Kumbum monks. To a great extent, this study has occurred explicitly in terms of the first and last of these dimensions: the nature of the act itself, predominantly in terms of the ideologies and 'technology' of tantric practice; and the mechanism of acceptance, in terms principally of notions of faith or trust (*L. dadpa*).

However, there were less explicitly held understandings of authority - which might rightly be called hegemonic, in the sense of applying universally to all members of the lay and monastic community - which were implicit in the structures of ritual practice that we have examined so far, and which profoundly influenced the issue of *who* was accepted as a source of authority. To understand this second dimension, however, we must turn to the third - namely, the *focus* of authority, for which we need to re-examine some of the rites so far covered.

To summarise some of the salient aspects of these: firstly, the ritual cycles performed by the Kumbum monks were not simply something which had been handed down from generation to generation, to be performed as part of a 'traditional' round of events (Ramble 1990), done simply because they had been done before: rather, they were structured according to a variety of contemporary 'felt' needs, by the local laity and by the monks themselves.

This is not to say that issues of precedent and the continuity of ritual practice were not of enormous importance. Rather, the sense of an established structure and set of ritual precedents, especially those grouped around lineages of tradition, created definite cognitive and social structures in the here and now which in turn defined and moulded

contemporary ritual concerns above and beyond the issue of the maintenance of traditional practice. If 'pure' access to lineages of tradition provided a sense of authority and social agency within the lived world (10.3), it did so within the context of very real and pragmatic concerns of everyday social life.

As a result, such symbolic systems defined a framework for concerns about pollution, household integrity, and so forth, which fed into *on-going* social processes, and as can be seen in the structuring of *skangsol* around principal events in the agricultural year, or the performance of *sangsol* and *trus* in *response* to pollution events. The agendas of ritual care provided by the monks were enacted to resolve *specific* ritual needs in the Lingshed community that emerged within that framework. It was, I would argue, the framework of these needs that presented the 'focus' of authoritative acts.

Such rites did not simply *express* the problems emerging within the community, but actively mediated them, presenting ritual solutions to ritually-articulated difficulties. This in turn implies that in this context at least there are two identifiable dynamics within any single ritual process:

- i) the symbolic articulation of problems in definable ritual terms; and
- ii) the transformation of such symbolically-couched problems through ritual 'reconstruction'.

This dual aspect divided the ritual process according to the specialised knowledge of a heterogeneous series of ritual specialists, who would be consulted by laity and monks (5.3.1). In the first dynamic - 'diagnosis' - problems are described in terms of a variety of different explanatory systems, including:

- a) systems of bodily humours, and their various inter-relationships;
- b) levels of *spark'a*, or life-force;
- c) demonological and pollution accounts;
- d) matters of karmic retribution;

e) reference to western allopathic systems.

None of these ways of discussing misfortune was necessarily opposed to any other, nor was any system seen as being a complete description, although karmic matters were described as more fundamental. Many systems of description inter-related: for example, low *spark'a* was seen to cause imbalances of bodily humour, but also to make people more prone to demonic attack and possession. Conversely, levels of *spark'a* were seen as generally higher in men (and particularly religious men) than in women, and therefore aspects such as demonic attack and illness were more broadly associated with the karmic nature of one's birth, where better karma meant a higher chance of being born male (and thus with higher *spark'a*).

Within this diversity of explanatory methods, there was a tendency for certain types of discourse to be emphasised by certain types of ritual and medical specialist: thus, *amchis* (local doctors) tended to emphasise systems of bodily humour and levels of *spark'a*, whilst oracles concentrated on demonological matters and incidents of pollution. Each of these 'diagnostic' systems was explicitly linked to a curative procedure: thus, oracular diagnoses of spirit attack and the bodily poisons that resulted from it were linked to oracular capacities to exorcise the troublesome spirit and suck out the poison. In many cases, however, broader methods were recommended, with oracles and doctors advising the performance of rites by monks, the saying of certain prayers, and so forth, in direct response to the nature of the diagnosis.

Throughout this process, therefore, the 'illness' of the patient would be more and more closely articulated according to an established set of symbolic categories, each of which in turn implied a certain remedy or the necessity of diagnosis according to a differently constructed symbolic system. In all cases, the content of the final ritual remedy was directly related to the symbolic articulation of the problematic that generated it (see also Lichter and Epstein 1983).

Thus, rather than the illness being 'discovered' (as an objective reality) through the diagnostic procedure, it is instead more and more closely circumscribed as an object of symbolic thought, that it might therefore be manipulated through ritual action. Day (1990) has noted a

similar process in the identification of village oracles in Ladakh. Here, an initiatory illness is 'diagnosed' by an oracle or incarnate as being an incident of possession, following which the identity of the possessing spirit is gradually negotiated into being, ritually purified and exorcised of its negative qualities until it is a fully beneficent god. Day herself records the process of tutelage by senior oracles, in which the possessing spirit of the novice oracle is instructed in its own qualities, and taught the skills it should have as a deity.

Thus, the process of 'bringing forth' the reality of misfortune and spirit intervention was a positive and negotiated process which limited, defined and circumscribed ritual interaction. As Tambiah notes:

Rituals as conventionalised behaviour are not designed or meant to express the intentions, emotions, and states of mind of individuals in a direct, spontaneous and "natural" way. Cultural elaboration of codes consists in the *distancing* from spontaneous and intentional expressions because spontaneity and intentionality are, or can be, contingent, labile, circumstantial, even incoherent and disordered. (Tambiah 1985a)

This should not be taken to mean that traditional ritual constructs determine fully, or attempt to determine fully, communal experiences of reality (Bloch 1986: 185). There was a flexibility to the structure of ritual practice that should not be underestimated. Even 'high' Buddhist rites such as tantric empowerments (L. *wang*) and *skangsol* were composite ritual forms, generated out of smaller component rites which could exist on their own or be transferred from or to other rites (6.5; 6.9.1). So, for example, both *skangsol* (7.3) and *sangsol* (11.2.4) involved the preliminary *dagskyed* ('self-generation' as tutelary deity) as an essential component, whilst death rites involve a combination of tantric empowerment and purification (11.2.3). Such composite forms were not simple accretions, but fitted within a global and identifiable ritual structure (6.5), which organised the progressive relationship of ritual elements. This structuring informed both the progression of a particular ritual performance, and the broader context in which rites are performed, creating a single programme of ritual practice that spans a day, a month, and the whole year. Thus, the various *skangsol* of the year progressively purified different territorial institutions relevant to the ritual mandate of the monastery - the house, the monastery, the *yul* -

ensuring that a complete round was performed each year. At the same time the ability (L. *nuspa*) to perform this "annual cycle" (L. *lo-khor* - "wheel of the year") of *skangsol* was based on the ritual power (L. *lasrung*) generated by the *lopon's* main retreat during *Skam Ts'ogs*, at the end of the previous year (6.9.2).

Within such rites, house and monastery as objects of ritual attention were equivalent: thus, rites to cleanse a household were the same as those to cleanse a monastery or shrine-room (see also Sharpa Tulku and Perrott 1985). This equivalence derives from the symbolic structure of households, local shrines and indeed the *gompa* itself: in certain crucial ways, all of them act as temples (L. *lhakhang*), within which divinities of various kinds were actively bound and put to ritual use.

These various temples in turn occupied territorial space, and in this sense were located within the world of chthonic numina that would otherwise occupy that space, numina which had to be placated and controlled so that they acquiesced to the new ritual presence. Conversely, most rites, in the sense that they created bounded domains to which divinities were invited, created ritual spaces which resembled houses or palaces, and acted like temples: the 'palace' of the tutelary deity in the sand mandala empowerments; the 'bathing-house' of the Buddhas in *trus*, or the 'houses' of the water-spirits in the basements of *khangchen*.

The dominance of the house as a central symbolic motif and archetypal territorial domain informed not simply the liturgical and meditative practices of monks, but the very infrastructure of monastic life. This is particularly true of the structure of ritual sponsorship in Lingshed, where the household (as both an economic and symbolic object) represented the core organisational structure (Ch.4). In particular, the centralisation of the productive and reproductive matrix of the household estate within the *khangchen* equates with a similar centralisation of *yang*, or wealth, in itself a semantic juxtaposition of agricultural productivity and social reproduction, making it the formal producer of sponsorship resources on behalf of the rest of the household estate. Indeed, the *khangchen's* role as a basis for offering and sponsorship were crucial to its acceptance as a jural body.

Furthermore, communal sponsorship within the village had certain important organisational features. To understand these, I would like

briefly to examine the sponsorship organisation for three ritual forms examined in previous chapters - *tsechu*, *bumskor*, and *sangsol*.

i) *Tsechu* were the “tenth day” celebrations (6.9.5) held every month celebrated Guru Rinpoche’s subjugation of the local area gods of the region (held to have taken place on the tenth day of the month). Due to the size of the village, Lingshed was divided into a series of seven *tsechu-alak*, or groups of houses given over to the sponsorship of *tsechu*. As each month came around, a different *khangchen* within each *tsechu-alak* sponsored and hosted the event.¹¹⁰

ii) At *bumskor*, the annual blessing of the fields (9.3), responsibility for hosting the ‘tea-stops’ and attendant prayers throughout the day was rotated within each *yulcha* (village section) passing from house to house by year, rather than by month. These *yulcha* sections were, with the exception of a single house, identical to the *tsechu-alak* groups.¹¹¹

iii) Similarly, performances of *sangsol* offerings (11.2.4) at local area god shrines throughout the village were organised and sponsored by *khangchen* owners on a rotational basis within *yulcha*.¹¹²

Several features are worthy of note about the distribution of sponsorships, and the relationship between sponsor and ritual performance. Firstly, with the exception of a single house (Fig. 12.1), sponsorship was organised around a unitary division of space in all of the three rites, which suggests the existence of territorial groups that were

¹¹⁰The *tsechu-alak* sponsoring groups were as follows: Ber-Ber house and Shalan-Khor section; Yogos section and Diling house; Chog-Tse-Rag-Khor section; Khartse section; Gyen-Khor section; and Daou section.

¹¹¹ The *bumskor* sponsoring groups were as follows: Diling, Ber-ber house and Shar-Chyogspa houses; Yogos section; Chog-Tse-Rag-Khor section; Khartse section; Daou section; Gyen-Khor section; and Shalan-Khor section..

¹¹²The *sangsol* sponsoring groups (with sponsored *yullha* shrine name in brackets) were as follows: Diling, Ber-Ber and Shar Chyogspa houses, Shalan-Khor and Yogos sections (Shar Chyogs and Ama Prus Gang *yullha*); Gyen-Khor and Daou sections (Serchamo, Chu Dung Ma and Adoma *yullha*); Khartse section (Oma Bar *yullha*); Chog-Tse-Rag-Khor section and Bandoma house (Bandoma *yullha*).

logically or historically prior to the ritual cycles performed by the Kumbum monks. Supporting this hypothesis is the fact that sponsorship by the various territorial units was not exclusively centred around Lingshed monastery: for example, monks from Kumbum were actively discouraged from attending *tsechu* rites which were nonetheless organised around the same groups. Similarly, within the village groups themselves, *khangchen*, despite maintaining allotted economic responsibilities to the monastery, were free to sponsor a variety of different ritual specialists - not necessarily affiliated to Kumbum - depending on their specific ritual needs.¹¹³

Secondly, sponsorship was concentrated semantically on the *khangchen*: Berig, a large village section situated to the East of the monastery (Fig. 12.1) had neither *bumskor* stopping-spot nor local area god shrine, since there were no *khangchen* there (although there were a few fields and *khangbu*). Within the household estate, all instituted relations with numina were channelled through the *khangchen*, as were the blessings from rites such as *chosil* (9.2).

Thirdly, although sponsorship by households was felt to benefit other groups as well, it almost inevitably involved perceived benefit being returned to the sponsoring household or (as in the case of *sangsol*) to those in the same village section (the exception to this were *sangsol* offerings to household gods, where the *p'aspun* affiliated to particular household gods were often physically separated and in different village sections (some, though very few, were in different villages).

This implies something of crucial importance to our understanding of pastoral care in Tibetan Buddhism: that at the heart of all three ritual practices lay a common focus on the purification and subjugation of a commonly-held "sub-stratum" of territorial domains in the form of household estates, whose defining feature was that they were, to a lesser or greater extent, socially and agriculturally fertile (most particularly the *khangchen*), and whose status as such allowed them to act as sponsor for such rites.

¹¹³I was told that Nyingmapa Order monks occasionally visited the village, performing exorcisms of returning ghosts and other ritual activities beyond the remit of the Gelukpa, although I never personally witnessed this.

In such a context - where the symbolic transformation of households was the dominant agenda of ritual activity - we might legitimately question the boundedness of the monastery as a ritual institution. The perceived benefit derived from many of the ritual practices of the Kumbum monks was created and channelled through a set of ritual exchanges that were located beyond the boundaries of the simple liturgical performance by the monks. The monastic assembly itself acted simply as a central focus for a wider dynamic that encompassed the invoked divinity and sponsor in a single exchange. Here, the sponsor acts as the economic basis of offerings which were *inalienably* transferred to the invoked divinity through the ritual process (8.2), whose performance by monks assured the facilitation of the exchange between sponsor and divinity. Within this context, the three salient features of the rite were: invocation of the divinity; the giving of offerings to the divinity; and the transfer of blessings from divinity to sponsor in the form of prayers by the *lopon*, who most essentially represented the agency of the divinity within the monastic assembly. The performance of prostrations and other acts of supplication (such as the giving of incense, tea and the offerings themselves) served to construct a relationship of hierarchy not so much between monk and sponsor as between the monastic assembly as a manifestation of Buddhahood and the sponsor.

If we are to understand the nature of this 'exchange', the monastery as an institutionalised collection of monks should be distinguished from the monastic assembly as a ritual body, although in general they were constituted by the same population (excepting resigned monks). The sponsorship and economic support of these two were separate, distinguishing between monks as celibate, non-productive householders who inhabited *shaks* on the one hand, and full members of the Sangha, and objects of refuge, on the other.

Nonetheless, in both the support of monks as individuals and the sponsorship of the monastic assembly as a ritual act, the monk was embedded *in some way* in a reciprocal relationship with the laity or, more specifically, with supporting households and domains that acted as (productively and reproductively) fertile 'places', for which the household head is a representative. Buddhism was thus practised, not in a vacuum,

but in a dynamic “subduing” relationship with fertile chthonic territory¹¹⁴, whose very continuity it ensured, symbolically replicating that apparently non-Buddhist symbol found in the household god shrine, where the divine arrow ‘fertilises’ the bowl of grain. But, if ritual acted with reference to territorial domains (such as the household estate, the *yulcha*, and so forth), it did so also in the social context of corporate group, whose identity was intimately bound up with those domains.

Such corporate and territorial groups, as ritual items, were conceptualised principally in terms of local and household gods. The most powerful of these chthonic spirits were the *yullha*, or “local area gods”, divinities with control over specific *yul*, or local areas (usually villages). *Yullha* represent the peak of a local supernatural hierarchy of unseen forces and powers, and certain *yullha* were held to control whole armies of lesser local spirits. In this way, they exercised considerable power over the local domain, controlling a wide range of natural events: the coming of snows in winter, melt water springs in the summer, the growth and fertility of crops. It also gave them power over the health, welfare and fertility of those born within their domain.

Kumbum maintained a complex relationship with such numina. According to villagers and monks alike, all these divinities were bound (*L. damchan*) to defend the Buddhist faith: some were said to be Buddhist monks and nuns. Indeed, one of the most important *yullha* of the area, Shar Chyogs (“Easterly Direction”), was raised to his present status as one of the Dharma Protectors of the monastery from his previous position as the household god of one of the old local kings. In each of these cases, relationships were maintained through a combined cycle of offering (*sangsol*) and purification (*trus*).

12.2 - Talking About Local Gods: Analytic Perspectives

Whilst it is impossible to say that such offering practices to local deities are or were universal to Tibetan Buddhist communities, their preponderance means that their presence cannot be ignored in any study of the ritual life of such communities (Riaboff 1995; Saul 1996; Snellgrove

¹¹⁴I have used the somewhat cumbersome term “chthonic territory” because “land” is too narrow semantically.

1957: 239-42; Mumford 1989; Furer-Haimendorf 1964: 267-8; Paul 1970 are but examples), and we certainly cannot dismiss the entrenched relationship between Kumbum and local divinities as being merely a local aberration, a corruption of pure Buddhist practice resulting from a *unilateral* 'domestication' to local ritual conditions. Indeed, the fact that rites concerned with autochthonous spirits are so often discussed as something separate from Buddhism means that we might suspect, as Samuel (1993a: 190; 1978: 107-9) does, that many apparent ethnographic variations in the treatment of local gods has more to do with the differing interests of Western observers than to actual disparities of practice. Certainly, analytic preferences towards contrasting "true Buddhism" with the equally nebulous category of "pre-Buddhist beliefs" (often associated with early Bon traditions, of which little is known for sure), have led to a strand of analysis which interprets such practices either in terms of a "real, if residual lay cult" (Samuel 1993a: 43) - a case of Stein's "Folk Religion" (Stein 1972), primarily concerned with the 'this-worldly' concerns of the laity (Samuel 1993a: Ch.10) - or (inasmuch as such divinities have been subdued and bound by oath to protect Buddhism) as purely peripheral protectors whose association with Buddhism is incidental rather than integral.

Of these two hypotheses, the former has proved, very simply, to be ethnographically wrong, and the latter begs important questions as to how and why such local divinities fit into a soteriology that regards them as un-Buddhist and inconsequential to the Buddhist path to enlightenment.

Mumford has discussed Buddhist relations with local spirits in terms of a shamanic "ancient matrix" of meaning in which actors' identities are relational, bound up in relationships of reciprocity with the world around (Mumford 1989: 20). These relationships militate against the detachment from subjective interaction and creation of the karmic "life sequence" emphasised by Buddhism. As with many such models, Mumford's imagery (his "ancient matrix") suggests an oft-found tendency to collapse speculative *historical* relationships between religion in pre-Buddhist Tibet and the subsequent arrival of Buddhism, into the depiction of *synchronous* ritual relations between local divinities and contemporary Buddhist ritual traditions. As Samuel notes:

The relationship between [Mumford's] phases is best understood as logical (and dialectical) rather than chronological; the 'ancient matrix' in Tibetan societies was constantly under attack, either overtly or implicitly, by Buddhism, but it continually reconstituted itself. Throughout Tibetan history, it provided a background against which Buddhism took shape and in terms of which it had to justify itself. (Samuel 1993a: 6)

The status of worldly gods within Buddhist ritual systems provided equally uncomfortable theoretical conundrums for the study of Theravadin Buddhism. Richard Gombrich, in opposition to interpreting the incorporation of local ritual form into Theravada Buddhism as "syncretic", argued instead that it was *accretive* (1971: 49): Buddhism allowed for and had relations with traditions which attend to the worldly needs of laity, whilst itself concentrating on issues of soteriology. Tambiah (1970) and Obeyesekere (1963; 1966) argued that offerings to local gods and the "higher" soteriological agendas of Buddhism could fit into a single "field" of religious activity that posited a definite hierarchy of religious beings.

Of course, Tibetan Buddhism - whilst presenting some of the same anthropological issues - has aspects that distinguish it radically from its Southern cousins. The Mahāyāna concept of the *bodhisattva* (L. *changchub-semspa*) - the being who uses *any* means to bring others to salvation - implies that Buddhist practitioners can and should often be born as the divinities of other religious traditions (Gellner 1992a: 101), allowing for a complex symbiosis between religious traditions that ensures spiritual liberation for the greatest number. This is 'skilful means' (L. *t'abs-la-khaspa*), the teaching of Buddhism by the most appropriate means. Whatever the case, the role of local divinities is most usually portrayed as at best peripheral to Buddhism, arising from the heterogeneous traditions of individual local areas, and unrelated in any essential way to the central practices of Buddhism.

12.3 - Talking About Local Gods: Representative Discourses within the Gelukpa Hierarchy

Nevertheless, the separation of local divinities from Buddhism cannot simply be dismissed as an analyst's fiction. The paradox has more reality than this. Ambivalence towards local gods is to be found within

indigenous discourse as well. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, in conversation with Gunter Schuttler during the late 1960s, declared of local gods and their oracles:

This has nothing to do with Buddhism. The oracles are absolutely without importance. They are only small tree-spirits. They do not belong to the three treasures of Buddhism. Relations with them are of no help for our next incarnation. They should be looked upon as a manifestation of popular superstition which is deleterious to the health of human beings. (Schuttler 1971, quoted in Prince Peter 1978).

Judging His Holiness' perspective is problematic. Although he can plausibly be classed as a self-conscious 'Buddhist moderniser' - aware of Tibetan Buddhism's position in the eyes of economically-important Western observers and involved in certain types of reform in the post-diaspora world of Tibetan Buddhism - we must be wary of assuming that his condemnation of an over-concern with local numina can be equated with an assertion that they do not exist. His Holiness's use of the term "superstition"¹¹⁵ should, I would argue, be taken as referring to viewing such spirits as objects of spiritual refuge, rather than as simply existent, or as requiring ritual attention.

Similarly problematic in my own experience were the troubled replies of many of the Kumbum monks, who often played down monastic involvement with local area gods, whilst at the same time performing rites to them on a regular basis. Certainly, this was not a case of lying, but rather an apparent discomfort about how Buddhism should be portrayed to others. Local divinities were by definition area-specific, and the contingencies of specific local problems were often distilled out in monks' portrayal of monastic Buddhism. The public presentation of monasticism (such as that which emerged in more formal fieldwork interviews) was intrinsically linked to lineages of teachings about monastic responsibility and conduct which derived from the teachings of visiting incarnates during ordinations and visits to more central monasteries, teachings and instructions which are in general *not* territorially specific. There was, in other words, a centralised body of scriptural and oral tradition which monks would look to as providing a template for their representation of

¹¹⁵It is unclear from the reference whether this is a subsequent translation.

Buddhism. This body of tradition was not simply a *resource* for understanding and portraying Buddhism in a public context; monks had an *obligation* to maintain it as a lineage of teaching. The presentation of Buddhism and monastic life thus often became divorced from their practical understanding of 'doing their job' as ritual technicians in a local context.

One of the most marked aspects of researching this issue in Lingshed was how different monastic and householder discourses were concerning local deities. Although not an absolute distinction, laity regularly spoke of household and local area gods with a warmth and affection that contrasted markedly with the monastic disdain and ambivalence I encountered. Whilst householders spoke of their *particular* household gods and *yullha* as *srungma* ("protectors"), monks portrayed them as merely "helpers" (L. *rogspa*), otherwise capricious and vain, and certainly improper objects of refuge (L. *skyaps*). On several occasions, older monks took my questions on the matter as an opportunity to admonish both myself and other monks and laity present not to entrust themselves (L. *dadpa cha*) to such divinities, as they did not provide ultimate release from suffering in the manner that trusting the Three Jewels of Buddhism could. Although the worldly protection they provided was felt by all to be real, monks argued that it only applied for the duration of this life, and could not protect people beyond this incarnation, or in the realms of the *bardo* death state.

The transience of the local gods' influence was contrasted with that of the Three Jewels in the form of the *lama* and *yidam*, with whom one has a karmic relationship in the *bardo* (see Evans-Wentz 1960), and across a range of lifetimes. Both were regarded as of Buddha status, and thus beyond the realms of cyclic existence (L. *khorwa*) and vicissitudes of the world of sentient beings (L. *jigten*). The *lama* particularly, as a cosmological figure, was seen as being "above the gods".

In relationship to Buddhism itself, informants (particularly monks) spoke of such local spirits as being from "before Buddhism", and part of "Bon" beliefs. Somewhat paradoxically, the same informants were also happy to assert that, as individuals, such divinities might personally be younger than Buddhism's dominant influence in the region. For the monks especially, "Bon" was a powerful imaginative category, not simply as a coherent historical tradition, but as a present but slightly undefinable

influence in the world (see Samuel 1993b). This imaginative category has informed certain representational models of Buddhism's relationship with local gods which as we have seen have perhaps uncritically been accepted by many anthropologists and Buddhologists.

12.4 - *Sangsol and the Monastic Hierarchy*

If such discourses are to be taken as representative of Buddhism's ideological relationship with local numina, then we must also accept that they are completely at odds with ethnographic reality. Although 'cults' to local deities are indeed non-uniform in their particulars, and may very well arise from the particular quirks of local social domains, the use of a *general class of rites* devoted to local divinities in Buddhist areas appears almost universal. Those ritual texts used at Lingshed (**App. B**) were published in Dharamsala and distributed throughout the monasteries of the order. Similarly, the use of worldly deities as the protectors of specific monasteries was widespread.¹¹⁶

Many such numina were deemed to be *chospa* ("religious ones") - beings who may not have attained enlightenment, but might nonetheless be comparatively religious, potentially having taken vows and so forth - and thus dealing with their legitimate needs and requirements was regarded as within the mandate of legitimate Buddhist activity.

It would be feasible to put such activities down to the use of "skilful means" - such as the maintenance of lay devotion to Buddhism through the performance of 'local' ritual acts - if it were not for the fact that *sangsol* was *not* only performed in the lay domain. They were also crucial to the ritual cycle of the monastery itself. Apart from occasions of pollution and the monthly third day offerings, *sangsol* was also performed during monastic ordinations and on four other principal monastic occasions throughout the year:

i) *Zhipa'i-Chonga* (15th.d, 4th.m): the date that the *lopon*, the Master of Ceremonies and his Assistant were installed in 2-3 year cycles; it also

¹¹⁶Thus, just as Kumbum maintained the *yullha* Shar Chyogs as a protector, so Spituk monastery in central Ladakh had Nezer Gyalpo, and Sera monastic university maintained Dregpa Chamsing.

marked the occasion of the Spring *Snyungnas* rite, in which laity took temporary *gyesnyen* (lay-ordination) vows;

ii) *Galden-Ngamchod* (25th.d., 10th.m.) celebration of the three great occasions in the life of Tsongkhapa; also the date of the installation of the *gyesgus* (disciplinary officer);

iii) *Chubsum-Chodpa* (12-13th.d., 2nd.m.) the date that the *gomnyer*, or monastic caretakers, were installed;

iv) *Smonlam Chenmo* (1st.m.), especially during the winter *Snyungnas* rite, when laity took temporary vows.

Each of these occasions was integrally bound up with the very constitution of Kumbum as a monastic institution, marking either the installation of new officers, or the ordination of new vow-holders. As a ritual practice, therefore, *sangsol* accompanied those *rites de passage* which were crucial to the very existence of the monastic community. All of the above *sangsol* rites differed in two major respects from normal monthly offerings to local area gods:

i) they were sponsored by the monastery itself, rather than villagers; and

ii) the rite itself was performed on the roof of the monastery, rather than at each of the *yullha lhat'o*. (Photo 11.4).

As we have seen in previous chapters, there was a directly perceived reciprocity between sponsorship and benefit, articulated in terms of a pronounced up-down metaphor. The performance of *sangsol* on the roof of the monastery was no mere accident, but the direct equivalent of, for example, the reading of texts on the roof of households (9.2). Benefit passed *down* to the sponsor: in this case, the monastery.

To understand the purpose of such rites we must return to the prior analysis of household *sangsol* rites, specifically, the conclusion that pollution events requiring offerings to local gods were brought about through the movement of social actors *upwards* to unprecedented positions in relation to important sources of social agency. In the case of the

monastery, the ordination of monks and the institution of monastic offices involve definite 'upward' movements in local ritual terms - as well as a move away from the reproductive matrix of the *khangchen* - to the monastery from the village on the one hand, and to raised positions of authority within the monastery on the other. Thus, although it may be pushing the argument too far to say that events such as ordination invoke pollution as such, they certainly require the permission (or aid) of the local gods to be performed successfully.

But if the *lopon's* inauguration required such rites, then his or any other monk's ordination could not (even in the eyes of the Buddhist authorities) have allowed him fully to transcend a concern with, or reliance on, local divinities. To understand this constraint, it is essential to return to Ladakhi and Tibetan notions of social identity, and its relationship to a localised cosmology which Samuel argues "forms the ground in relation to which all Tibetan religious orientations have to position themselves" (Samuel 1993a: 157).

12.5 - Local Selves and the Buddhist 'No-Self'

Within studies of Buddhist peoples, it is rare to find discussions of birth that are not discussions of rebirth, where the processes that determine the identity of a new-born child are seen as being predominantly karmic (Thurman 1994; Evans-Wentz 1960; Freemantle and Trungpa 1987; McDermott 1980; Perdue 1992: 546). The individualism seen by many Western observers as inherent to Buddhist ideas about karma and multiple rebirth has often gone hand in hand with analyses of monastic Buddhism which emphasise its role in extracting individuals from their social context, of placing them within a Goffmanian "total institution" (Goffman 1961, quoted in Tambiah 1970: 81). The portrayal of monks as devoid of social or local ties is a principal bulwark of the depiction of monasticism as the closed pursuit of religious ideals. Thus, Day presents ^{the} monastic ordination process in Ladakh as being one in which

all particularistic ties to kin, village, and processes of reproduction are transcended. As the monk dons the cloth, he joins a spiritual community in which he loses his identity. As a monk, he is equivalent to all other monks as far as domestic ritual is concerned. (Day 1989: 71).

In comparison with this renunciation of social identity, family life outside the monastery is often discussed as a critical failure of this ascetic ideal (Ortner 1978; Goldstein and Tsarong 1985: 20) within a society whose 'ethic' is predominantly Buddhist.

However, the dominance of the *zhindag* relationship as the basis of ritual activity, and the structure of lay religiosity (4.4), belies the assertion that non-social ascetic celibacy - as the model of individualism or social atomism - is the only way to act religiously, or that social life in Buddhist areas always exist in a state of constant comparison with such an ideal. Similarly, Ladakhi understandings about birth and the constitution of personal identity were not always couched in an individualistic karmic idiom. A person's link with the *place* they were born was often equally salient. As we saw in the discussions on the household and the attribution of ritual pollution at birth and death, persons also existed within the context of ideas of social and ritual agency and responsibility that were *corporate* in nature.

In the context of local divinities, the corporate nature of certain types of affiliation - by household, by *p'aspun*, by village - linked villagers as ritual agents to a wide variety of divinities and other numina, the most immediate of which were the *p'alha* of the person's natal household, and surrounding chthonic spirits such as the *yullha*. Depending on the astrological conditions, some or all of these divinities formed the *skyeslha* or 'birth-gods' that existed within the person's body from birth: they were born with (L. *lhan skyes*) the person and will die with them. Such personal protective divinities were also referred to as *gowa'i-lha* in Tibet, and the most powerful of them was the dominant *yullha*, situated on the person's head (Stein 1972: 222; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 327-8). As Samuel (1993a: 187) notes, the specifics of such multiple bodily inhabitants varied, involving local area gods, household gods and clan divinities depending on local tradition. Their presence nonetheless marks individuals as being in some way part of specific chthonic and kin groups, although beyond this their precise function is unclear.

I never witnessed any offering rites to *bodily* birth-gods, who were not regarded as being 'persons' (L. *gangzag*) in the same way that the

external deities they represented were.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, their accepted presence implied an understanding about people's intimate connection to the place (L. *zhi* or *gnas*) in which they were born, a connection which occurred primarily through physical embodiment (L. *luschan*) - or birth - there. Similarly, notions of the "life-essence" (L. *la*) of individuals and groups were often linked to specific places and geographical features (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 482): should such places be disturbed, a person's *la* could be dislodged and wander abroad, causing illness and potentially death to the affected person (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 481-3; Tucci 1980: 190-3; Mumford 1989: 168ff; Holmberg 1989: 154). *La* was also strongly cognate with the divinities (L. *lha*) and places that produced it, such that, as Stein notes:

All these 'seats of the soul' are barely distinguishable from beings or objects which are the habitation of the deity, or rather, are deities themselves. (Stein 1972: 228; see also Samuel 1985)

The relationship between such notions of personal "essence" and territorial context needs some extra qualification, particularly given its Buddhist context. As Lopez (1996) notes, concepts such as *la* should surely sit uncomfortably beside established Buddhist arguments for the non-existence of "selves". This doctrine - *gangzag kyi dagmed*, the "selflessness of persons" (Hopkins 1983) - does not directly influence the question of bodily birth gods (which are not persons in their own right) but does address the issue of the existence of *la* and the local numina that such bodily deities "represent" within the body. Such non-bodily numina share with humans common designations as social or supernatural actors, both in the sense of being persons (L. *gangzag*) and of having "selves" (L. *dagpo*).

In the context of spirits and divinities, *dagpo* is often glossed as "owner" or "master" (Phylactou 1989; Day 1989), as in for example in the terms *sadag* ("master of the soil") and *zhidag* ("master of the foundations/domain"); in the human context, terms such as *khyimdag* ("household head") similarly support this notion of ownership. However, whilst *dagpo* is certainly a transformation of *dag*, a term cognate with "I" or

¹¹⁷Dagyab Rinpoche (1995: 95-6) refers to offering rites to such gods - which he refers to as "the gods born together with [the offerer]" and other divinities and spirits as a means of repaying karmic debts to such beings.

“self” (Hopkins 1983: 749), it is not entirely synonymous with it, being instead generally used for oneself when formally narrating a story. As with *khyimdag* it marks a *formalised* representation of social agency.

Following such an interpretation, *zhindag* (“sponsor”) becomes the socially determined agent of alms (L. *zhin*), rather than the “owner” or “master” of them in the same way that a *khyimdag* acts as a *formal* (rather than necessarily actual) social agent for the household group. Similarly, Ngari Rinpoche’s relationship with Kumbum and other monasteries was more closely cognate with his role as a provider of blessing and authority than his ownership of them in the Western legal sense.¹¹⁸ By extension, *sadag* and *zhidag* become the formally defined ‘agency’ of certain territorial domains (rather than simply their owners), producing wealth and fertility within them, and representing the matrix of agency that correlates with certain corporate human groups, such as households and household estates that share the same *p’alha* or *yullha*.

This reification of corporate activities into certain notions of identified agency creates territorial domains as social actors, but also makes them the potential objects of symbolic transformation within Buddhist rites. Within such transformations, places become not simply metaphors for social identity or agency but objects of the ritual gaze. As Ramble notes in the context of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage practices:

A given territory is often conceived of as having such a [divine] subtle counterpart...It would be reasonable therefore to regard the ritual texts that accompany the cults of this divine population as constituting a branch of sacred geography...A principle that underlies many ritual strategies for healing, protecting or otherwise acting on the phenomenal world, involves merging the latter with an ideal, which may be a myth, a divine realm, or some other abstract notion, such as the Void; then performing various transformations in this more malleable sphere and thereby the desired changes in the material world which has been harnessed to it. (Ramble 1995: 89)

Thus, ‘places’ become the objects of ritual transformations not simply as physical objects, but as ones which condense cognitive and social

¹¹⁸Consider for example his role as a provider of blessing in the *Yar-gnas* Summer Retreat (2.6).

notions of agency as well. They become the objects of ritual transformation in the same way, *and within the same processes* as the mind is made the object of spiritual transformation.

Ethnographically, this metaphorical association is complex and multivalent: tantric initiates become 'temples' to tutelary deities in sand mandala rites whose primary spiritual aim is the transformation and subjugation of the mind of the novice, but where the initial act is the expulsion of earth-spirits and the commandeering of the territorial site of the shrine-room (6.8) on behalf of a tutelary deity whose primary reality is seen as indistinguishable from the novice's own cognition of emptiness (6.3).

Here, therefore, the appropriation of specific territorial domains (L. *zhi*) during tantric rites, and their transformation into manifestations of the Buddha's Body, Speech and Mind, mirrors the spiritual transformation of the practitioner on the religious path (L. *lam*). The meditator's basic consciousness and attributes - also termed *zhi* (Tucci 1980: 52) - are appropriated and consecrated for the tantric purposes of gaining enlightenment through arising as a divinity.

This correlation of cognitive and territorial space as a crucible of religious transformation has implications throughout the ritual repertoire of the Kumbum monks. In the tantric context, this largely occurred through the central metaphor of 'subjugation' or 'taming' (L. *dulwa*). *Dulwa* as a linguistic term implied subjugation in three separate contexts:

- i) the taming of local spirits by high *lamas* such as Guru Rinpoche;
- ii) the taming of the mind through discipline; and
- iii) the bringing under cultivation of new land by the farmer (see also Das 1991).

This implies that offering rites to local *zhidag* and other local numina had more subtle implications than simply keeping the villagers happy. Since religious relationships with the landscape were not static but rather on-going transformational processes that interlaced cognitive and territorial domains in acts of symbolic subjugation and appropriation, this appropriation of territorial elements depended on their articulation as

appropriatable entities, as socialised and socialisable figures and personalities - as spirits and gods.

Thus, the classical depiction of the Buddhist spiritual path - as the transformation of the three poisons (L. *duk sum*) of ignorance, desire and hatred into the state of enlightenment - is reformulated in terms of the transformation of territorial conceptions of identity through communal monastic ritual. Local constructions of the self - integrally connected to chthonic frameworks - become subjugated by the presence of the tutelary Buddha, whose nature is in turn the cognition of selflessness. In more philosophical terms, the 'conventional truth' (L. *kundzob-denpa*) of a person's local existence, conceived in terms of a variety of territorial numina, becomes subjugated to, but not destroyed by, the 'ultimate truth' (L. *dondam-denpa*) of the 'emptiness' of selves.

This implies something of the reason why such local divinities have such an ambiguous role within Buddhist practice. Although they are present within the ritual iconography and practice of Tibetan Buddhism, such divinities are constitutive of indigenous notions of personal and communal identity. They are therefore the *object* of Buddhist transformation, rather than its method. In the sense that Buddhist spirituality addresses certain notions of the self, and seeks to 'overcome' them, then it must address local divinities and spirits which constitute the primary ritual rubric for such notions.

Thus, Buddhist rites do not simply 'express' Buddhist doctrines such as selflessness, but are built around the transformation of extant constructions of the chthonic self to 'generate' a religious tendency towards selflessness.

This point can be addressed from a different angle, if we are prepared to accept the mildly controversial leap that monastic rites such as those we have looked at in this thesis are equivalent to established forms of meditation. One of the central teaching texts of Drepung Gomang Monastic College in Karnataka (to which Kumbum is affiliated and where Geshe Changchub was trained) is the Exposition of Tenets by Jamyang Sheyba, written in 1689. Here, analytic meditation (L. *chad sgom*) on the emptiness of self is described as having three stages (from Hopkins 1983: 44):

i) Identifying the object negated in the theory of selflessness (that is, bringing a sense of having a self into close analytic focus);

ii) Ascertaining that selflessness follows from the reason (that is, analysing this 'self' to determine if it can exist inherently, with the reasoning being that it cannot);

iii) Establishing the reasoning's presence in the subject (that is, applying the cognition of selflessness to one's 'sense' of selfhood, thus undermining it).

Thus, the self is not simply dismissed within Buddhist meditation, but actively reified as the object of meditative examination, *from which and in terms of which*, selflessness is 'realised'. This makes 'doctrines' such as selflessness to many extents relative and dependent on comparison with conventional notions of the self. As His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama asserted when discussing the notion of selflessness,

From the Madyamaka standpoint...the very notion of truth has a relative dimension. It is only *in relation* to falsity, it is only *in relation* to some other perception that anything can be said to be true. But to posit a concept of truth that is atemporal and eternal, something that has no frame of reference, would be quite problematic. (Dalai Lama 1996: 81)

Thus, the corporate constructions of 'territorial' agency (such as *la*, or hierarchies of local numina) found within local matrices of meaning are not simply eradicated by the arrival of Buddhist symbolic hegemony; they are incorporated as objects of ritual attention that provide fuel for the fire of Buddhist transformation. The 'Buddhizing of people' becomes logically equivalent to the Buddhizing of places.

PART III

Chapter 13: The Limits of Clerical Monasticism

**Chapter 14: Yogic Renunciation
and the Structure of Gelukpa Monasticism**

**Chapter 15: Sources of Blessing, Sources of Danger -
Kumbum's Relationship with Incarnates**

Chapter 16: Divine Emanations and Local Domains

Chapter 13:

The Limits of Clerical Monasticism

13.1 - Clerical Renunciation and Monastic Authority

In the previous chapter, we saw how monastic ordinations at Kumbum monastery, as well as the installation of important officers within its organisational structure, were accompanied by the performance of *sangsol*, including amongst them offerings to local deities. Following this, I argued that such practices were related to the fact that both ordinary monks and laity were seen as integrally bound up with the place that they were born, and that the various deities and spirits local to such areas were crucial to indigenous notions of the embodied self, in reference to which Buddhism, as both a spiritual discipline and an institutional religion, must orientate itself. Can we read from this that monks and laity are symbolically equivalent within this domain of local numina? If so, what can be said concerning the issue of monks' ritual authority within the context of ritual practices such as *sangsol* and so forth? If monks *are* different, then what makes them so, and to what extent?

In answer to these, it seems obvious that monks demonstrably do have access to forms of ritual authority which are not available to laity. Most obviously, it is they who are called upon to perform *sangsol*, and, in the guise of Yamāntaka, they can coerce local deities to do their will to a limited extent. Of course, in many areas of Ladakh and Tibet, such offerings were and are often performed by laity. Indeed, in the outlying villages of the Trans-Sengge-La Area, villagers that only have solitary 'caretaker' monks to see to the needs of the local temple must often perform offerings themselves. But in general, villagers felt that the ritual skills of the monks were far more effective, if also more expensive. Such authority is generally located in their capacity to perform *dagskyed* - the meditative generation of themselves as the tutelary deity Yamāntaka, from which position they are entitled to manipulate, cajole and threaten local deities (11.2.4). Such authority, especially in the case of the *lopon's* ritual authority, was integrally related to the two processes within monastic life:

- i) The receiving of Yamāntaka's tantric empowerment (L. *wang*) from a qualified lineage-holding *lama*;
- ii) The maintenance of a series of vows. Principally these were tantric vows (L. *rgyud gyi sdomba*) associated with the tutelary deity and the *lama* from

whom the monks received empowerment, but they also included those vows associated with the monk's ordination status, and with his vow to attain enlightenment - the *bodhisattva* vows (L. *changchub gyi sdomba*).

The first of these criteria was seen as essential to the performance of tantric rites at all: to do so without it was seen as futile and dangerous. However, the second criterion - the requirement for discipline - was the source of the greatest amount of on-going emphasis. Householders I spoke to were wary of monks who had possibly transgressed their vows, as this "made their mantras no good". To neglect one's tantric vows in particular was seen as especially damaging, whilst at the same time (because of the rather private and internal nature of tantric practice) difficult to assess in any particular case. Monastic vows were seen as important here, but apparently not critical: both laity and monks accepted that a real *bodhisattva* could and should transgress his or her vows if it was to the benefit of others.

Nonetheless, 'attachment' (L. *dodpa*) as a mental quality was felt to undermine the ritual power of monks. Kumbum's Master of Ceremonies explained that, because the actual activities of numina were invisible to the senses, it was essential that the officiant be able to 'bind up' (L. *sdomba*) his attachment to the six senses¹¹⁹, an ability to which all monks should aspire once they received their *gyets'ul* vows. Here, the senses were regarded as part of the embodied aspect of people, the 'doors' to the external embodied world (see also Cozort 1986: 45).

Arguably, such mental control is linked to a perceived dissociation from the very processes of embodiment that embed people within local territorial matrices. Similarly, renunciation of sexual reproduction and economic productivity cuts the ties to the processes of childbirth and agricultural growth: they no longer co-operate in *producing* the embodiment that binds. Just as the sand mandala rites had both cognitive and territorial aspects, so too did the *sangsol* rites: in order to overcome local chthonic influences and attain the supra-worldly ritual authority of Yamāntaka, ritual officiants needed to overcome their cognitive relations with the embodied world around them. Within the clerical renunciation of the Kumbum monks, this cognitive leap accompanied the territorial shift

¹¹⁹That is: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking.

away from the productive and reproductive centre of the household, to the *shak*.

This shift from the production of embodied wealth (children and agricultural produce) to the production of spiritual wealth had subtle linguistic counterparts. The term for economic increment or interest (the production of *surplus* wealth) was *skyedka*, a term also applicable to the gradual increase in ritual powers that came with spiritual practice. The core term itself (L. *skyedpa*) was cognate with *skyewa*, "to be born". Both terms were used to describe the arising of thoughts in the mind, to be contrasted with *drewu*, "the fruits" of such thoughts.

Spiritual (cognitive) acts were thus metaphorically linked to acts of (embodied) birth and agricultural production: the two represented alternative modes of life, mirror-images of one another. Departure from the realm of physical embodiment thus implied entry into the spiritual life, and the attainment of ritual powers. Clerical renunciation - as a cognitive and social removal from embedded attachment in the chthonic and fertile world - was felt to lend power to ritual performance, giving some measure of control over the numinal forces that framed people's existences.

13.2 - *The Limits of Clerical Monasticism*

That said, although monks may attain ritual authority through the renunciation of the active *processes* of embodiment, they cannot in general overcome the fact of their already established embodiment (i.e. their own births). To the extent to which they are previously embodied, so are they trapped within the previously established ritual framework of that embodiment, whether as monk or laity. Ordination to the monkhood does not change this, because it does not transform the bodies of monks, only their relationship to social processes of embodiment: monks remain within the symbolic walls of the household, although separated from its main productive and reproductive activities.

For this reason, both village and monastery existed *within* the power of local gods, just as household Buddhist shrines were *within* a household and therefore under the power and protection of its household god, which was most usually built above the Buddhist shrine room. Just as models of the household as a tiered social and ritual structure were often transposed on to wider understandings of the landscape (5.2.2), similarly models of the

monastic assembly's or the *lopon*'s ritual authority - as representing the power of the enlightened tutelary deity - were telescoped *down*, and played out *within the context of the local domain*, over which local area gods had sovereignty.

The shift from laity to celibate monk, and subsequent training in tantric systems, therefore, involved a definite upward shift in ritual authority over local domains, whilst at the same time monks remained under the purview of the *yullha*, with the inauguration of important monastic officers involving the mandate of local gods through the medium of *sangsol* held on the day of inauguration.

Thus, monastic ordination placed local monks in an ambiguous position: as peripheral householders - and thus embedded within a domain of local gods - they remained *under* the power of local divinities; but as members of the monastic assembly - and therefore one of the Three Jewels of Buddhism, entitled to 'represent' the tantric Buddha Yamāntaka within the ritual context - they had a dominant position *over* local deities.

The problem of conflicting depictions of the ritual position of renouncers in South Asian religions has been discussed by Burghart (1983), who argued that producing a single sociological picture of renunciation is problematic. Since renunciation is fundamentally an ideological construct, different informants (for instance, renouncers versus householders) will adhere to different ideologies about renunciation, depending on their particular roles and agendas and therefore, in Burghart's view, any attempt to create a unified picture might be counterproductive. In the Lingshed situation, monks and householders did indeed emphasise differing roles and responsibilities: householders spoke often about the responsibilities that particular monks had to their natal households. Conversely, monks often dismissed such particularity: it was of no concern *which* monks did household rites, they would argue, since, in this respect at least, "all monks are the same". But it is unclear whether they were speaking of the same thing, although they might be discussing the same individual. Householders in such contexts often spoke of monks as fellow members of the same natal household, as people supported and housed by the same kin; whilst monks spoke of the equality of monks as members of the monastic assembly as a ritual body.

Certainly, to demand that these two roles fit into a single depiction - either as renouncer, householder or something somewhere in the middle -

would be a grave methodological error, simply because it would conflate sources of representation. But emphasis on conflicting discourses should not cloud the fact that the position of monks was *explicitly* ambiguous even within the ecclesiastical structure itself. Their ambiguity was even entrenched within the architecture, 'placing' their different roles in physically different locations: their role as members of the Sangha was principally located in the *gompa* and household shrine rooms, whilst as peripheral householders, they lived in the privately-owned monastic quarters. Thus, it was not so much that differing discourses about monks' position vis-a-vis local numina created a contradiction; rather, it generated a complex structuring of religious space, actively regulating the structure of the monastery as an economic body and as a ritual tradition.¹²⁰

13.3 - Problems of Local Forces

The territorial affiliation that regulated the institutional structure of monasticism also affected people's capacity for ritual action. People's specific birth-status and birthplace made them both victims and assets when dealing with local area gods. Being born within the domain of a particular local god implied a certain tutelary relationship which everyone, monks and laity alike, felt loath to break. A story concerning the village of Matho (just outside Leh), which was told to me by a Tibetan refugee from the Kham region of Tibet, will serve as an illustration.

At some point during the 1980s, the villagers of Matho began to suffer a series of misfortunes (illnesses of various kinds, largely suffered by

¹²⁰ In the broader sphere of the Gelukpa Order, the affiliation of monks to their natal domain was replicated in the structure of monastic universities. Just as the larger part of local monasteries such as Kumbum were formed out of the agglomeration of monastic quarters which were part of the natal household estates of monks, so were monastic universities largely formed out of the agglomeration of differing 'colleges' (L. *khamtsen*) to which monks were and are assigned according to their natal origin, and was taught within that context, usually in his own dialect by teachers from his own area (see Goldstein 1989: 27). Thus, everyone from Ladakh stayed in Ladakh *khamtsen* in Gomang college of Drepung monastic University in Southern India. Further, smaller 'dormitories' (L. *mitsen*) within these colleges were even more locally specific. Even for resigned monks, therefore, there is a pronounced maintenance of symbolic and social links with natal territories.

local children) that had proven highly resistant to treatment. Whilst endeavouring to uncover the cause, a local oracle declared that the culprit was a tree spirit who resided in a tree above Matho village. Despite several entreaties, the spirit remained unmoved and continued to plague the villagers; eventually it was decided at a village meeting that the tree needed to be cut down to reduce the spirit's power. No-one, however, was prepared actually to do the deed themselves as all feared the inevitable wrath of the spirit, which was sure to take its revenge, weakened or not. Eventually, the villagers approached some men from the nearby refugee camp at Choglamsar: being from Kham province (on the other side of Tibet), they would have nothing to fear from such a local spirit, no matter how powerful it was. For a substantial sum, the men from Kham agreed and took an axe to the tree, which brought the spate of illnesses to an end.

As we can see from this tale, power to affect local numina is linked, to a perceived foreign-ness to the relevant domain, with local villagers being seen as very much within the power of local spirits' protection and retribution, remaining bound there inasmuch, and for as long, as they have bodies that bind them to social existence through birth.

This has important implications for our understanding of the ideology of monastic authority. If the ritual authority of monks came from their renunciation of certain household activities, rather than their departure from the household as a corporate group and symbolic domain, then they remained an integral part of the household. Being embedded within these household and local area cosmologies, ordinary monks within the clerical hierarchy did not have the authority to effect changes to those cosmologies, since their own clerical authority was constituted within the context of them. Global ritual changes to local domains reconstruct the relations of reciprocity and offering between the village and the monastery, and between humans and local chthonic spirits. Since the social and ritual position of ordinary local monks and villagers (including the *lopon*) were constituted by these very ties of ritual reciprocity, the instigation of new rites for local areas was by definition beyond their powers.

Thus, whilst monks performing *sangsol* played out the cosmological "Mythic Time" of the local gods' submission to Yamāntaka, thus replicating the acts of a Buddha within the local domain, their authority appeared to be limited to exactly that - the *replication* of previously established acts. They had no power to inaugurate rites which affected the

local domains of which they were themselves a part. To highlight this distinction, I would like to discuss an incident that occurred in Lingshed two years prior to my fieldwork there - an incident which gave rise to the inauguration of a new ritual cycle to be performed by the Kumbum monks: the *sangs chenmo* rite at Lha rGyal Sgan - the Hilltop of Divine Victory.

13.4 - Lha rGyal sGan : "The Hilltop of Divine Victory"

In the winters of the late 1980s and early 1990s the monthly round of offerings to local area gods - normally performed on the third day of every month - was disturbed by a series of bad winters. The snow in the valley lay so deep during the dark of the year that monks were unable to make their way through it to reach the local area god shrines scattered on the slopes and spurs of the surrounding mountains. Either offerings were not given at all, or they were given on days other than the third.

As the winters passed, tension between the laity and the monks grew on the matter, but the winter snow continued to provide an insuperable obstacle. Both laity and monks worried over the growing weight of pollution that the omissions were causing, but the solution to the issue was beyond the powers of the *lopon*.

At this time, Geshe Changchub had just finished his long training in the monastic universities of Southern India. As part of a programme of re-integrating Ladakh and Zangskar into the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy following the massive ecclesiastical upheavals brought on by the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Geshe returned to the region with the incarnate *lama* Dagon Rinpoche (1.3).

Whilst staying at Kumbum, Dagon Rinpoche agreed to give teachings and tantric empowerments to the villagers, an event which caused laity from all the surrounding villagers to make the journey to Lingshed. The empowerments were to be given at the *p'otang* near the monastery. Before they could start, however, proceedings were interrupted by the ecstatic possession of the local area god oracle from Dibling, who had also come to receive empowerment.

Passing into trance, the oracle became possessed by one of Lingshed's local area gods. Addressing Dagon Rinpoche, the *yullha* voiced its grievances over the issue of winter offerings. The incarnate asked the

lopon, who agreed that the problem was a grave one, but there was not much he could do if winters continued to be so bad.

After some deliberation, Dagon Rinpoche decided that a new rite had to be instigated to overcome the accumulating pollution resulting from the lapse. He wrote out a *sangs-chenmo* ('great *sangsol*') rite to be held outside the monastery on a nearby hilltop now called *Lha rGyal Sgan* - "hilltop of divine victory", every summer on the third day of the eighth month.¹²¹ Offerings for this rite were to be ceremonially burnt in a rite that combined *sangsol* with *trus* in a manner similar to that of the *zhin sreg* fire-rite following the sand mandala empowerments (6.8): designed, in other words, to compensate for those lapses in offering rites throughout the year (when discussing this issue, monks often stressed the fact that the performance of the *Lha rGyal Sgan* rite did not mean that relationships with the local area gods were now unproblematic, simply that the annual deterioration of the relationship between man and local god did not accumulate from one year to the next). Binding the local gods to accept this rite, Dagon Rinpoche then returned to the giving of empowerments.

In the story of *Lha rGyal Sgan*, the ritual capacities of the Kumbum monks - none of whom were incarnates - can be contrasted with those of Dagon Rinpoche. The precise distinction between incarnates and local monks will be studied in the next chapter, but it is important to note here that to incarnate *lamas*, unlike to ordinary monks, is attributed the capacity to choose their own re-birth, a capacity which suggests a certain transcendence over the processes of birth which, as we have seen, serve to 'lock' ordinary monks and laity into local chthonic frameworks. For the moment it suffices to note that the local *lopon* (and, by extension, any of the other monks) was unable to effect the *innovation* in ritual practice necessitated by the change in climatic conditions. All they were entitled, and qualified, to do, was to replicate previously instigated ritual patterns. Of course, once Dagon Rinpoche had inaugurated the rite, the monks were at liberty (indeed under obligation) to repeat it.

This story highlights numerous aspects of the complex relationship that Tibetan Buddhism, and especially monasticism, has with the local

¹²¹In 1994 this was performed on the 3rd. day of the 7th. month instead, in order not to interfere with the return visit of Dagon Rinpoche in the 8th month.

territory in which it exists. In particular, it highlights the ideological tension between the flux and mutability of the local chthonic events, and the enforced continuity of ritual traditions within Gelukpa monasticism. Within monasticism generally, transmission of teachings was carefully controlled, centring ideally on face-to-face transaction between teacher and student, the content of which interaction only entered written form in extremely restricted circumstances (Gyatso, J. 1992). Moreover, religious teachings always maintained a core element of divine (enlightened) origination, in that their ultimate authorship rested with the Buddha (Gyatso, J. 1992), regardless of subsequent presentation. This sense of the divine origin of knowledge also extended to those who transmitted the teachings subsequently, and knowledge of the lineage of a specific teaching: the uninterrupted manner in which it passed from enlightened beings through those who initially received them, and down to the speaker, was an important determinant of the authenticity and therefore authority of a specific corpus of teachings.

The same is not however true of the activities of local area gods, who are liable, if left unattended, to renege on their contract with the Buddhist authorities, and even at the best of times were felt to act quixotically, unpredictably and dangerously (see Samuel 1993a: 178). Chthonic events such as earthquakes and the bad weather suffered in Lingshed were regarded as signs of increasingly troubled relations between human communities and local divinities. In the face of such transience, the regular and fixed routines of monastic ritual - which, as we have seen, are primarily constructed in answer to definable problems, and are therefore to a certain extent particular in application - are not simply found wanting, but *irrelevant* to new concerns.

13.5 - Conclusion

We have seen, therefore, how the clerical renunciation of the household within Tibetan Buddhism in Lingshed at least has been constituted within the context of a range of greater and lesser notions of natal territory, involving varying relations with production and reproduction. This generates ambiguities as to the position of monks as renunciates, between their role as the Sangha members, and their role as household members. Within the context of local monks' natal region,

however, monastic renunciation was limited to the symbolic boundaries of the household.

This is not simply the household as a physical domain, but rather as a metaphorical one, as a household that is carried around by individual actors because of, and in the sense that, they were born with a body and within a house. Collins (1982), in his discussion of Theravada Buddhism notes that early Buddhist texts maintain the body and mind as being "like a house" (p.167). In the Ladakhi context, the house of the body and the house which you were born to became conflated: inasmuch as Ladakhi Buddhists had a body that they were born into, to this degree were they embodied and embedded within their natal territory. This being so, their capacity to attain ritual ascendancy over the salient divine aspects of that natal territory is limited.

It is possible, although in my view doubtful, that this tension between monasticism and local forces is only relevant to the border regions around historical Tibet, far from what was once the centre of lamaic institutional power. Certainly, it is not a problem unique to Lingshed or Ladakh. A similar incident has been described by Mumford (1989) for the Tamdungsa region of Nepal. Mumford's work, which charts the increasingly problematic relationship that Buddhist villagers had with local area gods, and the gradual increase in the prevalence of blood sacrifice as a local method for solving that relationship in the absence of high *lamas*, maps the dangerous edges of local affiliation to monastic Buddhism, and the fragility of monastic authority within local domains. What is clear, both from Mumford's ethnography and from the story of the *sangs chenmo* rite at the Hilltop of Divine Victory, is that monastic Buddhism in Tibetan border regions is far from transcendent when it comes to local supernatural numina, and, indeed, that Buddhist affiliation (including monastic ordination) occurs *within the context of*, rather than in opposition to, relationships with local area gods.

However, this should not be taken as a denial of Buddhism's ascendancy over local domains. Rather it questions the equation of Buddhism's ritual capacities with clerical monasticism per se. This equation tends to arise out of a conflation of a multiplicity of differing types of religious practitioner in Tibet, into the single figure of the monk as renouncing *bhikkhu*, the icon and apex of religious striving. Most especially, this defines away the inter-related tradition of the incarnate *lama*, and the

'yogic' renunciation embodied in that tradition. By contrast, I would argue that, in Tibetan Buddhist terms, the figure of the incarnate represents the true renouncer, of whom ordinary monks are mere shadows. It is to these true renouncers that I will now turn.

Chapter 14:

**Yogic Renunciation and
the Structure of Gelukpa Monasticism**

14.1 - Introduction - The Arrival of Dagon Rinpoche

From field notes, 24th August, 1994:

This morning Dagon Rinpoche arrived, having travelled from Gongma village. Lavish preparations were made for his arrival at the monastery, ensuring that everything looked its best, with new and recently-repaired banners placed over the balconies and courtyard. Complex negotiations have taken place over the last few days as to which of the village households he might visit or, more importantly, stay in overnight during his sojourn in Lingshed, and little else has been talked about since the incarnate began his journey south from Wanla. At the upper entrance to the monastery, next to the incarnates' quarters (L. *zim-chung*), one of the older *ex-lopons* was preparing the entrance. The path to the monastery and, within, to the quarters, had been edged by white chalk lines, elaborated at the doorway of the monastery into curling red and white patterns. These, he explained, were intended to protect the incarnate from the *gompa* itself which, by comparison, was polluting to him. Similarly, on the ground outside the monastery, he painstakingly drew the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism (L. *tashi rtag gyed*) on the path between the white lines.¹²²

With Dagon Rinpoche's arrival immanent, the monastery became a hive of activity, filled with laity and monks wearing their best clothes, talking animatedly. As the morning progressed, everyone moved out to the path leading to the pass from Gongma, above and to the East of the monastery. Younger monks were entrusted as banner and 'umbrella' carriers, and each of the monastic officials was lined up in order of rank, with the Disciplinary officer at the front, waiting, incense in hand to lead Dagon Rinpoche to the monastery; behind him stood the *lopon* and *umdzat*. All the higher monastic and village officials carried *katag*, ceremonial scarves for presenting to the incarnate when he arrived.

Geshe Changchub inspected everything, ensuring above all the correct order of people to welcome the incarnate. Some trouble arose because, although the village officials should technically be the first to greet the guest (followed by the monks, who would thereby be closer to the

¹²²That is: the parasol, the twin golden fishes, the treasure vase, the lotus, the right-turning conch-shell, the endless knot, the victory banner, the Wheel of Dharma. See Dagyab Rinpoche (1995: 17-38) for a discussion of this symbolism.

monastery, as was proper), the lie of the land meant that the villagers therefore stood physically above the monks. The Geshe thought this inappropriate, and everything was changed around.

This meticulous concern with order also caused some fuss earlier in the *gompa* itself. Two of the younger monks had been assigned the task of blowing the long copper *dungchen* horns, and were busy setting them up in the usual position on the floor above the main kitchens and *dukhang*, facing the valley. Halfway through, however, the *umdzat* emerged from the Maitreya Hall and lambasted the pair of them for setting up in the wrong place. Just as the call to villagers and gods to come to the main prayer hall was normally made from *above* that hall, so should the call to welcome the incarnate be made from *above* the incarnates' quarters. To blow the horns from the normal place would have been to invite him to the ordinary *dukhang*. The young *dungchen* players, somewhat chastised, rushed to set up on the roof of the *zim-chung*.

After a long wait, Dagon Rinpoche's procession appeared on the sky-line, a majestic train of figures, divine and semi-divine, descending into the valley. The incarnate himself - a surprisingly unassuming figure in monastic robes with round wire-rimmed glasses - was riding on a horse, flanked by his retainer and young assistant. In front of him strode the *choskyong* oracle in full possession, waving his sword defiantly, his bright yellow silk robes billowing in the wind. Behind Dagon Rinpoche marched the local god oracle from Dibling, in red, growling and shouting. Following behind them, the strongest men from Lingshed and Gongma carried his trunks over the pass, carefully leading the party's other horses down the precipitous path.

When the procession finally reached its welcoming party, laity rushed ahead of the monks, pressing their heads against the soles of Dagon Rinpoche's feet. Geshe Changchub, the *lopon*, and the village headman (L. *goba*) came forward, offering prayer scarves to the incarnate as he descended from his horse; as is traditional, the incarnate returned them, draping them round the neck of the giver in blessing, before heading on towards the *gompa*, preceded by two senior monks playing the *gyaling* horns, and the Disciplinary Officer, waving incense and ensuring that the path was clear.

At the *gompa*, the incarnate was ushered in, walking with some ceremony over the eight signs of Buddhism as he entered. The crowd of monks and laity following him, however, were extremely careful not to step on these signs.

Some minutes passed as the party took time to settle in. Outside the incarnate's quarters, a crush of laity, especially women and their children, developed, with everyone waiting to enter and receive blessings from the incarnate, or simply to catch a glimpse of events within. Karma's father and some other elder laymen were seated outside the door of the quarters, playing drums and trumpets as *lha rnga*, the traditional offering of music by the laity.¹²³ In time, the women and children were let through, to present prostrations to Dagon Rinpoche and receive his blessing in the form of red knotted threads (L. *srung-skud*) blown upon by the incarnate.

Like the older laymen and monks, I held back, taking time to drink tea in the monastery's library. Here negotiations between senior laymen and the monks continued over the issue of sponsorship and the Rinpoche's timetable. Uncertain of the protocol on such occasions, I asked whether we should be going to pay our respects to the new arrival. Karma's *azhang* (maternal uncle) smiled and told me to stay put: "We will give prostrations tomorrow, after the women and children. They have more need."

The above description of the arrival of Dagon Rinpoche highlights one of the most crucial and pervading distinctions within Tibetan Buddhism: that between the ordinary monks and laity on the one hand, and the high *lamas* and incarnates on the other. The gap between these two was so great that the *gompa* itself - the apex of local purity for ordinary monks and laity - was potentially polluting to the incarnate; and the Eight Auspicious Symbols - normally an object of reverence - were there to be walked over by the incarnate, as a blessing. It is the nature of this distinction, this quantum leap that divided these pre-eminent members of the Tibetan Buddhist Sangha from ordinary counterparts, that I would like to discuss here.

Previously, we have explored the social and symbolic construction of the clerical renunciation of the processes of economic production and social reproduction that constituted much of the activity of the household. This was, however, a renunciation of role rather than membership, with monks still occupying a section of their natal household estates, in the form of their monastic quarters. This path of clerical renunciation, whilst being viewed as virtuous and admirable by laity and monks alike, was also seen

¹²³ See Trewin (1993).

as limited in that it never attained the full transformation of renunciators, who remained rooted to their autochthonous nature by the iron thread of their natal bodies - a thread seemingly unbreakable through clerical means.

This in turn placed definite limits on the ritual authority of local 'clerical' renunciators. Although the practice of tantric rites was an essential part of the ritual training of Kumbum, the tantric empowerments necessary to perform such rites did not in themselves bestow upon the practitioner the ability to act like an incarnate or high *lama* - conferring tantric initiations, instigating ritual practices and subduing local divinities in the same way that, for example, Dagon Rinpoche could at the Hilltop of Divine Victory. Tantric empowerments were a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of that kind of ascendant religious status in Tibetan Buddhism: monks who had received these empowerments and were skilled in their practice attained at most the ability to coerce local area gods and *choskyong* within the context of specific ritual precedents created by high *lamas*. Although local monks had access to enlightened divine powers through the practice of *dagskyed* ("self-generation"), this power was always qualified by the fact that their manifest bodies were polluted by local influences derived from birth.

By contrast, the instigation of new ritual forms requires a transcendence of local domains and forces which 'clerical' renunciators have not completely attained: they are renunciators of the essential lifestyle of the natal 'household', but at the same time they still remain within its symbolic boundaries, rooted to their natal domain. This means that their ability to generate themselves as the tutelary deity is effective only *within* that domain, rather than having ritual power *over* it.

This 'clerical' form of renunciation is, however, not the only one found within Tibetan Buddhism, nor is it the most important. Religious figures such as Dagon Rinpoche, or for that matter the Dalai Lama - who *are* regarded as having such transcendent authority - mark, within the Gelukpa Order at least, an entirely different order of ritual specialist. Such figures are usually referred to as *rinpoche* - "precious one", a term which is applied to incarnate *lamas* (L. *tulku*) and to advanced tantric yogins (L. *naljorpa*).

These two types of religious figure were and are distinguished in both Tibet and Ladakh as being true *lamas* in the institutional sense of the

word: those fully qualified to give tantric empowerments.¹²⁴ Within the Gelukpa Order, only the first of these two types of *lama* were accepted within the ritual hierarchy: that is, the incarnates, or *tulku* ("emanation bodies").

The cultural focus on incarnate *lamas* translates into an extraordinary institutional structure which revolves around their presence, which starts soon after birth (see also Mills 1996). As soon as omens referring to the birth of high incarnates are witnessed, divinations are made and search parties set out, combing large areas for children with particular qualities. Aziz (1976) lists, amongst other signs, particular affinities for religious ritual and ritual objects, the ability to recite texts prior to having been taught them, or knowledge that only their previous incarnation would be privy to. In certain cases, such as the Gyalwa Karmapa incarnate lineage, the previous incarnation traditionally leaves behind precise written instructions as to the location of his future rebirth.

Depending on the agreement of their parents, incarnates are usually taken into monastic and religious apprenticeship as soon as possible. Usually, they will leave their natal home, and become heir to the estate of their previous incarnation. They will then receive extensive training in the liturgical and ritual specialities of the Order which they have joined, and those associated with their predecessor.

Although there is obvious pressure for them to fulfil their obligations as incarnates, it is always possible for an incarnate to renounce his ecclesiastical role. Within the Gelukpa Order, with its special emphasis on monasticism, this pressure is stronger, since he must also maintain celibacy. Unlike the *lamas* of other orders - where celibacy is not necessarily a strict corollary of religious authority - a Gelukpa incarnate wishing to marry must also renounce much of his position as a ritual figure. This, for example, was the course that was chosen by Ngari Rinpoche, the incarnate 'owner' of Lingshed and its sister monasteries.

The life of a working incarnate is a constant balance of training and retreat on the one hand, and tending to the needs of laity and members of the monastic community on the other. Most spend a large proportion of

¹²⁴Although almost anyone can be someone else's *lama* in the sense of a personal spiritual teacher, and thereby be seen by their student as an enlightened being, this relationship is highly subjective, and usually not recognised generally.

every day carrying out “surgeries”, in which laity will visit them with requests for blessings, blessed medicines, teachings or for rites to be performed. One of the most common rites performed in response to many requests were divinations, called *mo*. These were used to answer specific questions regarding future actions, usually of an important nature (such as funeral arrangements, business ventures, the timing of long journeys, and so forth).

The importance of incarnate *lamas* within Tibetan Buddhism is difficult to understate, marking a paradigm shift in status between these *p’agspa-gyedunpa* (“sublime Sangha”), and ordinary monks, even high scholars such as Lingshed’s Geshe Changchub. In a way, the ethnography of a small secondary monastery in Ladakh is not the place to discuss incarnates as a general class, and I do not claim to have ethnography that does anything more than suggest the complexities of their position in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy. Such an ethnography would by necessity paint a picture of the very apices of the ecclesiastical ladder, not its lower rungs. However, their role in local monastic affairs and the hagiographies of previous Tibetan incarnates tells us much if we know where to look. More than this, understanding the ritual position of incarnates is, I would argue, indispensable to understanding the ritual position of the ordinary monks of Kumbum themselves.

Any such understanding, however, must by nature be more than simply ethnographic: it also necessitates a return to the philosophical subtleties of Tibetan tantric traditions, and an understanding of what I will term *yogic renunciation*.

14.2 - Incarnates as Reincarnations

Incarnate *lamas*, or *tulku* (meaning “emanation (or transformation) body”) embody on the face of it a combination of two metaphysical processes: reincarnation according to karmic principles, and divine manifestation. Regarded as consciously and deliberately reincarnating in particular pre-chosen circumstances, their births are heralded by a wide variety of signs and omens.

The religious and ritual authority of such figures has in the past been located in a variety of different issues. In all circumstances, however, what is crucial is their status as rebirths (L. *yangtse* - literally, “living

again"). Such rebirth is thought of in terms of certain crucial, and familiar idioms. We saw in the previous chapter how 'embodiment' was akin to 'being housed'. Ladakhis extrapolated this metaphor in the context of re-incarnation: people spoke of the consciousness departing the body "like leaving a broken house", and "travelling" to a new body.¹²⁵

Re-birth itself was perceived as being preceded by an entry through the "womb-door" into a new body (see also Evans-Wentz 1960; Freemantle and Trungpa 1987; Thurman 1994). Such re-birth was regarded as being uncontrolled in the majority of cases, and a variety of spiritual practices were set aside to "close the door" to re-birth in an undesirable form, the most common of which was the universal mantra to Chenresig, OM MA NI PAD ME HUNG, each of which syllables was meant to "close the door" to involuntary re-birth in one of the six realms of samsaric existence (see also Samuel 1993a: 234).

The image of the traveller in the intermediate *bardo* between death and rebirth reverberates through many Ladakhi ideas concerning death. Whilst discussing the bi-annual *Snyung-gnas* Rite to Chenresig, I asked a young layman from Lingshed what benefit it was for those that performed it. He replied that it did many things, but most of all it protected one in dangerous places, such as when one was travelling across high passes, or through the *bardo* after death.

This image of the traveller also informed understandings of renunciation. In interview, monks especially remarked that the truly homeless ascetic should show a lack of attachment to each life, in the same manner that the traveller would not become attached to each of the various guest-houses on his route. In this same sense, the spiritual life for Buddhists is seen as being a path or road (L. *lam*), and the *lama* as being a "shower of the path" (L. *lamstonpa*). On my initial winter journey down the frozen Zangskar river to Lingshed, Karma once joked that rest of the party (none of whom had travelled this dangerous route before) should make offerings to him, since he was the "guru who showed the way".

¹²⁵Of course, the foundations of this metaphor are not simply Tibetan, but general to Buddhism as a whole. Collins notes for Theravadin Buddhism that Buddhist texts visualise the process of remembering one's past lives as that of remembering previous 'abodes', and the processes of re-birth as being the gradual passage from one abode to another (Collins 1982: 168).

In the context of this idiom, the incarnate *lama* is viewed as having mastered this process of re-birth, of travelling from 'house to house', so that it is within his conscious control. This has led to an enormous symbolic weight being placed on the birth-speeches of legendary religious figures: the birth speech of the Tibetan *lama* Phadampa Sangye, recognised re-incarnation of Kalamaśīla and Narendranatha, who, immediately after being born,

thanked his Mother, saying, "Women like you are a lodge for travellers, a son such as myself; and I am grateful for having been able to rest in your womb". (Aziz 1979:29).

Such speeches replicate the birth-speech of Buddha Śākyamuni who, emerging painlessly from his mother's womb, declared that it was his last incarnation and that he would attain Buddhahood that very lifetime. Arguably, however, the incarnate's independence of normal birth processes is more integrally bound up with Tibetan ideas about Guru Rinpoche, the archetypal incarnate. One of his titles - Padmasambhava - itself means "self-born of a lotus", and relates to his mythical birth. When he first entered Tibet and encountered the King Trisong Detsen, he refused to salute him, declaring,

I am not born from a womb, but was magically born. The king was born from a womb, so I am greater by birth.
(from *Padma-thang-yig*, f.128b-129b, trans. in Snellgrove & Richardson 1986: 97).

However, reincarnation on its own does not, and within the Buddhist context *cannot*, be the sole criterion of incarnate status. From a Buddhist perspective, everyone reincarnates; similarly, in Ladakh many children were regarded as being reincarnations of particularly pious or religious forebears, without necessarily being regarded as *tulku*. Here, the ability of the incarnate *lama* to retain conscious control through the traumatic time between death and rebirth was central to his religious status: upon being 'discovered' in their new incarnations, *tulku* are, as we have seen, tested by the ecclesiastical authorities to see how much they know of their previous life, being asked, for example, to choose their previous belongings from amongst similar items.

However, such memory should not be seen as the foundation of a *tulku's* authority. Simply accumulating experience from one lifetime to the next is hardly a plausible basis for their ascendant status, and most people seemed to accept that incarnates would lose any real remembrance of past lives as they grew older.

What is lacking here is the second, and more important, dimension to the *tulku's* status: the sense in which they are seen as emanations of Buddhahood.

14.3 - Incarnates as Emanation Bodies

Previously, we have seen how, within the ritual context, monks could represent the presence of tantric Buddhas such as Yamāntaka through the meditative act of *dagskyed*. This “self-generation” as deity itself depended upon prior empowerment and the performance of a medium-length “approaching retreat” (L. *ts'ams nyenpa*). Such training, whilst a necessary condition for attaining true tantric mastery, was far from sufficient. Although such training gave access to divine enlightened power through *dagskyed*, this power was qualified by the fact that their manifest bodies were still regarded as polluted by local influences derived from birth. Thus, whilst they could become the tutelary Buddha *within* the context of the local domain, they could not become it *in ascendance* of that domain.

This problem of local embodiment is what negatively defines the status of the incarnate. What separated both incarnates and high tantric yogins from ordinary monks and tantric practitioners in Tibetan areas was a history of having ‘transformed’ themselves through tantric methods into a manifestation of the tutelary divinity which is ‘trans-local’ (Tib. *jigten-las-daspa'i* - “having died to the world of physical incarnation”). In ideological terms, this involved more than the simple ritual transformation of *dagskyed*, it necessitated a “re-embodiment” of the renouncer in a body that was transcendent of the local constraints caused by normal birth.

This ‘transformed’ body was symbolically linked to the nature of Buddhahood itself. Within Tantric Buddhism, a Buddha is held to have three ‘bodies’ (L. *sku*) or modes of existence (Thurman 1994: 33; Freemantle and Trungpa 1987; Evans-Wentz 1960; Getty 1978: 11-12; Samuel 1993a: 255; Cozort 1986). The Buddha himself exists in the form of the *chos-sku*

(‘Truth-Body’ or ‘Religion-Body’), which is the actual enlightened mind of the Buddha, regarded as the essential and identical nature of all Buddhas, existing beyond cyclic existence. Simultaneously, Buddhahood manifests itself within the phenomenal world (L. *zugskham*, ‘form-’ or ‘embodied-realm’) as a variety of *zugsku*, or ‘form-bodies’. This includes the *lung-sku* (‘complete enjoyment body’) within which category we find the iconography of the tutelary divinity (L. *yidam*) Such *lung-sku* are seen as eternal and indestructible, whilst at the same time not actually *physically* extant. The final ‘form-body’ is the *tulku* or “emanation body”: this is the actual physical manifestation of Buddhahood as historical figures such as the Buddha Śākyamuni or Guru Rinpoche.

Although the *chos-sku* is perceived as being of the nature of ultimate Buddhahood, all of these various categories of figure participate in Buddhahood to an equal degree, differing solely in the manner in which they ‘show’ (L. *stonches*) themselves in the world.

This set of ‘modes of existence’ is what the serious tantric practitioner seeks to become transformed into. At the same time, such forms are held to be pre-existent. This being so, it is not so much that the advanced practitioner struggles to *attain* enlightenment, but rather that he/she struggles to *gain access* to it in a ritually pre-existent divine form (specifically, the tutelary divinity). This often creates a certain ambiguity about very high religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism. They are perceived as manifestations of the enlightened presence within the world (as part of the Three Bodies of the Buddha), whilst at the same time they are seen to be struggling towards enlightenment (as persons): thus, for example, the Buddha Śākyamuni as a historical figure is seen by Tibetan Buddhists as being a manifestation of his own previous enlightenment: he is felt actually to have attained it in the previous lifetime, but returned as Śākyamuni to “show the way” of attaining enlightenment (Cozort 1986: 99; Tambiah 1984: 206).

For Tibetan views on re-incarnation, this dual aspect is exemplified in the distinction that is made between simple re-incarnations and actual incarnates. Everyone reincarnates, and therefore re-incarnations of important monks, whilst revered, are not seen as being as important as incarnates who are *sangyas-gyi-trulwa* (“descended, or derived from, the Buddha”). One therefore is historically moving along the path towards Buddhahood, the other is a manifestation of it within mundane existence.

14.4 - *Becoming an Incarnate*

Such manifestations of Buddhahood are not, however, pre-existent cosmological facts that Tibetan Buddhists simply hold on to. It is regarded as entirely possible for an ordinary person to attain the status of *tulku*. Such a possibility, moreover, is institutionalised within the Gelukpa Order: the Ganden T'ipa, as head of the Gelukpa Order, is entitled to start his own lineage of incarnations, despite having himself been elected from the ranks of non-incarnate monks (Sherpa Tulku et al. 1977). We must ask therefore, what makes a non-incarnate into an incarnate?

To know this we must return to the structure of tantric practice. The salient feature which distinguished true tantric masters from ordinary ritual practitioners was not empowerment itself, but the tantric renunciation and especially retreat that sometimes followed on from it. Thus, in Lingshed, the increased ritual capacities of the *lopon*, resulted from the *lasrung* ('enabling work') that he accumulated during his annual meditation retreat on the monastery's tutelary deity, and enabled him to master the fierce *skangsol* rites and coerce *choskyong* to do his bidding. This retreat lasted two weeks and was performed annually. Beyond this, the attainment of true tantric powers arises through retreats lasting at least three to four years, often standardised into strenuous three year, three month, three day tantric retreats.

During this time, the practitioner remains secluded from all but a select group of helpers or co-practitioners, and concentrates on the ritual transformation of his or her mind and body into those of a Buddha through a series of tantric meditations and practices. These focus especially on two major 'attainments' (L. *drubpa*):

- i) the transformation of the *tsalung*, the internal "arteries and winds" that represent the symbolic core of the person as an embodied agent; and
- ii) the attainment of the "three isolations" (L. *wen-sum*).

Both of these transformations are aimed at symbolically recreating both the person and his or her environment as divine. The three isolations (that is: *lus wen* - bodily isolation; *ngag wen* - verbal isolation; and *sems wen* - mental isolation) involve respectively the cognitive recreation of perceived

physical objects as the body of the tutelary deity; the recreation of all aspects of breathing and verbalisation as being identical with the syllables denoting the Buddha's Body, Speech and Mind; and the recreation of all aspects of thought as being like that of the mind of a Buddha.¹²⁶

The term *wen*, normally translated as isolation, also has strong connotations of separation (as an act), and can therefore be seen as the 'separation' of the practitioner's mind from 'ordinary appearances' (Cozort 1986: 21), replacing them with divine ones. *Wen* also implies *physical* separation in the sense of being isolated geographically from others: the physical isolation of the monastery from the laity is therefore semantically collapsed down, within the tantric retreat, and replaced by the cognitive isolation of the tantrist from the mundane reality of his own body, speech, mind and environment as ordinarily conceived.

Essential to this process of cognitive and thence bodily transformation is the metamorphosis of desire (L. *dodpa*) into a part of the enlightened consciousness. This requires the use of a *rgya* or sexual partner as a method finally and completely to "yoke" the enlightened mind on to the exterior and interior perception of phenomena as being of the nature of the *yidam*.¹²⁷ The depiction of many enlightened divinities has a dual aspect which replicates this, incorporating both a male figure, representing compassion (L. *t'ugje*) and divine ritual efficacy (L. *t'abs*), and a female one, representing wisdom (L. *shesrabs*).

This divine form was replicated within the ritual act, linking the practitioner (as male divine aspect) to the ultimate nature of phenomena (as female divine aspect), and transforming the practitioner in terms of this union, creating the *rgyu lus*, or "illusory body" of the tantric deity within the practitioner's *tsalung*.

14.5 - Sexual Yoga and the Clerical Establishment

¹²⁶See Cozort (1986, Pt.III).

¹²⁷The term *rgya* actually corresponds to the term *mudra* in Sanskrit, and is more commonly translated as "seal". It is associated with a broader range of hand-gestures and meditative positions common to tantric Buddhist ritual, which generally perform the function of 'externalising' interior meditative states.

Of course, the use of such methods within the context of monasticism presents grave problems. As monks bound to celibacy, the population of ritual practitioners in Kumbum and other Gelukpa monasteries could not practise actual sexual yoga without compromising their vows. Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelukpa Order, is said not to have engaged in sexual yoga since he regarded its use as dangerous to the uninitiated and did not wish to set the wrong example to his followers (Cozort 1986: 92; Thurman 1982: 30). Instead, the practice of using meditatively visualised partners (L. *yeshes-gyi-chyag-rgya* - "wisdom seals") was the most common alternative. Such visualised partners were, however, generally perceived as not being as effective, and only able to bring the practitioner to a certain stage of spiritual development and no further.

However, if monks can only use limited methods, how are they to attain the consummation of tantric endeavour? Conversely, if incarnate *lamas* have attained such consummation, can we say that, within the logic of this system, they must have used sexual yoga at some point?

This is more than an analytic point. The difficulty of synthesising the demands of tantra and the rigours of clerical monasticism is not lost on Tibetan Buddhists themselves. As Samuel notes:

The importance of yogic practice in Tibet implies a relative deprecation of the monastic status. A common view is that once control over the *tsalung* (internal psychic currents) has been obtained, vows have no meaning...Consequently, a 'serious' Tibetan practitioner is as or more likely to be a lay yogin than a celibate monastic. Nor are *lamas* necessarily monks. (Samuel 1993a: 278)

Tibetan religious literature is replete with stories of such transcendent yogin figures (often called *nyonpa* or 'madmen') as Drugpa Kunleg (Dowman & Paljor 1980; also Samuel 1993a: 253-4) who eschewed monastic ideals and ridiculed the contradictions between the practice of tantra and rigid monasticism. Such ridicule hides more than simply a perceived sense of hypocrisy: Tibetan Buddhism is caught between two powerful demands: for the perceived order, dependability and bureaucratic structure of clerical monasticism on the one hand, and what Samuel refers to as the need for "shamanic" powers - the capacity to invest

ritual with divine presence and efficacy - on the other. Samuel has argued, moreover, that the various Orders of Tibetan Buddhism that have arisen over the last thousand years largely reflect different syntheses of these two agendas.

Nevertheless, although the tension between sexual tantra and monasticism is real, the symbolic *dependence* of monasticism on tantric powers is just as strong. Tibetan understandings of religious events are strongly linked to the existence of precedents, and this is no exception. The dependence of monasticism on tantric powers, not simply in terms of each individual monastery in Tibetan areas, but of monasticism in general in Tibet, is directly associated with the story of the founding of the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet at Samye in Central Tibet in 779c.e. The building of the monastery was said to have been hampered by the interference of local gods inimical to Buddhism, which tore down in the night everything that was built in the day. Eventually Santaraksita, the abbot supervising the building, requested the aid of Guru Rinpoche, a married tantric yogin, in overcoming this obstruction. Guru Rinpoche agreed, and entered into magical battle with the local area gods throughout Tibet, eventually subduing them and binding them to Buddhism, thus allowing the building of Samye monastery.

This act of subjugation by Guru Rinpoche is of inestimable cultural importance to Tibetan Buddhists in general, and it is very difficult to find a Himalayan Buddhist area which does not have either a cave that Guru Rinpoche meditated in during this mammoth task, or an 'imprint' (L. *rjes*) of his hand or foot on some nearby mountain or boulder, signifying the region's subjugation to Buddhism.

This interdependence between tantra and monasticism contains a subtle tension: the married tantrist Guru Rinpoche is essential to founding the monastery as a sacred space, but he cannot reside there; whilst the abbot-monk Santaraksita cannot found the monastery as sacred space but can create and be part of the monastic community that resides there. The monastic ideal cannot accommodate sexual tantra but at the same time cannot exist without the tantric powers that arise from it. The two must collaborate but, in the Samye example, are divided into two profoundly different types of practitioner, the monk and the tantric yogin.

In the modern situation, this collaboration is synthesised into the single figure of the incarnate *lama*, who, as Samuel argues,

provided a linchpin for the reconciliation of the monk and shaman-yogin ideals...Merely to be a reincarnate *lama* implies that the *lama* had such abilities, since he had been able to control his rebirth...[This] allowed the monastic *gompa* to take a more central role in the provision of shamanic services to the Tibetan population, and it likewise strengthened their position in the political system. (Samuel 1993a: 497).

Samuel explains this reconciliation of tantric power and monasticism by arguing that the incarnate gains his fully tantric powers through a "previous life when he was a non-celibate yogin" (Samuel 1993a: 497). Suggestive though this argument is, it is also profoundly problematic. If the attainment of spiritual and ritual authority - the personalised manifestation of enlightened Buddhahood within the world - must occur *outside* the confines of the monastic life - within a hypothetical previous married life - what possible impetus would there be for an aspiring religious virtuoso (such as the young Tsongkhapa) to enter into monasticism *prior* to attaining tantric consummation? From the other side of the argument, the Gelukpa hierarchy itself would depend, according to Samuel's formulation, on the spiritual attainments of incarnates trained in other (non-monastic) orders of Tibetan Buddhism during previous lives: hardly a strong position from which to assert doctrinal ascendancy.

14.6 - Death Yoga and the Clerical Establishment

The solution to this conundrum, I would argue, lies not in sexual yoga at all, but in its symbolic equivalent. Since sexual yoga and its supporting meditative training enact the "sealing" of all phenomena with the cognition of emptiness and impermanence, it is seen as equivalent to the processes of death within the practitioner (see Cozort 1986: 103-105). Previously, we explored briefly the complex symbolic world of the *bardo*, the liminal period between death and re-birth in Tibetan Buddhism, where the deceased's consciousness is forced into an instantaneous confrontation with the various 'natures' of his or her own mind. These different experiences, described in terms of lights, are explicitly related in literature such as the Tibetan Book of the Dead to the various Bodies of Buddhahood (Evans-Wentz 1960: 94; Fremantle and Trungpa 1987: 11). Simultaneously

the deceased adopts an 'illusory body' similar in essence if not in form to that 'generated' by the tantric yogin (Cozort 1986: 105). For the spiritually untrained mind, the death-period is portrayed as one in which the unshackled 'negative' qualities of mind - desires, hatreds and jealousies - previously 'embedded' within the physical body, come to the fore in this subtle 'illusory body' which, untrained, leads the deceased through a variety of dream-like domains, eventually making those qualities manifest in a new and karmically determined manifest body, which is then born.

Conversely, the spiritually-trained mind has the opportunity to make use of this period of physical unencumberedness to ensure a better or more beneficial re-birth, attain liberation from the wheel of suffering that most beings inhabit, or even attain full enlightenment. This ability is achieved through prior familiarity with the states of death through tantric practice during life, and through prior renunciation of attachment to cyclic existence. It also arises from prior familiarisation through tantric meditation with the various forms of Buddhahood, and particularly with the multiple possible forms of the tutelary deity, the *yidam*. Upon recognising the various visions of the *bardo* as being essentially their tutelary deity - and therefore a function of their own mind - the texts read to the dead repeatedly instruct them to attain meditative union with the *yidam* thus represented, and attain Buddhahood.

It would be mistaken, even within the Buddhist context, to view such ritual descriptions as symbolic of the *actual* processes of death. Rather they are the manner in which the deceased is supposed to *master* the processes of death. Just like the identification of deities in the training of oracles described by Day (1990) earlier, the 'identification' of the various visions of the death state is described as a negotiated process in which the deceased is encouraged to view (or 'recognise') his or her death-experiences as manifestations of the activities of tantric divinities, of Buddhas, *choskyong* and *yidam*, or at the very least as exemplifications of the Buddhist teachings of impermanence and emptiness. Such a recognition is seen as being sufficient for liberation from the heavier consequences of karmic retribution, or indeed from cyclic existence itself (Evans-Wentz 1960; Thurman 1994). The act of 'recognition' is thus held in itself to transform the entire course of the death event.

The actual processes of death are therefore reconstructed in terms of the imagery of tantric enlightenment, ideally giving the deceased power

over them through their prior familiarity with the relevant practices. In this sense, Tibetan rituals do not so much replicate the processes of death, but rather both ritual activities and the death process are seen as being moments when a certain type of cognition - a perception of the world as primarily divine - is positively evoked as a manner of experiencing reality.

But if the ritual processes of Tibetan Buddhism involve a return to a state of divinity through symbolic death, then they are conversely also intensely creative (see Bloch and Parry 1982). The arising of divinity, following either symbolic or actual death, is an act which creates a Buddhist universe with it, ordering and recreating the internal and external landscape in terms of it. The *bardo* death state is one which is perceived as being of crucial importance for the entire future identity and environment of the deceased: it is a period when the influence of "internal" states is essentially cosmogonic - they *create* the exact nature of the domains and environment into which the deceased will be reborn.

Thus, in the same way as the 'internal' states of anger or desire are seen as 'creating' a person's rebirth in hell or wherever, so the cognitive transformation of the death state into the symbolic qualities of the tutelary divinity generates a re-birth whose nature and circumstances are determined by divinely enlightened qualities. In this way, extensive meditations on specific tutelary deities are said to ensure re-birth in "their" paradise, there to receive extensive teachings of the Buddhist Doctrine.

In this context, many Highest Yoga Tantra texts refer to the direct relationship between the *bardo* and the various 'modes of existence' (bodies) of the tutelary Buddha. Thus, for example, evocations of the tutelary deity Yamāntaka involve three stages which explicitly link the various Bodies of the Buddha to the death process: "meditation of taking death as the path of the Truth Body"; "meditation of taking the intermediate state [*bardo*] as the Enjoyment Body"; and "meditation of taking birth as the path of the Emanation Body" (Sharpa Tulku and Guard 1990: 43-51).

This symbolic equivalence between sexual yoga and the death process means that further development for the committed celibate monk can be attained in death - and indeed, perhaps only in death. Death is seen as providing the spiritual adept with a fully effective alternative to an actual sexual partner when it comes to being reborn as a *tulku*. The

recreation of the body as the 'illusory body' of the tutelary divinity is thereby secured within the death state.

The representations of death found in the Bardo-T'odol and the understandings about the function of yogic practices associated with them reiterate many of the facets that emerged from our study of local ritual in Ladakh. The manifest physical body (L. *lus*) constitutes an effective brake on the ability of religious virtuosi to transcend the realms of 'normal existence': true and definite religious accomplishment, and thence spiritual authority necessitates either death or symbolic death (through sexual yoga) as a precondition, symbolically re-creating a new body, which is transcendent of local embeddedness. The figure that returns from full tantric retreat (involving sexual yogic practices) or from the fully mastered domain of the *bardo*, is one who has actively recreated this local embodiedness and thence embeddedness, and attained full authority over it. Through sexual or death yoga, a body and mind are re-created as entirely subjugated (L. *dulwa*) to the trans-local "mind of enlightenment" (Tib. *changchub-gyi-sems*). This subjugation of local forces internally is replicated as authority over local gods in the external world, and the accomplished yogin is seen as having full dominion there.

It is in the context of these understandings about death that we must look again at the ideology of the incarnate *lama* in the Gelukpa environment. Through being disallowed by his vows from attaining tantric ascendance through sexual yoga, the monastic adept instead attains it through the death process. Returning from this, his relationship with his surroundings is transformed, not simply because he is the re-incarnation of a previously good and holy person, but because he is the re-incarnation of a good and holy person *who has died*.

Arguably, without the essential dimension of death as a tantric vehicle for the final but celibate attainment of enlightenment, the Gelukpa spiritual tradition remains profoundly incomplete, even in its own terms. It therefore seems more likely that the ideology of the incarnate is one which emphasises death yoga rather than sexual yoga as its basis: that, through consciously controlling the processes of death and re-birth, the incarnate chooses the most appropriate manner of re-birth. His new body is thereby symbolically purified and subdued, since doctrinally he has no attachment to it or his new life and surroundings except as a means to the end of enlightenment and the liberation from suffering of all beings.

14.7 - *Incarnates and Local Gods*

In the previous chapter we explored the relationship between 'clerical renouncers' such as ordinary monks in the Gelukpa Order, and the productive/reproductive matrix of the household as the basis for renunciation. The introduction of the tantric element to renunciation in the Tibetan context changes this picture profoundly. Through the ritual metamorphosis of the mind and body in which they were born, or through the death process, yogic renouncers adopt an entirely different construction of natal ritual agency, one that is based on bodily unity with the enlightened divinity of the *yidam*, rather than with a host of localised numina, as is the case for ordinary monks and laity.

That said, the salience of the household as a guiding metaphor remains, but the natal household as the basis of socio-ritual identity is replaced by the divine mansion (L. *p'otang*) of the *yidam*, ritually manifest as the sand mandala of tantric empowerment.

Thus, the high tantric *lama* replaces his relationship with the worldly numina of the natal household and local domain - the *p'alha*, *t'ab-lha*, *zhidag* and *yullha* - with those of the enlightened and supra-mundane domain. Importantly, this is more than simply a different name, but a marked shift in status and ritual authority. Ritual emanation from the *yidam* (and control over death processes) implies access to the power and authority of that divinity and those like it (see Samuel 1993a: 283). The *yidam* itself stands in a direct hierarchical relationship with local divinities, and has correlated ritual power over their related local domains (and thus households). In this sense, the tantric renouncer and incarnate, through entirely recreating their body, have finally stepped beyond the symbolic boundaries of the localised household, and replaced it with a divine mansion that stands beyond the vicissitudes of local conditions.

14.8 - *Conclusion*

To conclude: I would argue that the Gelukpa order encompasses to related forms of renunciation: clerical renunciation and yogic renunciation. Clerical renunciation, whilst enabling substantial spiritual advancement (and attendant growth in ritual authority) within a single life-time, only

attains it within the context of the replication of the ritual acts of incarnate *lamas*. Beyond this precedent, clerical renouncers are unable to influence the local domains to which they are born, because their embodied physical presence is symbolically embedded within those domains through the medium of a series of "birth gods" (L. *skyes lha*) that were "born with them" (L. *lhan skyes*). To attain mastery over these forces of embodiment requires an act of yogic renunciation, wherein the ritual specialist must either use sexual yoga, or take advantage of the moment of death, to re-create the body as a pure embodiment of Buddhahood. In the context of celibate Gelukpa monasticism, it is the latter method that acts as the foundation of the ideology of the incarnate *lama*, or *tulku*. Such *tulku*, having overcome those localised influences that they were originally "born with", attain symbolic mastery over local domains, and the authority to produce innovative ritual change over local gods - change which can in turn be replicated by clerical renouncers.

Such a reading of the Buddhist material is far from being without precedent, having an equivalent within Tibetan discussions of the "afflictions" (Tib. *nyon-mongs*, Skt. *klesha*). Hopkins notes that the afflictions that cause cyclic existence are perceived as two-fold in Tibetan soteriology: innate (L. *lhan-skyes* - "born with") and artificial (L. *kun-tags* - "associated with"). The latter of these are the first to be overcome by the successful practitioner; overcoming the former (those afflictions with which one was born), even partly, is the sign of a true *bodhisattva*, and such a practitioner

gains the capacity to be born as a being of greater and greater influence. As his virtues increase, he is able to outshine, or suppress, greater numbers of beings and more powerful beings, not for the sake of exercising power but for the sake of helping them. (Hopkins 1983: 100)

Thus, the term *lhan-skyes* becomes semantically associated within the Buddhist ideology of rebirth with notions both of afflictions and of birth-spirits (Das 1991: 1337). Attaining symbolic mastery over either is the source of a purified rebirth and immeasurably enhanced ritual authority.

The incarnate, and the fully-accomplished tantric yogin, are therefore, in Tibetan eyes, the consummate renouncers. Having attained the transformation of their bodies and minds, they have stepped beyond the symbolic boundaries of the household and released themselves from

the tyranny that locality and birth hold on their spiritual progress. Simultaneously, the successful yogin - whether celibate or married - becomes for his followers and sponsors a channel for ritual access to high supra-mundane divinities, and thus a living method to control lesser divinities. Laity I spoke to described such *lamas* as having the powers of the *yidam* "in their hands", as being truly "above the gods".

The *lama* thus becomes an object of veneration of far greater importance than temples, monasteries or local gods. He becomes, in Buddhist terms anyway, an object of refuge relevant to many lives, rather than simply one (as for local area gods). Similarly, in representing not simply the possibility of ultimate enlightenment, but its very presence in the here and now, the *lama* attains a position higher even than Buddha Śākyamuni in the reckoning of his or her followers.

Tibetan ideologies concerning incarnates and sexual yoga discussed above are not simply ritual esoterics, but have profoundly affected the nature and structure of the Gelukpa Order, and thereby the history and formation of the state structure of Tibet since the fifteenth century. The reason for this is simple: the doctrinal acceptance of the incarnate *lama* as a vehicle for supreme ritual authority allows for the possibility of an entirely self-consistent monastic ethic, since the *tulku* represents the possibility of attaining tantric consummation within the monastic context. Death yoga, and the doctrine of the incarnate that follows from it, allows for the creation of monastic communities which are entirely monastic, since high ritual officiants with instigatory powers are possible within and emergent from the monastic community. If, as Samuel argues, the legitimate claim to tantric ritual powers - amongst them the coercion of divinities - is the cornerstone of a Buddhist Order's political future (through the ability to attract royal and other important sponsorship), then the ideological possibilities of death yoga are crucial to Gelukpa monastic power.

At the same time, it bifurcates the hierarchy of the Gelukpa into two distinct types of personnel: normal monks on the one hand and incarnates on the other, with no room for manoeuvre or cross-over between the two within a given monastic population. This implies the assumption by the Gelukpa Order of a radically different monastic organisation, with reference to religious practice, than that of less monastic Orders. The other orders of Tibetan Buddhism (Nyingmapa, Kagyudpa and Sakyapa) all maintained the standard instituted possibility of the attainment of high

lama status within a single life-time, through the three-year retreat, followed by a *lama's* involvement in married productivity. This allowed for small-scale communities of monks and laity surrounding a single married *lama* figure.

The Gelukpa however, maintain large monastic contingents, none of whom have any requirement to enter extended retreats as an explicit demand, unless they wished to attain high ritual positions such as *lopon* or *khenpo*¹²⁸, both of which had associated retreat periods, although they were comparatively shorter than those expected of high *lamas*. Ordinary, non-office holding monks were not required to go on celibate retreat, but instead to maintain a constant level of 'clerical' renunciation: this was felt as reflecting on the ritual capacities of the monastery as a communal group, and the tantric powers of a monastery which lacked firm discipline were occasionally questioned by laity (see previous chapter). In general, however, most felt that monks should go on retreat in preparation for certain posts, although such retreats would be comparatively short in duration (a matter of weeks, rather than months or years). It is unsurprising that in this situation, the Gelukpa gradually specialised in the clerical and academic aspects of Buddhism, since large monastic establishments could effectively depend upon incarnates to provide the necessary *ritual* authority required to maintain political and economic ascendancy.

¹²⁸The latter, higher post is usually filled by incarnates anyway.

Chapter 15:

**Sources of Blessing, Sources of Danger -
Kumbum's Relationship with Incarnates**

Overleaf:

Photo 15.1 (top) Geshe Changchub (centre) delivers gifts from Dagon Rinpoche (left, on throne) to local monks.

Photo 15.2 (bottom): Laity gather to receive blessings from Dagon Rinpoche (centre) as he passes following teachings at the *p'otang*.



Overleaf:

Photo 15.3 (above): Laity dance for Dagon Rinpoche following teachings and empowerments.

Photo 15.4 (below): *Lha rnga*, the offering of music, traditionally given at the arrival of all high guests.



15.1 - Incarnates and Shamanic Buddhism

As with oracles, incarnate *lamas* represent a complex religious category - a moment of cosmological interface where the numinal becomes manifest - prompting the evocation of grand ceremony and scrupulous ritual observance. Ethnographically, oracles and incarnates are often found together within the ecclesiastical structure, with oracles providing crucial advice for incarnates on which to base many of their decisions. We have already seen, in the Lingshed scenario, how the Dibling oracle was the crucial intermediary in the events which led to Dagon Rinpoche's instigation of the *sangs chenmo* rite at Lha rGyal Sgan. At a higher political level, collaboration between the office of the Dalai Lama and that of the Nechung Oracle has been a standard political institution since the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, with the oracle maintaining a profound influence on Tibetan political affairs (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 448-454; see also Dalai Lama 1990: 148-149). Similarly, important oracles are regularly used in the search to find new incarnates, and incarnate *lamas* are similarly called upon to identify and test high oracles, particularly those that claim to be important Dharma Protectors.

This ethnographic proximity of shamanism to the status of incarnates, and their importance as resources for political decision-making, the solving of individual and communal problems and the curing of illness, has led several authors - most prominently amongst them Geoffrey Samuel and Barbara Aziz - to discuss both such institutions within the context of shamanism, or (Samuel 1993a) "shamanic Buddhism".

As I read him, Samuel's use of the category is as a rubric to cover a general trend in Tibetan Buddhism, rather than as a specific explanatory model. Aziz, however, takes a far stronger line, and whilst she avoids the precise charge that incarnates *are* shamans, it is evident that her understanding of ^{the} *tulku* institution is based on a model of possession, similar to that of the oracle. She describes the incarnate as possessed of two essentially separate identities - that of the person, and that of the deity of which he is an incarnation - vying for decisive power over a single life, to the extent that the wishes of deity and person can be "at odds" (Aziz 1976: 347). In Aziz's picture, therefore, the *tulku* represents a highly rationalised shaman, a bureaucratic oracle.

Such a perspective is radically at odds with indigenous interpretations of the matter. Most Ladakhis I questioned on this issue were extremely emphatic that oracles and incarnates were not the same kind of religious specialist at all. Firstly, they argued that all incarnates were *khaspa* ("knowledgeable ones"). Their moral standing was indisputable by definition, in that the capacity and wish to return as an incarnate depended on the prior and extremely advanced cultivation of *changchub-kyi-sems* (Skt. *bodhicitta*), the wish to save other sentient beings from suffering. By contrast, oracles were *chosen* by the divinity, who then possessed the oracle intermittently: such possession implied nothing about the moral standing of the oracle him or herself, regardless of the morality of the possessing divinity.

Secondly, the oracle's body was a vessel for the divinity, whilst the 'personality' of the oracle was pushed aside by the emerging divine presence: the oracle should remember nothing of the encounter. All those I spoke to - including a prominent oracle - regarded this as a defining feature of possession: it should simply not be possible for an oracle to remember anything from a trance state. In other words, the oracle's personal (as opposed to divine or spirit) identity predated divine intervention and was, in some cases, at odds with it.¹²⁹ This was not the case with incarnates: the incarnate's personal identity and moral constitution were regarded as indivisible from the incarnating divinity, indeed a manifestation (L. *trulwa* - an emanation, or divine show) of it. In this sense, it was impossible in Ladakhi eyes for an incarnate to put the deity "on hold" briefly for individual purposes, as Aziz suggests (1976: 348). It *was* possible for a particular incarnate to reject the specific responsibilities associated with his *post* as an incarnation, such as entering monastic life or fulfilling teaching and ritual obligations - as in the case of Ngari Rinpoche.¹³⁰ Conversely, it was also possible to question the particular veracity of an incarnate's manifestation.

Regardless of such institutional decisions, informants stated that *every* action by an accepted incarnate should be seen as a manifestation of

¹²⁹Day (1989) describes several cases in which, for example, the spirit had to be "banned" from entering female oracles because the oracle wished to have children (possession during pregnancy being regarded as dangerous to both mother and child).

¹³⁰Aziz describes several other cases of such rejection.

that deity's intentions. This view was strongly related to the *tulku's* post as the pre-eminent spiritual teacher: on several occasions I was told that as Buddhists, it was important to view all high *lamas* as Buddhas, and to see all actions not normally in keeping with the exemplary lives of their forebears as signs both of their compassion, and as a manifestation of the *dip* (pollution) in one's own mind clouding one's capacity to see them as they truly were.

Finally, there is a cosmological distinction. Incarnates are manifestations of particular tantric tutelary deities, deities which are by definition of Buddha status, and thus *jigten-las-das-pa'i-lha* - supra-mundane divinities. Conversely, those divinities that possessed oracles were always felt, by the monastic authorities at least, to be *jigten-pa'i-lha* - mundane gods. This is not a distinction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist gods, but a distinction in the manner in which divinities act in the world, either directly and forcefully (as for mundane gods) or indirectly, through manifesting such focuses of religious reverence as incarnates. However, the manner in which oracles and incarnates *are* part of a unitary cultural phenomenon is in the sense in which they 'represent' the power and authority of complementary sections of Buddhist cosmology, that is, the mundane and supra-mundane worlds.

The contingency of local and worldly gods in comparison with Buddhas means that they are powerful in a historically and socially embodied fashion: they exist within the world, and act in worldly ways. Unlike Buddhas, who are beyond such conceptual distinctions, *choskyong srungma* (worldly Dharma Protectors) and other lesser gods can act more or less partially, protecting Buddhists against non-Buddhists and acting in favour of those that supplicate to them, and against those that actively do not. Buddhas, instead, remain uninvolved (in direct terms) in cyclic existence, and therefore are not called upon to perform everyday and partial deeds. In this there is a constant tension between the moral purity and disinterest of Buddhas on the one hand, and the moral dubiousness and magical efficacy of lesser gods on the other. In such a context, it is perhaps unsurprising if oracles and incarnates - representing as they do the capacity to overcome ritual dilemmas on both a worldly and a supraworldly level - often act in conjunction.

15.2 - Manifesting Deity

If manifesting the power and authority of Buddhas or lesser deities within the experienced world presented a major ritual aim in much Tibetan Buddhist (and especially Vajrayāna) ritual, then such manifestation was far from unproblematic even when achieved. Sophie Day, in her seminal work on oracular possession in Ladakh, has argued that the subduing and harnessing of the power of local gods in Ladakh is intrinsically bound up with the act of housing them within *lhat'o* (Day 1989: Ch.2). She argues that this process of housing numina transforms wandering and potentially demonic spirits into protective ones, but it also gives them a certain degree of manifestation, essential to their domestication. Just as tantric empowerment makes the practitioner a 'temple' to that *yidam*, and therefore an active nexus of that divinity's activities in the world, so too does housing divinities bind them to act within the world by giving them bodies (*zugs* - "form").

Thus, for example, *skangsol* rites to Dharma Protectors provided offering cakes which were to act as the 'bodies' of the deities during the course of the rite. The symbolic presentation of divine embodiment also concentrated around the presentation of clothes (L. *naza*) to deities. Kumbum monks annually re-clothed (L. *naza-soma-p'ulwa* - "to offer new clothes") the shrines of local area gods by replacing the juniper leaves on their shrines in order to maintain the divinity's acquiescence to the requests of villagers. Similarly, the clothes, teachings and statue of the *lama* (a small enrobed statue of the Buddha) were taken round the fields during *bumskor* to ensure their fertility and abundance.

The presentation of the outward embodied forms of deities provides more than simply an index of their presence - it is a functioning part of the perlocutionary force of bringing those deities into the world. This is most evident in the case of preparation of oracles for possession, as an incident which took place in February 1994 (later related to me by one of the Kumbum monks) illustrates [from fieldnotes]:

Today the school was visited by Dibling [oracle], who had previously been possessed at the *gompa* on the eighth day [two days previously], and said he would visit the school. So up he appeared, and went into trance, apparently possessed

by the Dibling *yullha* Kyungay, and harangued them for their carelessness in not preparing for his arrival.

[The teacher], who is rather sceptical about Dibling *lhapa's* authenticity (he thinks he has too many trances...) was rather put out by this intrusion, and demanded of the oracle what he wanted, since everyone was very cold and wanted to go home.

The [oracle] claimed that there were *bamo* in the village, and that one had his greedy eye on the village school. Generally, people were unimpressed by this piece of information, since the presence of *bamo* was hardly startling news to make such a fuss over, and anyway, everyone went home in the evenings (thus negating the *bamo* threat [which only really works at night]), so what was the problem?

The [oracle] replied that he would be able to do something about the threat, but he didn't have his [ceremonial] clothes with him. [The teacher], unimpressed by this excuse, said that if he [the *yullha*] was here, then he was here, clothes or no, and that he should get on with whatever business he had if that is what he was here to do. The [oracle] left.

Despite the cynicism of the teacher (a local monk who often commented on the general inferiority of local area gods), we can see that the boundary between the subtle and manifest nature of divinities informs considerable ritual elaboration. Moreover, there is a powerful distinction between various forms of presence: without his clothes, the local oracle could speak, but could not actually act to allay the threat to the school. Similarly, the Dharma Protector oracle that occasionally visits Lingshed could only act to destroy or drive away pollution and demons if he had certain implements of his ritual regalia. Thus, the divine presence of worldly deities does not simply and unproblematically come into being, but requires complex and systematic coaxing through various levels of embodiment.

This complexity of presence has counterparts within the structure of tantric rites. Tsongkhapa's Great Exposition on Secret Mantra, a central Gelukpa text on tantric practice, describes the meditative act of *dagskyed* ("generation of self as divinity") - which has been discussed in this work in a variety of contexts - as one in which the tutelary deity is visualised as gradually manifesting itself through a series of progressively more concrete forms. The following table describes this process, as the deity is

visualised emerging from 'emptiness' and gradually made consubstantial with the practitioner. The divinity is invoked through a variety of divine types, which are "sealed" into the corporeal body of the practitioner through the use of mantra:

<u>Order of Divinities Invoked</u>	<u>Form</u>
Ultimate Deity	Formless (emptiness)
Sound Deity	Sound of the deity's mantra
Letter Deity	Written letters of the deity's mantra
<p>[From the letter deity then emerge endless offerings to the Buddhas, and bodily forms of the deity which satisfy the requirements of all sentient beings (<i>sems-chan</i>), thus fulfilling the essential function of Buddhahood. These then re-coalesce back into the purified mind of the practitioner, crystallising as the Form Deity]</p>	
Form Deity	Fully visualised bodily form
Seal Deity	The use of mantra to "seal" the visualised deity into the physical body of the practitioner.
Sign Deity	The deity as fully "constructed" and sealed.
<p>(from Tsongkhapa 1981: 104-108)</p>	

Fig. 15.1 - The Stages of Tantric Invocation

This manifest and embodied presence of enlightenment within the world then becomes the source of ritual action, often using other divine figures such as the meditatively visualised Dharma Protectors - themselves seen as forms of the central tutelary deity. This complex process of manifestation - like the birth of an incarnate *lama* - becomes the source of ritual authority and blessing.

15.3 - Polluted Divinity? Dangerous Purity in an Imperfect World

We saw above how various forms of Buddhahood - through a variety of means - become physically embodied in the world as sources of ritual authority and blessing. Such embodiment, whilst representing supramundane divinity, takes place within a definable local context. As we have already discussed in Chapter Ten, such representations of Buddhahood as the Yamāntaka statue in the main prayer hall thus become the focus of pollution concerns. Similarly, the monk's performance of *dagskyed* means that he must treat even his own body with some care and caution.

This is even more so for incarnate *lamas*, who represent the consummate presence of Buddhahood within the world. Indeed, their mere presence profoundly effects and reconstructs the social and ritual domains around them, as they come to represent mobile 'sources' of blessing, a ritual *axis mundi* around which local areas must rebuild themselves. It is a relationship that is therefore ambivalent, powerful and dangerous.

Thus, just as with all other divine 'sources', the presence of a high *lama* enforces a strict awareness of the correct ordering of social and ritual events 'below' him/her. Although intentional disrespect towards a high *lama* was regarded as having profound and long-lasting karmic repercussions, correct relations with reference to *tulku* involved more than simple intentionality. As with any pollution concern, even *unintended* or unknowing disrespect towards them was felt to carry heavy penalties for the corporate community within which they resided.

An awareness of the dangerous purity of incarnates informed a popular but cautionary tale concerning the recognition of one of Ngari Rinpoche's incarnations, often recounted by one of the older *ex-lopons* in Kumbum's kitchens.¹³¹

This particular incarnation of Ngari Rinpoche was born in one of the more desolate regions of Zangskar, just south of Zang-la, an area well known for the difficulty of its living conditions. The child was orphaned at a young age and grew up to be a goat herder and spent his time wandering the high pastures, looking after his charges. There were very few

¹³¹I could never ascertain for sure to which of his various incarnations it referred, although most felt it to be that of Lobsang Yeshe Dragpa, the founder of Rangdum, Lingshed's "mother *gompa*".

springs in the region, and the young goat herd began to demonstrate his spiritual heritage by making prophecies about the emergence of new springs. Eventually the young incarnate decided that it was no longer tenable to live where he was born, and decided to move himself to Tibet in the hope of finding somewhere more suitable.

Packing his bags on to the back of a goat he set off. As he was heading for Lhasa, the incumbent Panchen Lama (at Tashilunpo Monastery, en route between Zangskar and Lhasa) had a vision that a great man was coming the next day via a nearby bridge. So, the next morning, he sent out his servant to the bridge, but all he saw was a young man with a goat, a fact which he forgot to mention to the Panchen Lama when he returned empty-handed. But the Panchen Lama quizzed him, asking "Where is the important guest?", to which the servant replied that he had only seen a man with a goat. "But that was the guest! He should have stayed here for the benefit of the monastery!" replied the Panchen Lama.

By this stage, Ngari Rinpoche had already passed Tashilunpo by, and was moving on to Drepung Monastic University (outside Lhasa) and to Spituk *khamtsen* (a 'college' house within Drepung affiliated to Spituk, the main Gelukpa monastery in Ladakh). Requesting permission from the abbot (L. *khenpo*) to stay, he was refused. Indeed, when Ngari Rinpoche asked him for a letter of furtherance (essential to entering another monastic house) the *khenpo* refused even this, but gave him instead a ball of barley-flour (*tsampa* - this ball would have his thumb-print in it, and be the meanest form of identification). Ngari Rinpoche took the ball over to the other college in Drepung, and asked for accommodation at Gomang Ngari *khamtsen* (a college residence which houses people from Ngari), where he was accepted and stayed to study for monkhood.

Eventually, Ngari Rinpoche became *gyesgus*, the disciplinary officer of the college. At this time, everyone in the monastery began to fall ill with leprosy (L. *dze* - a disease felt to be caused by the attack of water spirits). The monastic officials approached the *choskyong* (protector of the doctrine, in this case probably via an oracle), to ask about the cause of the disease, and the *choskyong* replied that one of the monks was an incarnate, and therefore should be respected. So, the monks wrote all their names on pieces of paper and sent them to the *choskyong*. The *choskyong* surveyed the pieces of paper and declared that the incarnate was not amongst them that day and they should all assemble the next day so that the *choskyong* could decide in person.

At this time, Ngari Rinpoche was outside the monastery, at a nearby rock, upon which was carved a depiction of Dolma (the female *bodhisattva*, strongly linked to Tibet's patron divinity Chenresig). Seeing that the painting was very dirty, the incarnate declared "It's hardly surprising that they are all ill when this statue is so dirty".

The next day, the monks gathered in entirety in the courtyard. Amongst them, Ngari Rinpoche and a Mongolian monk were sitting talking. The *choskyong* declared that it would throw a *katag* (a white ceremonial scarf used for greeting important visitors), and on whomever it landed, was the incarnate. Thrown in the air, it landed immediately on the lap of Ngari Rinpoche, who quickly threw it into the lap of the Mongolian monk beside him.

When presented with the Mongolian monk, the *choskyong* declared that this was not correct, and that all the monks should line up, so the *choskyong* could pick out the incarnate. When they had done this, Ngari Rinpoche was finally picked out. The *choskyong* declared that the cause of the leprosy was the fact that an incarnate, because unrecognised, was not being given the respect he deserved, and instead forced to do menial tasks such as *gyesgus*.

Within a few years, Ngari Rinpoche was recognised under his full title (rather than simply as an unspecified incarnate) and those Gelukpa monasteries in Ngari that belonged to him were replaced under his control.

The manifestation of enlightened divinity in the social world is therefore not without difficulty or danger. Whilst the activities of incarnates who act as *lamas* (in the sense of spiritual guides and tantric initiators - should (within a ritual context) be beyond question and beyond the possibility of polluting or immoral activity, the same does not follow the other way around. Although both laity and monks agreed that - as with Buddhas - it was not possible to pollute incarnates or other enlightened divinities *in themselves*, one's relationship with them could be sullied, and therefore their protective influence (as a source of blessing) would become 'obstructed'. We might note, for instance, the explicit simile drawn within the story of Ngari Rinpoche between his own non-recognition as incarnate, and the dirt that he found covering the image of the goddess Dolma. *Both* of these are identified as causes, implying not so much that they (Ngari Rinpoche and Dolma) were the source of the pollution, but rather that it emerged as a general lack of care on the part of the monastic community. The polluting of such a relationship through the disjunction of correct

relationships of respect and authority meant that the flow of blessing (L. *chinlabs*) from such divine sources was interrupted. As we can see, this was perceived to have profound effects on all related communities: the monastery in the above story itself was removed from normal activity through the emergence of leprosy. The disease *dze*, which has been glossed as leprosy, actually held a precise cultural meaning: it is a atrophic disease of the skin and outer limbs which was held to emerge from very serious pollution. It was also seen as enforcing social exclusion on those that suffered from it.¹³² As we saw with earlier discussions of *dip*, the polluting of relations between corporate groups and divine sources undermines the social agency of the group (in this case in a very much embodied manner).

15.4 - Imitation and Discipline

The relationship between incarnates and monastic institutions is thus profoundly dangerous, but at the same time crucial if monasteries wish to maintain ritual authority over local domains which are in a state of flux. Arguably, the ambiguity of this relationship is a precise equivalent to the ambiguity of a household's relationship with its household god (Ch.11): since the divine figure acts as a basis for the authoritative social and ritual agency of the household, correct hierarchical relations with it are essential to the household's continued well-being as a corporate unit.

In Lingshed, relationships with visiting incarnates became the focus of lay and monastic activity, even to the detriment of the monastic rule in itself. While Dagon Rinpoche was giving teachings in the *pot'ang* near Lingshed monastery during harvest 1994, it was very much incumbent on members of the village and especially the monastery to attend. Lay attendance at the teachings - which lasted a week and took up most of the daylight hours - meant that the harvest itself was neglected. Thus, as soon as they were finished, the monastic Disciplinary Officer gave dispensation to the novice and semi-ordained monks to help their families by harvesting their own "monks' fields". Although they all admitted that this was *digpa*

¹³²Phylactou notes the story of a king of Hemis Shugpa Chen in Ladakh who, through incurring pollution by killing a water spirit, came down with *dze* along with his wife, and was thus forced to retire from courtly life and live in a cave until the pollution was cleansed by a visiting yogin from Tibet (Phylactou 1989: 46-7).

(sinful), and broke monastic rule, it was essential in the circumstances, in order to maintain respect (*L. guspa*) for the resident incarnate.

The sense in which monastic discipline is somehow secondary to relations of respect for incarnate *lamas*, can be related to one of the other major institutional functions of *tulku* - their involvement in ordination ceremonies. Traditionally, the requirements for ordination in Tibet were unrelated to the presence of incarnates, simply because the tradition of ordination significantly predates the presence of established incarnates as institutional elements (something which can only be traced back to the 12th Century).

Nonetheless, although I never took a census on the matter, none of my informants knew of any Kumbum monks who had received their ordination to *gyets'ul* or *gyelong* status by anyone other than an incarnate. Most that I asked had received their ordination from the incumbent incarnate at Tikse monastery in Central Ladakh, although a few had travelled to India to seek ordination from the Dalai Lama. When I asked one monk why they did not receive ordination from the *lopon*, he explained that it was technically feasible to receive ordination in that way, since a *lopon* would certainly be an acceptable holder of the ordination lineage. However, he continued, such an ordination would probably not be respected, either by laity or by other monks: it was better, therefore, to go elsewhere to receive one's vows, and from an incarnate *lama* best of all.

Clerical relationships with incarnates thus had two major functions:

- i) they acted as a basis for ordination.
- ii) they acted as a precedent for ritual action.

In either case, incarnates were seen as ideal transmitters of lineages of tradition that related directly back to Buddhahood. Such transmission had two modes: synchronic and diachronic.

Synchronous transmission involved the direct manifestation of the influence of enlightened divinity in the world. For this to occur, a direct and pure conduit had to exist between Buddhahood and the local domain. This could occur in one of two ways: firstly, through the direct intervention of incarnate *lamas* such as Dagon Rinpoche; secondly, through the limited

manifestation of Buddhahood by local monks, mainly carried out through the meditative act called *dagskyed*.

Diachronous transmission, on the other hand, involved the successive transmission of the ritual form from enlightened divinity *as it manifested itself at some point in the past*, through to a suitably purified human recipient, who then transmitted it to his pupils, and thus into a lineage of teachings and ritual practices.

In fact, most cases collapse these two forms down into a single "history": thus, the local monks of Kumbum can effectively perform *dagskyed* because they have received tantric empowerment from prior tantric masters as part of a diachronous lineage. Similarly, Dagon Rinpoche instigated the *sangs chenmo* cleansing rite as an act of 'synchronous transmission' (from tutelary Buddhahood to "emanation body") through his status as an incarnate; following this, monks replicated his ritual act every year as a diachronous transmission.

Both types of transmission seek to collapse the distance between divinity and practice through purity of transmission outside the ritual form. At the same time, evocation of the 'enlightened presence' and 'mythical time' within ritual practice collapses this distance further. Through replicating the acts of Dagon Rinpoche, Kumbum monks performing *sangs chenmo* "re-created" the novelty of the initial moment of subjugation by the incarnate (the yogic renouncer). In this way, the incarnate's inner spiritual attainment became the focus of external structures of ritual acts by local monks, an example of Geertz's "exemplary centre" (Geertz 1980: 130) reflected in a thousand acts of monastic ceremony. At the same time, the acts of incarnates themselves recreated the religious ascendancy of their own *lamas*, and of founding Buddhas figures such as Yamāntaka and Guru Rinpoche.

However, monastic replication of the acts of high *lamas* is more than simple imitation, a "doing again" of seminal acts: it is the focussing of many historical moments into a single ahistorical moment, and a single founding figure. New ritual forms are therefore, in emic terms, no newer or less authentic than the initial acts of the Buddha. Thus, as with purification rites, innovative ritual acts create an ahistoric Mythic Time, encapsulated within historical events.

This encapsulation of ritual, or Mythic, Time within historical time is more than simply the local imitation of the *acts* of exemplary figures. Asad,

criticising Geertz's notion of imitation, asserts the salience of "programs of disciplinary practices" (Asad 1993: 134) within Christian monasticism, which "reorganised the soul" in terms of certain Christian values. Similarly, as Kumbum's master of ceremonies pointed out, ritual acts such as *sangsol* required effort, courage and renunciation on the part of monks, the "binding up" of the senses that located the ritual officiant within the historical present, so that he can recreate within himself the divine past. Rather than mechanically repeating what has been done before, such meditative acts are the local re-enactment of the trans-local spiritual *attainment* of the high *lama*, an enlightenment written small. It is this discipline - their personal control of physical, verbal, and mental acts - that makes monks suitable officiants to re-enact the ritual subjugations performed by incarnates. It is within this context that we must look again at the question of ordination as an act most fittingly carried out by incarnates.

The general term for the Vinaya rules - either monastic, *bodhisattva*, or tantric - is *dulwa*, "subjugation". The subjugation of monks to the rules of the Vinaya should, I would argue, be looked at in terms of their status as 'objects of territory', people whose crucial identifying feature as social agents is their place within a certain chthonic environment. Just like the subjugation of local gods, therefore, ordination is an act of ritual innovation - the subjugation of new 'territory' - and as such its source, as we would expect, is the power of an incarnate *lama*.

To conclude, the relationship between incarnates and monasteries is a seminal one, in which, as with the chthonic landscape, high *lamas* act to create templates of ritual action, which ordinary (clerical) monks replicate within the context of their own spiritual practice and monastic training. Therefore, local monastic institutions which lack resident incarnates (such as Kumbum) do not in themselves represent the subject of a complete discussion on renunciation. Isolated, the local monastery does not form a complete religious entity, and cannot be so discussed without making artificial divides as to what is and what is not 'real Buddhism'. Rather, the position that such local monasteries hold in the broader ecclesiastical structure must be taken into account and, most especially, the relationship that monasteries have with incarnates and other types of high *lama*.

Chapter 16:

Divine Emanation and Local Domains

16.1 - Introduction: Kumbum and the Gelukpa Hierarchy

So far, discussion of the relationship between Kumbum and incarnates has concentrated on its symbolic and ritual dimensions. Of course, this relationship has pragmatic organisational aspects, which profoundly influence Kumbum's status as a religious institution.

In particular, we must be aware that local monasteries such as Kumbum do not generally act as the residences of important incarnates, being affiliated to them by more indirect ties instead, such as through other, more important monasteries. This is very much a vicious circle in organisational terms, since young and important incarnates, wherever they are born, usually gravitate to the centres of political and economic power within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, where their extensive ritual and doctrinal education can be assured. In turn, the mere presence of such figures acts as a magnet for contributions by wealthy lay followers, causing wealth and political power to accumulate in existing centres (Goldstein 1973).

Thus, new incarnates congregate where other incarnates already live. Since there appears to be, or to have been, no overall bureaucratic structure which regulated the economic affairs of the Gelukpa Order as a whole - leaving individual institutions to fend for themselves economically - then such asymmetry is inevitable.

Therefore, local monasteries without incarnates tend to remain that way, forced into the periphery in terms of wealth, education and ritual authority. Without incarnates to attract wealth, local monasteries must concentrate on providing ritual care for those laity within their ken, whose economic support is generally in direct reciprocity for ritual services by monks. The monastic population of local monasteries become locked into concentrating almost entirely on ritual care for laity, with little in the way of surplus (either economically or in personnel terms) to dedicate to educational matters.

On an individual level, this tends to mean that monks in local monasteries must depend substantially on familial contributions if they wish to attain higher training or education, usually unavailable in the poorer local monasteries. Only exceptional monks - such as Geshe Changchub - break free of this cycle.

In short, therefore, monasteries such as Kumbum generally did not have the financial resources necessary to produce elite religious virtuosi, even within the limited context of clerical renunciation. As a result, the monastic community in Lingshed had no real authority to effect the kind of innovative ritual acts that maintained a relationship of *relevance* between monastic practice and local chthonic events. They were therefore highly dependent on outside influences - in particular the intervention of outside *tulku* - to maintain the integrity of their spiritual practice and their ritual relations with local divinities.

16.2- Ritual Innovation and the Great Tradition

In a sense, therefore, the relationship between Lingshed and the broader ecclesiastical hierarchy can be characterised in terms of a tension between an authoritative centre and a localised periphery. Such a picture does little justice to the subtlety of the situation, but nonetheless it provides considerable challenge for an anthropological discipline strongly influenced by the Durkheimian paradigm that ritual practice emerges out of the social structure of local domains. In general, the historical fact of the importation of ritual forms in Tibetan Buddhism stands at odds with the hypothesis that ritual is somehow indicative or reflective of extant social milieu.

This problem - highlighted most vociferously in the writings of authors such as Cantwell - is exacerbated in a religious tradition where, as we have seen for Lingshed, the basic criteria of ritual authority appear to be an *externality* and *transcendence* of local embeddedness on the part of innovative ritual preceptors. Rather - as we have seen in the case of the *sangs chenmo* rite in Lingshed, the ordination of monks, or the transmission of tantric empowerments - the genesis of new ritual forms within the Gelukpa Order occurs 'top-down' in ecclesiastical terms, rather than emerging from the social conditions of village processes (see also Cantwell 1988). The production of Buddhist ritual forms that incorporate local divinities and spirits - rather than being syncretic - is a case of authoritative

mediation of localised problems, designed to re-assert a totalised Buddhist order that incorporates them.¹³³

As Cantwell rightly notes, there is, and always has been, a marked continuity of ritual practice in Tibetan Buddhism, a continuity which is hardly challenged by the kind of ritual innovation performed by Dagon Rinpoche: it is rarely the case, after all, that innovative ritual forms such as these are anything other than re-workings of established Buddhist formulae, and the majority of Buddhist rites performed by the Kumbum monks use ritual texts printed by the central Gelukpa printing press in Dharamsala.

Nonetheless, I would argue that it is problematic to conclude from this - as Cantwell does, when speaking of comparable ritual practice in a refugee monastery in Himachal Pradesh - that centralised religious traditions directly determine local religious practice, and that therefore

Tibetan Buddhist rites in India do not gain their social relevance through reflecting or commenting on the social order. The same rituals which were practised in Tibet are practised unchanged in India, and can thus symbolise the continuity of Tibetan religious identity. (Cantwell 1988: 6)

The reason why (for example) what is performed in Kumbum is not simply the "same rituals...practised unchanged" is that such an interpretation hides the particular and historically situated relationship between local village practices and the intervention of high *lamas* such as Dagon Rinpoche, a relationship where the shifting flux of chthonic conditions in local domains such as Lingshed do not so much determine the acts of Buddhist authorities, but *demand a ritual response from them*.

Such arguments have strong echoes of the anthropological debate prevalent in Buddhist studies the 1960s and 1970s over Redfield's dichotomy between 'great' and 'little' traditions (Redfield 1956; Obeyesekere 1963; Tambiah 1970; Southwold 1983). Redfield contrasted the

¹³³Arguably, this is not simply a modern phenomenon, or one limited to Tibetan areas. Sanderson has argued that a similar process occurred between Saivite and Buddhist ritual forms in India between the third and ninth century c.e.: that observable correlations between Saivite and Buddhist tantric liturgical forms were part of a scholarly and self-conscious process rather than a product of both traditions sharing a single "substratum" of belief (Sanderson 1991).

formal literate traditions of the (usually urban) elite of a society or civilisation, with the informal, oral (and rural) village traditions. Such a model was always going to be an ideal type, but its salience influenced many debates concerning the relationship between central religious traditions and their peripheral manifestations. The dichotomy between great and little is especially enticing in the kind of context that I have described for Lingshed, but applying it leads to certain logical contradictions, which in turn highlight the flaws in Cantwell's argument.

As a starting point, let us take Dagon Rinpoche's creation of the instigation of the *sangs chenmo* rite at the Hilltop of Divine Victory as being an example of a moment of contact between the great tradition of the centralised Gelukpa hierarchy, and the little tradition of Lingshed, with its particular structure of local gods. Here, there are two possibilities as to the way in which Dagon Rinpoche represents the great tradition:

- i) as representing the broader bureaucratic hierarchy of the Gelukpa order; and
- ii) as representing the corpus of literary doctrine to which the Gelukpa adhere.

There are problems with either of these approaches. Following our argument in chapter 14, the ritual authority of incarnates such as Dagon Rinpoche was located within their status as yogic renouncers, as individuals who had *personally* attained a certain level of renunciation. Of course, his relationship with Kumbum was as a Gelukpa incarnate to a Gelukpa institution, but the ideology of his position was located in his acts as a religious individual, a Buddha figure in his own right. Within the Gelukpa institutional context, therefore, it seems a non-starter to locate his authority in simply bureaucratic terms: rather, such figures act within, and are chosen through the institutional processes of the Gelukpa Order, but within the ideology of reincarnation, represent *charismatic* sources of authority - that is, individuals whose authority derives from their own personal characteristics as religious strivers (see also Tambiah 1984: 332).

Conversely, seeing the incarnate's authority solely in terms of the degree to which he represents an established corpus of doctrine and practice has problems of its own: after all, the significant body of ritual

events that existed in Lingshed prior to Dagon Rinpoche's arrival were established Gelukpa ritual forms. By comparison, what Dagon Rinpoche introduced - whilst certainly a rite that was in line with established Gelukpa practice - was a *new* ritual form created in response to local changes, tailored to local needs and fitted into local calendrical cycles. Therefore, his status within the ritual context as a Buddha figure allows him effectively to define what is, and is not, Buddhist doctrine (L. *chos*). Here, the statement regularly heard with reference to Buddhist literature - *specha chos menok*, "texts are not doctrine" - has particular force. As we saw in the case of liturgical recitation (L. *chosil* - 9.2), it is not so much the text as the embodied recitation of text by qualified religious practitioners that generates blessing. Thus it is the physical embodiment of the Buddhist doctrine within particular religious virtuosi - the degree to which particular monks and incarnates represent the realisation of the doctrine, rather than the degree to which they replicate its precise content as defined by a literate tradition - that is most crucial to representing *chos* (see also Perdue 1992: Ch. 1).

The centrality of such embodied and enacted realisation of the doctrine makes it difficult to define what precise elements represent the 'great' and 'little' traditions. If such traditions are most paradigmatically represented within the activities of religious actors, then they are always and inevitably socially located - they cannot be distilled out from the context in which they take place, to represent a single unitary "class" of Buddhist doctrine, without doing violence to the very circumstances of every single enactment of Buddhist doctrine. Thus, for example, we cannot separate what high *lamas* teach from those to whom they teach it; similarly, we cannot distance monastic ritual practices from the local domains within which they are practised, regardless of whether those practices are the same word-for-word as similar rites practised by Gelukpa monks all across the Himalaya.

Furthermore, it is not a necessary step to assume that because such practices are uniform throughout Gelukpa communities, they are therefore imposed or introduced from outside without reference to the circumstances of the individual social and ritual domain into which they are being introduced. Dagon Rinpoche's introduction of *sangs chenmo* at the Hilltop of Divine Victory came in response to the representations by the

local area god oracle: it was therefore not so much imposed from above as demanded from below.

The instigation of ritual forms within local domains is thus not so much an introduction of tradition from outside, as an emergent interaction between local domains and seminal religious figures, which (in this case) effects a ritual subjugation and incorporation of local divinities and spirits into a characteristically Buddhist hierarchy, and which cannot be logically separated into any consistent distinction between established Gelukpa practice and local socio-religious conditions.

16.3 - Transformed Cosmologies and Histories of Intervention

Lingshed, and Ladakh in general, has been described by Samuel as one of the most “clericalised” of Tibetan Buddhist communities (Samuel 1993a: 113), with monks providing most forms of ritual care in the region. Sophie Day, in her discussion of ritual practice in Buddhist Ladakh, has argued that this ritual hegemony of monasticism in Buddhist Ladakh means that:

There is no separately defined ritual field that can be described as “a field of magical animism” (from Ames 1964) or “a field of the guardian spirits” (Tambiah 1970) associated with inferior but partially independent practitioners. (Day 1989: 25)

The present situation in the Lingshed region may well warrant such an analysis, but this was not always so. In particular, it cannot be assumed a priori that Buddhist monasteries always maintain an unproblematic ritual ascendancy over local deities, and therefore that the monastery can be looked to as far as providing adequate ritual maintenance. Innovative acts such as that by Dagon Rinpoche imply that the status of monasteries as ‘embodiments of doctrine’ are historically situated, and far from stable. This is obviously the case when we consider the strained relations over the issue of local area gods in Lingshed in the years prior to Dagon Rinpoche’s arrival.

The assertion of ritual authority over chthonic deities is integrally linked to the presentation of Buddhist - that is, vegetarian - offerings, the acceptance of which implies that the deity remains bound (L. *damchan*) to

Buddhism. In circumstances where monastic control of local deities is felt to be waning, there is the danger that blood offerings (L. *t'ak chod*) will be performed instead, with a sheep or goat being sacrificed by laity at the local god's shrine.

Until the mid-1970s, most informants agreed that blood sacrifice was widespread in Ladakh and Zangskar, taking place in addition to regular offerings by members of the monastic community. Such practices were, until recently, to be found in the villages of Nyeraks and Dibling, both sponsor villages for Kumbum monastery. In general, most laity agreed that such acts were sinful but (at the time) necessary, and usually performed by the village butcher or blacksmith (both members of the "polluted castes" (L. *rigs-ngan*). Thus, although local gods remained within the purview of local monks' ritual sphere, alternative ritual practices performed by "inferior but partially independent practitioners" were present even in the "highly clericalised" situation in Ladakh.

This changed with the intervention of the Ladakh Buddhist Association in the early 1970s (1.4). Acting to eradicate such "vestiges" of non-Buddhist behaviour, they encouraged and supported the intervention of a series of high incarnate *lamas* in a variety of villages throughout Ladakh and Zangskar. According to the L.B.A., these moves were explicitly designed to ensure the continuity of "Ladakh's Buddhist heritage".¹³⁴

Thus, the existence of *meaningful* totalising cosmologies that link local spirits into Buddhist hierarchies of "subjugation" cannot automatically be assumed as a statement of doctrine for Buddhist areas: rather, it is the result of historical acts by high *lamas*.

But if this is so, then the corollary is also true: the gradual marginalisation of local monastic authority when cut off from higher sources of institutional power such as high *lamas* and incarnates is a ritual inevitability. If, as I argued earlier, the limited nature of clerical renunciation fails to maintain the ascendancy of the monastery in the face of local chthonic changes, then those monasteries isolated from such centres of ritual authority are bound to become progressively irrelevant to a local area dominated by local forces beyond the power of local monks to control. This in turn relates back to the distinction made earlier (12.1)

¹³⁴Interview, Secretary of the Youth Wing, Ladakh Buddhist Association, 13.1.94.

between Buddhist ritual action as essentially problem-oriented (the overcoming of specified suffering) as opposed to goal-oriented (the attainment of enlightenment). The question of the *relevance* of Buddhist ritual agendas to the problems of laity thus becomes paramount to the continued support of monasteries and other ritual institutions - once they lose their relevance, laity must look elsewhere for ritual support.

Arguably, this problem is not unique to the Gelukpa but general in Tibetan areas where the monastic ethic predominates as the central vehicle of Buddhist orthodoxy. Mumford (1989) has described in some detail the problems that befell an isolated Tibetan Buddhist community in Nepal. He depicts the uneasy co-existence of Nyingmapa monasticism with annual blood sacrifices to a local deity. Laity were trapped in a moral quandary: being forced to give living sacrifice (a sheep sacrificed every spring) to a local divinity, Devi Than, for fear of her wrath, whilst realising that such offerings would bring equally undesirable karmic retribution. The small Nyingmapa monastery nearby was unable to do anything but 'look the other way' during such proceedings.

This situation changed only with the arrival from Tibet of an important incarnate, Lama Chog Lingpa, in the 1960s. Whilst giving tantric empowerments to the village, the incarnate vehemently denounced the practice of blood sacrifice. Binding the local divinities to accept vegetarian offerings from then on, Lama Chog Lingpa departed, leaving behind a ritual text he had composed that monks should recite annually in order to maintain the divinities' allegiance to Buddhism.

Chog Lingpa's binding of the local divinity was seen as related both to his tantric ability to represent the powers of Guru Rinpoche (the main tutelary deity of the Nyingmapa) on the one hand, and his 'telepathic' ability to understand the true nature of specific local area divinities (Mumford 1989: 82-4; see also Dargyay 1988) on the other.

These telepathic powers allowed Chog Lingpa to see that Devi Than was not 'actually' a manifestation of the blood-thirsty divinity Durga, but 'in fact' that of the wrathful Buddhist divinity Palden Lhamo, who was bound to Buddhism by Guru Rinpoche, and therefore was a suitable object of vegetarian, rather than blood, offerings.

The power of the incarnate *lama* therefore rests in his/her capacity or authorisation to alter that which is 'given': to reinterpret social and ritual reality and reconstruct it according to an incorporative Buddhist

order. Through re-building spaces as Buddhist domains under the reign of Buddhist gods and Buddhas, they reconstruct the landscape that Tibetan Buddhists inhabit. Through access to the divine reality of tantric gods and palaces that is masked by the ordinary appearances of local area gods and households, *lamas* become fulcra of power through which Buddhist realities show themselves in the local domain.

The high *lama's* ability to 'mould' the landscape, and the ritual cycles associated with it, is reified by Tibetans and Ladakhis alike in mythic renditions of magical battles, where the victorious incarnate leaves an impression (L. *rjes* - "imprints", a term also used to imply qualities of personality that carry over from one life to the next) of their hand or foot in the landscape. In Lingshed, the original subduer of local divinities, Guru Rinpoche, is said to have left his handprint in a rock in the base of the valley following his battle with the local gods of the area (1.1).¹³⁵

This conceptual interlacing of mundane and divine geographies is a common feature of the study of pilgrimage in South Asia, and within the Tibetan context has been commented on extensively by Western authors (Ramble 1995; Loseries 1994; Stutchbury 1994; Huber 1990, 1994; Huber and Rigzin 1995; Cech 1992). Here, the very history of a high *lama's* presence in an area makes it a sacred place, and pilgrimage itineraries of Tibetan Buddhists often mark out the meditation caves of high practitioners such as Guru Rinpoche and Milarepa. Such sacred spaces are associated with the *lama's* yogic practices there, and his capacity to *see* divine realities within the ordinary geography of the place. Elizabeth Stutchbury has suggested therefore that

there is a "sacred" geography which somehow *interpenetrates* with the mundane geographical features of the landscape, and that, furthermore, the process of sanctification is understood to be intrinsically linked to the meditational powers of yogic practitioners. (Stutchbury 1994: 72)

16.4 - Temple Founding

¹³⁵Similar stories abound throughout the Himalaya as to the physical imprints of Guru Rinpoche. Sacred imprints are also found in the songs of the yogin Milarepa, especially in his magical battle with the Bon priest Naro Bun Chong at Mount Kailash (Chang 1977).

Ideologically, this capacity of high tantric practitioners to *see* tantric realities informs their role in the founding of temples. Since temples and monasteries are a focus of divine invocation, the ground upon which they are founded should have the same divine basis that other ritual cycles do. In this sense, such religious institutions, as embodiments of religious practice, represent radical ritual innovations in local chthonic environments. Such 'innovations' are not necessarily welcomed by local area gods, as we saw in the case of the founding of the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, or the founding of the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Samye (1.1).

Temple founding therefore does not take place against a ritual *tabula rasa*, but rather is an act of ritual authority within a chthonic cosmology. Indeed, founding events, and the constitution of institutional monasticism that follows from them, arise out of an *interaction* between locality and the founding figure, rather than as a simple imposition of a preset ritual cycle. Changsems Shesrabs Zangpo, the founder of Kumbum, did not simply decide to build a temple in Lingshed: he founded the temple there after seeing a tantric symbol shining on the mountainside (1.2). Similar stories concerning the founding of Buddhist monasteries by high *lamas* in other Himalayan areas and other orders suggest this is far more than a local metaphor.¹³⁶ Nor is it limited to the founding of temples. Geshe Changchub himself often gave teachings describing the various "natural" Buddha figures in the rock formations in and around the Lingshed area.¹³⁷ Similarly, the *terma* ("hidden treasure") traditions, characteristic of the non-Gelukpa orders, describe the 'discovery' of texts, statues, and ritual implements by *terton* ("treasure finders" - reincarnations of the disciples of Guru Rinpoche) - objects which had been entrusted to local gods by Guru Rinpoche and hidden in streams, mountains, rocks and caves.¹³⁸

Here, as with 'lower' acts of ritual care, ritual authority is closely linked, not to the right to perform particular rituals, but to the ability to

¹³⁶See Samuel (1993a: 486) on the founding of Sakya monastery in Southern Tibet; Jina and Namgyal (1995: 32-3) on the founding of Phyang Monastery in Ladakh.

¹³⁷See also Piessel (1980) on Kumbum's sister-minastery, Karsha, in Zangskar.

¹³⁸See Aris (1988); Hannah (1994).

effectively to “diagnose” local events in terms of Buddhist discourse (Mumford 1989: 85-7), to redescribe chthonic domains symbolically in a manner which ‘fits’ with established patterns of monastic ritual practice.

Of course, it is not always the case that the chthonic environment is conducive to such findings. The stories of the founding of the Jokhang and subsequent Samye monastery are meant to take place in a context where most local gods remain antagonistic to Buddhism’s presence in Tibet: the actual founding needed therefore considerable and elaborate ritual subjugation of the local chthonic environment before the first stone of the Jokhang, or of the Samye monastery could even be successfully laid. The events concerning Shesrabs Zangpo’s founding of Kumbum seem altogether less traumatic, in a world already largely favourable to Buddhism: he does not need to subjugate the local area surrounding Lingshed so much as simply to find the most auspicious spot. The ritual and institutional power of latter-day high *lamas* is more related to the process of *creating* knowledge about the chthonic world, re-interpreting the territorial context of local Buddhists’ lives according to certain preferred models of cosmology and ritual authority.

16.5 - Mythic Time and Historical Time

Thus, crucial aspects of Buddhist ritual practice revolve around the idea of divine manifestation within the world. Such manifestation is a form of embodiment which gives rise to incarnate *lamas*, to the building of temples and monasteries, to the successful invocation of religious authority within village ritual. In the household context, the maintenance of stainless ritual relations between householders and the household god, as embodied within the structure of the household as a lived unit, was essential to the on-going social agency of that corporate group. In a whole variety of circumstances, the presence of successfully embodied divinity is felt to stand at the heart of social and ritual agency.

Such manifestation of divinity is in turn a re-enactment of a pristine past, an ideal moment of divine presence and hierarchy which gives order to the world. Human action is thus seen as possible within the historical time of the present because it is a manifestation of a mythical and pristine past, a Mythic Time of founding ancestors and Buddhas, the re-enactment of whose acts is the key to success and auspiciousness. Dislocation from

such divine sources, and the pristine moment of divine agency they represent, similarly dislocates individuals and groups from the rest of the world, isolating and polluting them.

The co-existence of such differing representations of time has been addressed at some length by Maurice Bloch, who divides the representation of social life according to two different types of time: "practical time" and "ritual time" (Bloch 1977). These, he argues, are deliberately incommensurate in terms of any single representation of cultural processes, with representations of ritual time acting as the "non-representation of society" (Bloch 1980), masking its true realities in a way that perpetuates the established political and social order - a function he attributes to most ritual discourses. Thus, discussing circumcision rituals in Madagascar, he argues that:

Ritual transforms and reduces events so that they lose their specificity and re-represents these events vaguely as being part of a timeless order. The image produced in the ritual can accommodate by this means a great variety of specific events and make them appear the same. The ritual can thereby be repeated unchanged even if the specific events it represents are significantly different. (Bloch 1986: 185)

Thus, for Bloch, ritual reinterprets the historical specificity of social life as part of a timeless order, making the present status quo unquestionable because in some sense cosmologically ordained. He then argues that such ritual discourses about time "represent" society in a manner that competes, or is at odds with, historical and socially-specific (what he calls "practical") representations of social events.

Bloch's reading on ritual discourses is fundamentally intellectualist. He follows authors such as Horton in seeing ritual and religious discourse as being one more theory about the world. "Ritual discourses" are a therefore representations of events that are either true or false and, since false, must fulfil a different, and more sinister function, that of actually suppressing the truth about social processes.

Bloch's rendition is at odds with ethnographic fact. If his "non-representation of society" did, as he says, attempt to replace one picture of social truth with another, more politically convenient one, then there would surely only be one such rendition of this "politically correct reality",

and it would be viewed as universally applicable, or at least as universally applicable as possible. Ethnographically, neither of these hold true in the Buddhist case.

Firstly, ritual representations of time (such as the recreation of the founding moment of the Buddha's subjugation in rites such as *sangsol*) are evoked within a highly specific context, and are not taken to represent a universally-applicable representation of reality. The kind of ritual time that Bloch describes is evoked *within* ritual practice - practices which are, in turn, seen as being played out within more 'practical' contexts of historical time. Thus, the fact that tantric rites in Lingshed recreate a static mythic time of Buddhas *for ritual purposes* cannot be read as implying that Buddhist ideology somehow denies the diachronous progress of events. Quite the opposite, and this brings me to the second point.

Tibetan Buddhist understandings of time *as a historical process* posit a constant process of decline throughout each cosmic aeon, or *kalpa*, during which religious truths revealed by Buddhas become gradually hidden, people's religious commitment wanes, and the world sees less real religious attainment. This is then followed by the arrival of a new Buddha figure in the world, pronouncing a new teaching, and so the cycle begins again. These marks of decline Mumford links to the gradual levelling of the "hierarchy of liberation" that asserts Buddhist ascendancy over local affairs (Mumford 1989: 240). These narratives - asserting the gradual growth in the importance of local gods and the decline in the ritual authority of the monks, followed by the re-assertion of hierarchical order through the intervention of a high Lama - can also be seen played out in tale of the introduction of the *sangs chenmo* rite in Lingshed.

Mumford also notes that such narratives of decline were related to ideas of progressive "externalisation", with people becoming more and more pre-occupied with "external" appearances (Mumford 1989: 228) and neglecting the "internal" aspects of religion. He also notes that this process of decline is strongly associated with growth in interest in local gods and local gossip - *mi-kha*, "the words of [ordinary] people" (1989: 241). Comparably, in the Lingshed context, we might remember the Master of Ceremony's comment that making offerings to local gods - itself dependent on the evocation of ritual time to mentally 'generate' Yamāntaka and replicate the local gods' subjugation to Buddhism - depended on the ability to "bind up" the six senses, to turn one's gaze fully inwards in the course

of meditation. Thus, the temporal "decline" from a state of Buddhahood is also a symbolic externalisation of human interest, a turning away from internal matters on the part of present day Buddhists.

Of course, Bloch would rightfully retort that such diachronous notions of decline and renewal were precise examples of ritual time, especially in their cyclic quality. This is true, but it does not lessen the fact that notions of decay across diachronous time (the progress of the *kalpa*) are to be found within the category of "Buddhist ritual time" *as well as* more static evocations of time (such as the moment of founding subjugation). If "ritual time" is a *representation* of social reality by certain interested parties, held up by them as being descriptive of events - whilst actually being functional in terms of fulfilling the requirements of those parties - then Buddhist ideology confounds this function by holding up two different accounts of ritual time, on top of what one would presume to be ordinary people's sense of "pragmatic time". If ritual discourse about time seeks to replace a "practical" apprehension of social reality with an ideologically contrived one, why should it then seek to confound itself by providing alternatives.

Common to most 'scientific Marxist' theorists, and to all intellectualist theorists of religion, Bloch makes the mistake of assuming that because science is built on the ideology that there is only one correct description of reality, all descriptions of reality found within other cultures which are even slightly at variance with one another must therefore be "conflicting". This emphasis tends also to influence the portrayal of the interpretation of Buddhist rites as being "naive" or "sophisticated", as approximating more or less accurately to a single "true" picture of reality (for example Jackson 1993).

Such theoretical perspectives ignore the flexibility with which (in this case) Buddhists approach the description of "reality": the presentation of differing 'ritual times' and ritual realities is carefully demarcated within the performance of Buddhist rites, and the incommensurate natures of various 'different' types of time and reality are seen as parts of a dynamic ritual process, rather than a static representation of "the way things are". These various kinds of "ritual time" are presented very explicitly within Buddhist rites and discourses and, although they are portrayed as representing reality *in some form*, those forms are not exclusive or competitive, but exist in a ritual dialectic to one another.

Thus, static renditions of mythic time become encapsulated within broader renditions of diachronous religious decay, creating the counterpoint that represents the heart of the ritual dialectic. Thus, the ritual practices of the monks - which evoke the static mythic time of Buddhist ascendancy and chthonic subjugation - are carefully nestled within the gradual passage of the agricultural year and related to the historically-located ritual *needs* of the local populace. They are related to such needs directly in the sense that they are seen as ameliorating the problems of local villagers, and indirectly in the sense that they are aimed at generating the ritual powers necessary to do so. Ritual events - moments of timeless divine manifestation in the world - act in a *diachronic* relationship to one another in the context of historical time.

Similarly, significant acts of divine manifestation and intervention by high *lamas* do not take place in a historical vacuum, as part of a single dehistoricised "tradition", nor are they represented as doing so. Acts of ritual intervention - such as the binding of local gods to accept Buddhist ritual regimes - occur in reference to historically-situated conditions, ritually transforming them *according to* evocations of mythic moments of Buddhist ascendancy. They are not simply the reproduction of the same old cosmologies, but the incorporation of presently existing cosmologies back into more transcendent ones.

Thus, ritual discourses do not simply and deterministically impose a representation of time, they symbolically negotiate them into being in a ritual context that is explicitly performative. Thus, Dagon Rinpoche did not deny the problems posed by regular harsh winters to the ritual round of Lingshed monastery; rather, he re-established these conditions as factors within the context of the newly created ritual ascendancy of the monastery over those very same local conditions.

16.6 - Histories of Absence

But if local monks replicate the ritual acts of high *lamas* in their absence, their maintenance of established ritual practices can easily be superseded by more significant events. Thus, for example, the usual practice of monthly *sangsol* offering was adequate until local chthonic

events - in this case heavy snows - rendered them inadequate.¹³⁹ Similarly, Mumford describes how in 1968 - some years after Lama Chog Lingpa's binding of the Gyasumdo local gods to Buddhism - a landslide destroyed much of the village (Mumford 1989: 135-137). This seriously challenged local perceptions as to Chog Lingpa's efficacy in his binding of the local gods, and almost led to a return to the previous tradition of blood sacrifice. In the end, the head of the local monastery was forced once again to consult an incarnate *lama* - this time Dunjom Rinpoche, the head incarnate of the Nyingmapa Order - for advice as to how to ward off the landslides, advice which once again precipitated a change in ritual practice.

Thus, chthonic events in particular - those linked to the wishes and loyalties of local gods - threaten the capacity of local monks to maintain ritual ascendancy. Simply through their very nature, local scenarios change, but local monks - dependent for their authority on an pure diachronous lineage leading back to Buddhahood - cannot simply change with them without losing their essential claim to legitimacy (their replication of the acts of incarnates) - they must depend instead on the intervention of incarnates to mediate the disjunction between rite and circumstance.

16.7 - *Shattered Cosmologies*

In circumstances where such incarnates are absent, narratives relating specifically to the power and demands of local divinities begin to take precedence. Reciprocity between man and god, rather than the ascendancy of Buddhism over local forces, becomes the dominant (if unwritten) discourse, and locals (either monastic or lay) are powerless in the face of demands by such numina. Local divinities - which still remain when incarnates have left, showing their continued and active presence within the agricultural- and life-cycles of local villages - become increasingly treated as individual forces within a divided and variegated landscape, rather than as subservient elements within a unified Buddhist hierarchy.

¹³⁹We must remember here that weather is seen as being under the control of territorial gods, and thus, emically anyway, might be described as a "chthonic event".

Such intrusions by chthonic forces do not make themselves known through chthonic events alone. Both Holmberg (1989: 173) and Srinivas (1995) have argued that into this gap - between instituted responsibility and the vagaries of a changing world - falls the chaotic realm of the shamanic: the *lhapa* possessed by worldly gods or the young girl filled with the mutterings of demonic possession, all too often speaking their minds, mediating between what should by rights be done and what is by circumstance impossible.

It is within the gap between *lamaic* authority and chthonic event, therefore, that the spirits speak. Such voices are not necessarily anti-authoritarian, riling against the strictures of monastic ritual or extant power structures. Often their voices serve to support and defend the very Buddhist hierarchy that is under threat. The relationship between Dibling oracle and Dagon Rinpoche was more co-operative than antagonistic, and Dibling oracle often acted to advise monks on ritual necessities. Whilst his interruption of the Dagon Rinpoche's tantric empowerments was in effect to criticise the monastery's ability to fulfil their ritual obligations to the local area gods, we must not forget that the complaint was addressed *within*, rather than outside, the hierarchy of the Gelukpa establishment. The shamanic presence of Dibling oracle in this context *mediated* the gap between local reality and religious orthodoxy: not questioning the authority of the high *lama*, but demanding his intervention.

The fact that a growing gulf between monastic ritual and the perception of chthonic events produces within it a variety of lay ritual practitioners - the oracle and the lay-sacrificer - does not *necessarily* entail any erosion of the sponsorship base of the monastic establishment itself, but such a conclusion must be inevitable in certain cases. As with many local monasteries, a significant part of Kumbum's income was related to voluntarily supported ritual practices. If laity no longer see the benefit in such rites, then it seems feasible that monastic institutions might at least dwindle in size and importance.

Holmberg (1989) has depicted such a situation in his ethnography of "amonastic Buddhism" in the Tamang region of Tamdunga in Nepal. Economically and ecclesiastically dislocated during the Rana state period from the organisational hierarchies of Tibetan Buddhism to the North, Tamang Buddhist institutions became socially and culturally introverted, resulting in an "involution of Buddhist ideology into the regularities of

local society" (1989: 178), including the passive acceptance of blood sacrifice *within the institutional domain of Buddhist rites* (1989: 188).

Holmberg links this involution to the collapse of institutional relations with the hierarchy of Tibetan Buddhism to the North through enclosure in the Rana state structure and the 1959 closing of Tibet's borders. Here Holmberg makes an important distinction: the isolation of Tamdunga's Buddhist communities

did not mean that Tamang Lamas (*sic*) were out of touch with, or uninspired by, other forms [of Buddhism] but they became independent of any *superseding institutional constraints*. Moreover, the surplus necessary to support a community of monks was expropriated by the state. (1989: 176, my italics).

Buddhist ritual practice in Tamdunga did not collapse into its own social domain for lack of other Buddhists or for a lack of the availability of Buddhist ideas, but for lack of connection to an external institutional hierarchy that would maintain its ascendance. In such circumstances, unified representations of the cosmological and ritual world of specific local domains become redundant - overtaken by local events and the particularistic discourses about local chthonic features - and there is no-one with enough authority to incorporate them into an over-arching Buddhist schema. This results in a ritual matrix in which there is

no single, consistent classificatory schema for the array of being who inhabit their world - no inclusive texts, no totalising iconographic paintings, no final formalised list of beings. (1989: 83)

This fragmentation also means that the diverse and predominantly oral ritual processes and cosmologies that do exist represent more closely the vagaries and particularities of local knowledge, rather than restructuring them in terms of a single overarching hierarchy.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰Ramble, discussing similar processes amongst Bon pilgrimage guides, notes that whilst in contrast to many of the written pilgrimage guides to places of national importance, other "popular, mainly non-literary genres...do not depart too radically from nature." (Ramble 1995: 115).

To conclude, indigenous representations of local reality - the cosmologies encapsulated within local ritual forms - cannot be located simply within an uniform Buddhist cosmology, that applies in all circumstances at all times. Rather they are the result of a series of discourses arising from the acts of authoritative religious specialists. Most such religious specialists act constantly to maintain a co-operative relationship between local communities and the chthonic numina that surround them, but it is only the high *lamas* that have the authority to produce truly ascendant and unified Buddhist cosmologies.

Such unified cosmologies are fragile in the face of chthonic events: once incarnates have left, chthonic events can give rise to alternative discourses about local events - shamanic or otherwise - that serve to break up the unified nature of such cosmologies. The nature of this fragmentation is not one that, for example, introduces new elements into extant monastic rites; rather, new (and more 'relevant') cosmologies are produced by alternative ritual practitioners who, whilst lacking the ritual authority to actually *bind* local gods to do their will, can at least introduce persuasive arguments concerned with mutually beneficial contractual obligations between god and man - the efficacy of blood sacrifice in particular. Thus, cosmologies that stress Buddhist ascendance become challenged by cosmologies that stress social reciprocity.

What marks the difference between these two discourses about cosmology is not any representative sense of a true state of affairs, but rather a sense that people, and particularly authoritative people, generate knowledge. To see things a particular way was not felt to depend upon a more or less accurate assessment of objective conditions: it depended instead upon the degree and focus of one's faith (L. *dadpa*). A particular perception of reality was not a passive acknowledgement of truth, but a moral act.

Thus, perceptions of local reality were linked to situated histories of ritual subjugation and authoritative intrusion. Such considerations appear on the surface to be 'instrumental', rather than simply expressive of Buddhist tenets: they are, in the terms I used earlier, problem-oriented rather than assuming an *a priori* ideal. Thus, they involve an active element, a re-orientation through the course of the rite towards a particular solution, a particular re-arrangement or re-evaluation of conditions. At the same time, such practices take as their crucible the *guru*-student relationship.

We can apply the same conclusions to exegetical statements by local informants: that they in general assume the adoption of normative, rather than expressive, positions which (especially in the case of monks) are usually moulded by the *guru*-student template. Buddhist teachings, or explanations of ritual acts by ritual specialists were aimed not simply at stating bald facts, but at being of *benefit* (L. *p'antoks*), in much the same way that ritual action was of benefit. Following Austin (1962), such exegeses were speech *acts*, serving to constitute a particular relationship between speaker and listener, and between both and the ritual practices being discussed.

By way of elaboration, let me give a final example from my first month in Kumbum monastery. On the day I acted as sponsor for the New Year *skangsol*, I spent some time examining the complex moulded offering cakes that would be presented to Yamāntaka and the Dharma Protectors. Although all were technically offerings (L. *chodpa*) to Buddhist divinities, the central *storma* had a subtly distinct function, acting as “supports” (L. *rten*) for the presence of the divinities during the rite. Monks explained that the *storma* acted like statues for the brief duration of the rite, but their presence there was not permanently established because the cakes did not have *zung*s - small ribbons of paper with empowering mantras written on them - placed at important points within them, as statues did. Whilst examining the offerings, I asked Karma if it was necessary to have the *storma* for the rite to be success. After thinking for a moment, he decided, “No, it is not *necessary*, but it is better. People should think ‘Here are the *choskyong*; here is Yamāntaka, here is Gombo...’. Then its is more beneficial to them.” So was it true, I asked, that the divinities were there in the offerings? “I don’t know. Maybe, maybe not, I’m not sure. But where there is *skangsol*, we must think ‘yes, they are there’. Otherwise, what is the benefit?”.

This utilitarian approach was one that I was to encounter again and again during conversations about ritual practice. Ceremonies and rites did not appear to be there simply to convey doctrinal truths about the world, or indeed about ritual practice itself. My constant questions about what things meant, or about why people did things, were often met either with incomprehension or with the most abrupt of answers, which more or less came down to an imprecise mixture of ways of saying, “Because it’s good”. Only later, after some very long excursions into somewhat useless and

circular debates, did I learn (to a certain extent) to stop asking *why* people did things, and start asking "How should I do this? What should I think?".

PART IV:

Conclusion

To summarise: the basic assertion of this thesis is that Tibetan Buddhist practice in Lingshed revolved around the notion of the subjugation or taming of local chthonic forces, and that it was this capacity that underlay accepted notions of ritual and religious authority. Such subjugation was linked not simply to the creation of universal Buddhist ritual forms, but to the creation of ritual forms which were direct responses to symbolically constructed understandings about particular social and ritual conditions in the local areas that monasteries served.

In this sense, and several others, local monasteries cannot be analytically separated from their associated lay communities, or from the chthonic forces that are the focus of "local" and lay ritual traditions. Such chthonic forces were conceptualised both in terms of household and local gods, and were seen as underlying the individual and communal agency of both householders and ordinary monks. Thus, both groups remained integrally bound within the structure of local forces that represented the environment within which local monasticism took place.

Ordinary monks therefore stood as ambiguous figures, located somewhere between their natal household and the *gompa*. Their adoption of monastic vows served to move them away from the activities of production and reproduction (or fertility) which characterised the role of the householder, but did not actually take them beyond the broader boundaries of the household estate itself.

This kind of renunciation - which I have termed *clerical* renunciation - gave local monks a limited, but definite degree of ritual authority over local chthonic events. This limit was related to their ability (through tantric empowerment and training) to authoritatively replicate the ritual activities of incarnate *lamas*, through their own meditative "self-generation" as - in the Kumbum case - the Buddha Yamāntaka. In particular, it allowed them to re-enact within the ritual context the magical victories that important Buddhas and incarnate *lamas* have had over local gods. However, because clerical renunciation does not entail *full* mastery and transformation of the physical body into that of a Buddha, it did not allow clerical renouncers to act out their own magical victories, to innovate on the established precedents of high *lamas*.

Incarnates, or *tulku*, were distinguished from such ordinary clerical renouncers through a history of having ritually transformed their bodies, such that they could fully and definitely "represent" the powers of particular

tantric Buddhas, of whom they were regarded as emanations. Such an history was related to certain tantric practices which symbolically transform the religious virtuosi into a Buddha manifestation through either sexual yoga, or through the ritual mastery of the processes of death and rebirth - processes which I have termed *yogic renunciation*. Successfully performed, such a transformation recreates the manifest body of the religious virtuoso, who is thereby no longer bound by manifest embodiment to the local domain to which he was born. Through fully manifesting the qualities of a Buddha, he becomes transcendent over local domains and their gods, and thereby has ritual authority over them.

Since the former method is unavailable to those who have taken monastic vows, the integrity of the Gelukpa monastic system demanded that the status of incarnate *lama* occurred solely through death yoga, and therefore that such *lamas* were born, not made.

As a result, the Gelukpa Order is divided into two types of monk: incarnates who are born to the post, and ordinary monks whose only real opportunity to attain such an ascendant status is through tantric preparation for death.

These two classes of monk acted in dynamic relationship to one another, with the acts of incarnates providing the ritual template for the ritual practices of ordinary monks. Such templates of ritual acts were formed through the process of creating ritual cosmologies that incorporated local divinities into a Buddhist hierarchy. Thus, while such hierarchies may be universal to the Gelukpa Order, they are each uniquely linked to particular local domains through the situated historical acts of yogic renouncers.

In the absence of further intervention by incarnates, however, such templates are static and unchanging once established, simply because their precise re-enactment - not simply as a mechanical copy, but as a spiritual attainment unto itself, made sure by the ordinary monks' maintenance of discipline - is the very basis of clerical authority. This implies two radical conclusions:

i) Although the strict observance of vows allows monks to be suitable *vessels* for the transmitted religious authority of incarnate figures, it does not give them any authority *in and of itself*.

ii) Clerical renunciation does not represent a fully complete system of religious authority; by extension, a monastery without an incarnate lacks the very source of any religious authority.

As a result, clerical renouncers alone cannot innovate new ritual practices to respond to perceived changes in local chthonic conditions, but must depend on incarnates. Thus, those monasteries in outlying areas, or in regions dislocated from centralised authority, are faced with regular crises of ritual authority. Such crises undermine the relevance of monastic practices to local domains, replacing them with alternative ritual processes, such as the discourses of local oracles or the knife of the sacrificer.

Such a portrait of ritual practice means that we must be extremely careful in the Tibetan Buddhist context with the concept of 'domestication'. The concept itself - used to describe the process by which eremitic Buddhist traditions become either integrated within, or compromised by, relations with surrounding social structures - assumes that such traditions are originally socially unencumbered. From this pristine state, one or more of a variety of processes causes domestication over the course of years or centuries (Carrithers 1979).

What is perhaps most odd about the concept of domestication is the way in which it locates Buddhism as a religious tradition within a definable set of ideals, rather than within an identifiable set of people. From here, the pragmatic elements of the people that adopt Buddhism progressively contaminate the tradition with social elements, such as through processes of ritual exchange (Strenski 1983). An example of such a 'contamination' would be the adoption of offering practices to local deities.

However, Tibetan Buddhist traditions do not locate the core of the religious tradition within a set of ideals, but in the realisation of those ideals in particular people. As a result, the capacity of people to realise Buddhist 'truths' is the fundamental spiritual problematic, central to the very constitution of the tradition itself.

This problematic - this *difficulty* - is not something which, as the years pass, progressively encroaches on initially idealistic Buddhist monks. It was present all along, in the social and ritual embeddedness of monks and laity both; in their embodied relations with local numina. This embeddedness is not the end result of a monastery's position, it is the very place from where it must start its religious endeavour. What encroaches is the perception of

change to the local world within which the monastery - whether it maintains the purity of its practice or not - must exist.

Conversely, it is the very essence of the tradition's realisation *in people* that necessitates ritual relations with local deities - the exact opposite of what the model of domestication would imply. It is the incorporation of local elements into the monastery's ritual cycle which implies its dominance over local domains and the Buddhist monks and villagers constituted within them. Asad argues a similar process for the disciplinary practices of Medieval Christian monasticism which, in Asad's words, effect

the appropriation (as opposed to suppression) of dangerous desires in the cause of Christian virtue. The overall aim of this monastic project was not to repress secular experiences of freedom but to form religious desires out of them. (Asad 1993: 165)

Thus, Buddhism, the transformative process, is the very inversion of Buddhism, the bounded corpus of pristine doctrine. The place of Buddhist doctrine within particular local domains, and the incorporative ritual cosmologies that accompany it, cannot therefore be treated in isolation, with no regard for local conditions and histories.

At the same time, its place there is not simply functional, emerging from the mass of social relations. Buddhist cosmologies are positive *acts*, performed by authoritative individuals at particular moments *in response* to local conditions. They are therefore neither independent of social conditions, nor determined by them. The internal intellectual content of Buddhist rites may remain fixed, but their application, which remains the heart of their purpose, changes from place to place and moment to moment, as does their relevance.

Following from all of this, it may be tempting to argue that, rather than the sublime considerations of Buddhism, it is the constant and ever-present fear of chthonic forces that is truly hegemonic within this most "clericalised" of Tibetan Buddhist regions. After all, consideration of such geomantic forces has moulded the history of Buddhist ritual practice in the area, and represents the ideational background upon which the palimpsest of Buddhist monasticism is drawn. Buddhist ascendancy may come and go, but the local gods remain.

But such a perspective would be mistaken, built as it is on the age old theological assumption that religion is about belief, and particularly about belief in gods (whether worldly or supraworldly). The First Noble Truth of Buddhism, after all, is about the sufferings of embodied sentient beings. The Second is the cause of those sufferings, desire. In Tibetan Buddhism the embodied desires of sentient beings are locked up within a world where people, and the land from which they come, are only separable through the renunciation of desire. As Geshe Changchub replied when I asked him whether the *sangs chenmo* rite at Lha rGyal Sgan meant that there would no longer be any problem with local gods:

No, no. That is never possible. *Dip* [pollution] will always return, otherwise why would there be *trus* [the purification section of the rite]? Life is always like this. It is suffering. Why? Because of desire. Problems will always come with local gods, just like between brother and sister - because of desire.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

The Ritual Calendar of Kumbum Monastery

In Lingshed, as with most Tibetan Buddhist areas, the calendar was based on a complex combined system of solar and lunar cycles. Each week had seven days (corresponding, even in translated name, to our own), and each month (L. *dawa*) generally had thirty days, passing from new moon to new moon. In most years there were twelve months, being named simply one to twelve.

The necessity to keep the lunar months in time with the passage of the seasons entails a complex series of adjustments that are made from year to year, with days of the week and dates being left out, or repeated, and with certain days having no date at all, according to certain astrological priorities. In Ladakh, there are two New Years: the Tibetan religious New Year at the end of the twelfth month, and the King's (or agricultural) New Year at the end of the eleventh month.

Monthly Rites

Nestled within the calendar of annual rites in Lingshed was a standard monthly rotation of rites and practices performed by either villagers or monks. The focus of these rites varied both geographically and hierarchically, covering in a single month the propitiation of each of the major classes important to both monks and laity, from local divinities (on the third day), to days of celebration and offering to each of the dominant Buddha figures (on the 8th, 10th, 15th, and 30th). These monthly observances were as follows:

3rd.Day: Offerings (L. *sangsol*) to local *lha* - local area gods (L. *yullha*) and household gods (L. *p'alha*) - at each of their shrines (L. *lhat'o*) in the village and on mountainsides.

8th.Day: Medicine Buddha (Smanla) Day. Special offerings made to Smanla at the monastery.

10th.Day: *Tsechu* ("tenth day"): a lay commemoration of the miraculous interventions of Guru Rinpoche in binding local area gods to Buddhism. Offering rites to Guru Rinpoche are sponsored by rotating *khangchen* within allocated groups (L. *tsechu-alak* - "tenth day groups"). This was a lay gathering that monks did not in general attend. Beer was drunk as the blessings of Guru Rinpoche, and sections of the *Padma Kat'ang* text (the biography of Guru Rinpoche) were read out (**Appendix B**).

15th.Day: Buddha Sakyamuni Day. A closed, confessional rite (L. *sojong* - "the nurturing of repentance") was performed in the *dukhang* in the morning, usually lasting around one hour. The rite was closed to all non-vow-holders, and involved a recitation of each of the vows taken by monks, followed by their confession of vows broken.

25th.Day: Offerings to Gyalpo Chenpo, the "great King" in the monastery (also part of the daily offerings given by Kumbum's *gomnyer*).

30th.Day: Buddha Amitabha (Od Padmet - "Boundless Light") Day. *Sojong* performed in the *dukhang* (see above).

On the 8th, 10th, 15th, and 30th days, especially during the winter months, laity would take the opportunity to go to the monastery, perform circumambulations, and have tea in the *gompa*.

Annual Rites

The annual calendar of rites performed at the monastery and within the village followed a dual agenda of strict adherence to a standard monastic cycle of events according to the progression of the lunar calendar, and a more flexible rotation in the performance of many rites in the village, linked to the variable needs of agricultural production. During the annual cycle, certain months (especially the first and the fourth) were regarded as being particularly “religious” months, when the good and bad karma of actions was regarded as being particularly accentuated. In general, the winter was seen as a time of religion and death (although it was also favoured as a time for feasting and weddings), whilst the summer months were seen as a time of agricultural production, a process regarded as profoundly negative in karmic terms through its association with the countless deaths of insects and worms.

First Month

1st - 15th: *Smonlam Chenmo*: large prayer rite, with prayers held throughout the day, aimed at securing prosperity for the Gelukpa Order, its leader the Dalai Lama, all its monasteries and all laity under its charge. Offerings were made to all the various Buddhist divinities throughout the two-week period, including special offerings (L. *sangsol*) made in the monastery to local divinities.

14th - 15th: *Snyungnas*: devotional and fasting rite to 11-armed Chenresig in the Tashi Od’Bar shrine of the monastery (see also Ortner, 1978). Lay-practitioners involved would take the eight vows of the *gyesnyen*¹⁴¹ (Skt. *upasaka*) for the duration of the rite, including a general prohibition from speaking except in prayer. Monks would lead the laity in a series of day-long prayers and prostrations. The participants eat a small meal on the first day and eat and drink nothing on the second. Whether male or female, the lay participants are allowed to stay overnight in the grounds of the monastery, in their capacity as vow-holders. A special *sangsol* is made during the rite.

¹⁴¹That is: no killing; no stealing; no sexual activity; no lying, no intoxicants; no singing or dancing; no taking a meal after noon; no using high or luxurious beds or chairs.

15th: A *Lama Chodpa* (offerings to the spiritual guide) rite was performed, including general offerings to Tsongkhapa and the Dalai Lama. This was followed by a *Ts'ogs* rite, a highly specific tantric rite (which should not be confused with the same term for a general monastic assembly) involving offerings of meat, beer, and various other foodstuffs: this rite allowed visitors to partake of protective offering cakes (L. *ts'ogs storma*) which are blessed by the *lopon* and handed out.

16th: *Smonlam Tadmo*: a celebration by the laity of the preceding rites, held in the *gompa*. Laity performed dances and drumming as celebratory offerings to the divinities summoned by the monastic community.

29th. and 30th: *Smanla Chodpa* Special offering rite to Smanla.

Second Month

1st to 15th: *Saka*, the ceremonial 'opening' of the "earth door" with a ritual ploughing of the principal field of each household.

12-13th: *Chubsum Chodpa* ("Offering of the 13th day") Offering rite marking the changeover of the various caretaker monks (*gomnyer*) of Lingshed monastery and its various under-*gompa* in other villages. *Sangsol* offerings were also made on this day from the roof of the monastery.

Fourth Month (Spring)

1st to 15th: *Bumskor*: held on an astrologically auspicious day during this period (usually one month after *saka*), the *Kanjur* volumes are carried around the fields of the entire village, by the laity, and periodically read out, along with cleansing (*trus*) rites to ensure a good harvest.

14th & 15th: *Snyungnas*: (see First Month).

15th: *Zhipa'i Chonga* ("fifteenth of the fourth", Buddha Purnima Day). A commemoration of the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha Sakyamuni. The monastery's *yidam* statue was placed on view during the hours of daylight. On this day, the *lopon*, *umdzat* and *u-chung* were changed every two-three years.

Fifth Month

15th. to 30th. days: *Kanjur & Tenjur* Reading. The Buddhist Scriptures and Commentaries were read out in their entirety in the *gompa*. Those monks absent except on monastery business were fined.

Sixth Month

4th: *Kanjur Tadmo*: Celebrations held by the laity after the readings of the *Kanjur* and *Tenjur*. This day commemorated the first preaching given by Buddha Sakyamuni at the Deer Park at Sarnath.

15th. to 30th: *Yar-gnas* summer retreat. Monks forbidden to leave the precincts of the monastery¹⁴² without the permission of the officiating *yardag* ("master of the summer retreat"¹⁴³), who must perform a blessing rite on their behalf. Those monks carrying out necessary monastic business had to return either to Kumbum or to one of its sister-monasteries (1.1) every seven days to receive blessing. Within the monastery, strict monastic discipline was emphasised, with monks prohibited from eating after midday.¹⁴⁴

Seventh Month

1st - 30th: *Yar-gnas* summer retreat continues. This period was also given over to the training of monks in the preparation of the Dorje Jigjet (the monastery's *yidam*) sand mandala, in preparation for the tantric initiations given upon the mandala's completion. These initiations are performed in order to enter monks into a career of tantric practice.

30th: *Ga-zhe* [dgag.dbyi] the "breaking" of *Yar-gnas*.

Eighth Month

¹⁴²The exact stipulation was 500 arm-spans from the *gompa*.

¹⁴³This post usually consists of one *ex-lo-pon* as *yardag chenpo* ("principal master of the summer retreat") and four subsidiary *yar-dag*, usually including the *lo-pon* and *u-mdzat*. The *yar-dag chen-po* himself never leaves the monastery during the summer retreat, whilst the others must, in order to perform rites within the village,

¹⁴⁴During the rest of the year, the monks would usually have a small tea or dinner in the evening.

3rd: *Lha rgyal sgan*: a large *sangsol* offering and *trus* cleansing rite to all the local area gods, to atone for late or unperformed offerings during the winter months.

Ninth Month

6th - 18th: *Dulja* ("subjugation"). Lingshed monks leave to perform *skangsol* rites in the households of Dibling village, to eradicate the *gye*; the ritual pollution accumulated through the harvesting process. In general, only the *gomnyer* and older monks will remain in Lingshed.

29th day: *Lingshed Gustor* (votive offering of the 29th day) this annual exorcistic rite is designed to purify the monastic precincts. Unlike many monasteries, no ritual dancing (*cham*) is performed.

Tenth Month

During the 10th month: *Mane* : A large communal rite centred on the Tashi Od'Bar shrine performed across several days. Almost all members of the laity gather on an astrologically auspicious date to recite the mantra of *Chenresig*, the patron deity of Tibet and its people, which process is meant to gradually fill the monastic *bum-pa* (blessing-pot from which consecrated water is sprinkled during a wide variety of rites, including the bi-annual *Snyungnas* rite).

1st - 20th: *Dulja* : the majority of monks leave Lingshed to perform *skangsol* rites in the households of the villages of Skyumpata, Gongma, Yulchung and Nyeraks.

15th: *Skangsol* rite held to change *lostor* (annual offering cakes to Dorje Jigjet) in Kumbum's *dukhang*..

25th: *Galden Ngamchod*: Commemoration of the death of Tsongkhapa. At sunset, offering candles are placed on every rooftop, shrine, *chorten*, window, and tree in the village. Also on this day the new monastic *gyesgus* (disciplinary officer) is instated. *Sangsol* rite performed on the roof of the monastery.

25th - 30th: Last days of the King's Year. This is a time of lay exorcism. Children carry firebrands out of *khangchen* households and throw them

beyond the lowest limits of the village, declaring it an end to the evil things of the old year.

30th: Each *khangchen* lights a large bonfire, and at about 4am its occupants carry torches and food to the bottom of the village, and cast the torches beyond the village perimeter. A feast is then held until the dawn of the first day.

Eleventh Month

1st - 9th: *Losar*: The King's New Year. Households take this opportunity to visit one another and hold feasts. *Skangsol* is performed by the entire monastery in each of the *khangchen* houses.

Twelfth Month

15th-30th: *Skam Ts'ogs*: ("parched assembly"): Large prayer rite to mark the end of the year, and centring around the annual retreat (L. *ts'ams*) of the *lopon*, who must perform offerings and prayers to the monastery's *yidam*, Dorje Jigjet. During this time, no female may enter the monastery. During the mornings, monks perform prayers (L. *choshot*) to all divinities of the Gelukpa Order, abstaining from food and drink during this time. The *lopon* emerges from retreat on the very last day of the year to perform the final *skangsol* rite of the year, intended to cleanse the entire local area of accumulated sin.

APPENDIX B:

Texts Used in Lingshed Ritual Practice

Texts are transliterated according to the Wylie system.

Skangsol Texts:

'Dod.khams.dbang.phyug.ma.dmag.thor.rgyal.mo'i.sgrub.thabs.gtor.
mchog

Dam.can.chos.kyi.rgyal.po'i.gtor.mchog.bskang.bso.bstod.bskul.dang.bcas.
pa.bzhugs.so | |

'Dod.khams.dbang.phyug.ma.dmag.zor.rgyal.mo'i.sgrub.thabs.bzhugs.so | |

dPal.dgon.zhal.bzhi.pa.la.mchod.gtor.'bul.tshul.bzhugs.so | |

mGon.dkar.yid.bzhin.nor.bu'i.gtor.mchog.bzhugs.so |

rGyal.po.chen.po.rnam.thos.sras.la.mchod.gtor.'bul.ba'i.rim.pa.dngos.grub.
kyi.pang.mdzod.ces.bya.ba.bzhugs.so | |

Shar.phyogs.dge.snyen.la.mchod.gtor.'bul.tshul.bzhugs.so | |

Funeral Texts:

Tibetan Book of the Dead: zab.chos.zhi.khro.dgongs.pa.rang.grol.las.bar.
do.thos.grol.gyi.skor.bzhugs.so | |

Lama Chodpa and Associated Ts'ogs::

Zab.lam.bla.ma.mchod.pa'i.cho.ga.bde.stong.dbyer.med.ma.dang. | tshogs.
mchod.bcas.bzhugs.so | |

(Sherig Parkhag Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, Dharamsala)

Trus Purification Rites:

rdo.rje.rnam.par.'joms.pa'i.sgo.nas.dkar.phyogs.rnams.la.ri.khrus.klung.kh
rus.bcas.bzhugs.so | |

in

bla.ma'i.rnal.'byor.dang. | yi.dam.khag.gi.bdag.bskyed.sogs.zhal.'don.gcas.
btus.bzhugs.so | |

(1992 edition. Sherig Parkhag Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, Dharamsala)

Sangsol Offerings:

Lha.bsangs.phyogs.bsdu.dang. | sde.brgyad.gser.skyems | gnas.chung.
'phyin.bskul | bod.skyong.lha.srung.gi.'phyin.bskul.dang. | bden.gsol.
smon.tshig.sogs.bzhugs.so | |

(1993 edition, Sherig Parkhag Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, Dharamsala)

Snyungnas Rite:

Thugs.rje.chen.po.zhal.bcu.gcig.pa.dpal.mo.lugs.kyi.sgrub.thabs.snyung.
par.gnas.pa'i.cho.ga.dang.de'i.bla.ma.rgyud.pa'i.gsol.'debs.bcas.bzhugs.so
||

Tsechu Tenth-Day Offerings:

Padma K'at'ang(the biography of Guru Rinpoche):

U.rgyan.ghu.ru.padma.'byung.gnas.kyi.skyes.rabs.rnam.par.thar.pa.rgyas.
par.bcod.pa.padma.bka'i.thang.yig.ces.bya.ba.bzhugs.so ||

APPENDIX C:

Glossary

Words in phonetic Ladakhi (as given in the text) are followed by correct Ladakhi spellings, then (if appropriate) their Sanskrit equivalent *according to standard Ladakhi and Tibetan usage*. This is then followed by a brief description.

Amchi [a.mchi]: Ladakhi medical practitioner.

Barchad [bar.chad]: Spiritual or other obstacles

Bodhicitta: see *changchub-gyi-sems*.

Bodhisattva : see *changchub-semspa*.

Bumskor [‘bum.skor]: late spring rite in which the *Prajnaparamita* (*bum*) texts are carried around the village and fields, in order to ensure a successful harvest.

Chandren trus [spyān.‘dren.khrus]: See *Trus*.

Changchub-gyi-sems [byang.chub.gyi.sems, Skt. *bodhicitta*]: The altruistic wish to attain enlightenment through compassion for others. Essential to the training of monks, this quality is seen as being a doctrinal pre-requisite to tantric empowerment (*wang*) within the Gelukpa Order.

Changchub-semspa [byang.chub.sems.dpa’, Skt. *bodhisattva*]: a broad term referring to a religious practitioner motivated by *bodhicitta*, or a celestial being such as *Chenresig*, who refrain from attaining enlightenment in order to help others.

Cham [‘cham]: Masked dances performed at monasteries, often related to the *Gustor* rite.

Char [‘char]: to arise, or dawn, as in the sun, or a thought, or an evoked divinity.

Chenresig [spyān.ras.gzigs, Skt. *Avalokitesvara*]: The *bodhisattva* of compassion, either found in his four- armed or thousand-armed form. Mythically, he is said to have founded the Tibetan race, and brought wheat to it. Often, his place as a tutelary divinity (*yidam*) confers upon him Buddha status, and he is said to emanate in the human form of the Dalai Lama.

Chinlabs [byin.rlabs]: general term for ‘blessing’.

Chodpa [mchod.pa]: refers to offerings in general, but to dough offering cakes in particular.

Chorten [mchod.rten, Skt. *stupa*]: a ‘receptacle [or support] for offerings’, these ubiquitous stone monuments are seen as representing the Buddha’s mind, as well as the elements and levels of the universe.

Chosku [chos.sku, Skt. *dharmakāya*]: The completely enlightened Mind of a Buddha.

Choskyong [chos.skyong, Skt. *dharmapala*] Divinity (or more rarely a historical person) committed to the protection of the Buddhist Doctrine and the Three Jewels. All Tibetan monasteries have a variety of associated *choskyong*, from high tantric divinities to lesser local area gods.

Chinlabs [byin.rlabs]: ('waves of magnificence') blessings, which proceed downwards⁷ from divine and highly religious figures to those that have faith (*dadpa*) in them.

Chyak p'ulches [phyag.phul.byes]: "to offer hands", or prostrate.

Dadpa [dad.pa]: "faith" or "trust".

Dagskyed: [bdag.bskyed - "self-generation"]: deity yoga based on visualising oneself as a Buddha.

Damchan [dam.can]: refers to those divinities ritually "bound" to Buddhism.

Dig [sgrig] - "obscure" or "obscuration".

Digpa [sdig.pa]: The nearest Tibetan term for "sin" or "sinful", this term is opposed to *gyewa*, or "virtue", but logically different from concerns about pollution (*dip*).

Dip [grib]: Literally, 'shade', in the sense of that on the North side of a mountain. Ritually, this term connotes 'pollution', and is caused by a variety of lesser or greater infractions of the 'established order of things', such as birth, death, eating irregularities, etc.

Dondam denpa [don.dam.bden.pa]: "ultimate truth", usually referring in Praśaṅgīka Mādyamīka philosophy to the notion of "emptiness" (L *stongpanyid*).

Donpo [mgron.po]: A combined term meaning both guest and object of invocation.

Dorje-Jigjet [rdo.rje.'jigs.byed, Skt. Vajrabhairava]: ('Adamantine Fearful One'). The tutelary divinity of Lingshed monastery. Also Yamāntaka.

Dorje T'egpa [rdo.rje.theg.pa, Skt. *Vajrayāna*]: The "diamond" or "tantric" Vehicle of Buddhism.

Dos [mdos]: thread cross arrangement used to 'trap' spirits.

Dra'o [dgra.bo]: "the enemy" - inimical spirits or mental qualities of any kind, often represented in rites as a small red figurine.

Dre ['dre]: A general term for a class of entirely malevolent demon, often seen as form of the spiritual afflictions (*nyon-mongs*) that are associated with specific people.

Dud [bdud]: A lesser class of malevolent demon.

Dud-tsa-chu [bdud.rtsa.chu] - ambrosia water.

Dug-sum [dug.gsum]: (“three poisons”) the spiritual afflictions of attachment, hatred and ignorance which Buddhist doctrine posits as the cause of all suffering.

Dugsngal-gyi-dugsngal [sdug.bsngal.gyi.dugs,bsngal]: The “suffering of suffering” (also “the suffering of pain”).

Drugchuma [drug.bcu.ma]: Red triangular votive offering cake (*storma*) used in large *skangsol* rites, the *drugchuma* represents the ‘weapon’ of Chosgyal, the Lord of Death.

Dujet-gyi-dugsngal [‘du.byed.kyi.sdug.bsngal]: “conditional suffering”.

Dulja [‘dul.byā]: literally, “subduing”. Those rites performed in each of Kumbum’s sponsor villages during the post-harvest period.

Dulwa [‘dul.ba]: literally “subjugation”. The agricultural, physical, ritual or spiritual ‘taming’ of any territorial or cognitive domain. Thus, the term is a general translation for the Sanskrit *vinaya*, or for any behavioural or mental discipline. It also applies to the ritual subjugation of local divinities by high *lamas*.

Gangzag kyī dagmed, [gang.zag.gyi.bdag.med]: the “selflessness of persons” within Gelukpa philosophy.

Gelukpa [dge.lugs.pa]: “The Virtuous Order” of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). This order, run under the symbolic leadership of the Dalai Lamas, emphasised celibate monasticism as the dominant religious path.

Gyegsus [dge.skos]: Disciplinary officer of the monastery, whose major duties lie in ensuring the integrity and discipline of the monastic community, especially during *ts’ogs*.

Gomnyer [dgon.gnyer]: ‘Caretaker’ monk, whose predominant duties involved maintaining the daily cycle of offerings within each of the monastic temples, and assuring the security of temple property.

Gompa [dgon.pa]: General term for Tibetan Buddhist or Bon monastery, although it is occasionally somewhat more restrictively used to imply the temples within the monastic compound.

Gonlak [dgon.lag]: “Branch, or subsidiary, *gompa*”, usually maintained by the monastery and occupied by single *gomnyer*, or caretaker monks.

Gyalchen Zhi [rgyal.chen.bzhi]: The Four Protector Kings.

Gyedunpa [dge.’dun.pa]: General term for the monastic community, or Sangha. One of the Three Jewels (*konjok-sum*) of Buddhism.

Gyeg. [bgegs]: hindering spirits.

Gyelong [dge.slong]: Fully-ordained Buddhist monk, maintaining 253 vows as proscribed by the Vinaya text on monastic discipline. Usually these are senior monks of many years standing.

Geshe [dge.bshes]: High scholastic status, obtained through decades of the study of philosophy, epistemology, debating, and monastic discipline at one of the central Gelukpa monastic universities.

Gyesnyen [dge.snyen, Skt. *upāsaka*]: A limited series of vows (or those who have taken them), relevant to celibate laity and novice monks. These vows are often taken for temporary periods of several days during *Snyungnas* rites.

Gye-tor [bgegs.gtor]: offering consisting of three offering cakes ranked with three candles, used in funerals and other purification rites.

Gyets'ul [dge.tshul, Skt. *śramaṇera*]: semi-ordained monk, with thirty-six vows.

rGyud [b/rgyud]: A general word meaning "lineage" (either religious or genealogical), it also used to denote those tantric rites given to the evocation of divinities through use of their *sngags* (Skt. *mantra*), or "seed syllables". In Tibetan Buddhism, the divinity's powers are then harnessed for religious purposes, such as ritual power or the attainment of enlightenment.

Gyurwa'i-dugsngal [gyur.ba'i.sdug.bsngal]: "The suffering of change".

Ja [bya; Skt. *kriyā*]: "action" tantra. *Jangwai Choga* [byang.ba'i.cho.ga]: purification ceremonies performed at death.

Jigten [jig.rten]: the world, in the sense of the physical domain in which suffering beings exist, and the beings which inhabit it.

Kalpa [bskal.pa]: Buddhist world-age, or aeon.

Khenpo [mkhen.po]: A full 'abbot' of a monastery, usually a post taken by a resident incarnate Lama.

Khorwa [khor.ba]: samsaric existence, in the sense of the state of suffering in cyclic existence. Logically a broader term than *jigten*.

Kundzod denpa [kun.rdzob.bden.pa] - "conventional truth".

Lama [bla.ma]: A polysemic term, but when strictly used refers to the transmitter of tantric empowerments (*wang*), or the person specific spiritual preceptor.

Lanamed naljor [bla.na.med.rnal.'byor; Skt. *anuttarayoga*]: "Highest Yoga" tantra.

Las-gyu-das [las.rgyu.'das]: the law of cause and effect, or karmic retribution, one of the mainstays of Buddhist moral doctrine.

Las-rung [las.rung]: the "empowering activity" which a practitioner may store up through retreats, allowing him or her to perform difficult ritual tasks.

Lha [lha]: A god, or divinity, this term also incorporates a wide variety of powerful local numina, the nature of whose existence, whilst disembodied to a lesser or greater extent, is not fundamentally different from that of people.

Lhaba [lha.pa]: A general word for a high or local oracle, who becomes possessed by one or more divinities on a regular basis, and can evoke them at will in the right circumstances.

Lhakang [lha.khang]: A temple or shrine room.

Lhamo [lha.mo]: Female oracle or divinity.

Lhandre [lha.'dre]: Broad colloquial term for an demon or powerfully malevolent spirit. Also *lhandre dud tsar!* [lha.'dre.bdud.tshar], a common exorcistic cry marking "the end of demons and malevolent spirits!"

Lopon [slob.dpon, Skt. *ācārya*]: Main teacher or head monk (if no *khenpo* is present of a monastery).

Lu [klu]: water-spirits, often manifest in the form of fish and lizards, which are strongly associated with fertility, both human and agricultural.

Lubang [klu.brang]: 'house' for water-spirits (L. *lu*).

Lud [glud] - ransom offering.

Naljor [rnal.'byor; Skt. *yoga*]: "Yoga" tantra.

Naljorpa [rnal.'byor.pa]: tantric yogin.

Namjom trus [rnam.'jom.khrus]: see *Trus*.

Nam-par-shes-pa [rnam.par.shes.pa]: "consciousness" - literally, "that which knows things".

Nelen [sne.len]: "to grasp the thread [of the lower hem of a garment]", to practise hospitality.

Ngotoks: [ngon.rtoqs - "direct perception"], part of the *skangsol* rite.

Nyerpa [gnyer.pa]: 'Manager' in charge of the regulation and provision for the monastic community or any substantial rite.

Onpo [dbon.po]: Community astrologer.

P'alha [pha.lha]: Household god associated with a group of household estates whose inhabitants are *p'a-spun* ("father's kin"), although no demonstrable genealogical relationship is necessarily present.

Rinpoche [rin.po.che]: "Precious One", a term used in reference to a high or incarnate Lama.

Rtsis [rstis]: Astrological almanac.

Sadag [sa.bdag]: "Lord of the Soil", an earth spirit associated with particular places and geographical features. Often synonymous with *lu*.

Semchan [sems.can]: sentient beings.

Sems [sems]: General word for the mind, especially that of ordinary people and creatures, as opposed to Buddhas.

Sangsol [bsangs.gsol](also *Sangs* [bsangs]): Offering rite to local divinities or household gods.

Sangyas [sangs.rgyas]: A Buddha or Buddhas, the term implies “purified”(sang) and “victorious” (gyas).

Shad ts’ul [bshad.tshul]: method of explication.

Shagspa [bshags.pa] - “adjudication”, part of the *skangsol* rite.

Shak [shag]: Monastic quarters, attached to, but not part of, a *gompa*.

Shod [spyod; Skt. *carya*): “performance” tantra.

Sholda [bshol.mda’]: (‘plough-arrow’) the cutting beam of a plough.

Skangsol [bskangs.gsol]: rite of offering to the *choskyong*, or Dharma Protectors. See Ch.7.

Skangshags [bskang.bshags] (“to lay open copious offerings”) Shorter confessional version of *skangsol*.

Skangwa [skang.ba] - “expiation”, part of the *skangsol* rite.

Skurim [sku.rim]: a general evocation rite.

Sku-sum [sku.gsum, Skt. *trikāya*): The three “Bodies” or modes of existence of a Buddha.

Sngowa [sngo.ba]: the dedication of merit that occurs at the end of Buddhist rites.

Specha [dpe.cha]: religious texts - literally “part of the example”.

Srung-skud [srung.skud]: protective thread given to sponsors and laity following prostrations and offerings.

Stodpa [bstod.pa]: (“eulogies”) part of the *skangsol* rite.

Storma [gtor.ma]: Red votive offering used in *skangsol* rites.

T’ablha [thab.lha]: Hearth god.

T’abs [thabs, Skt. *upāya*): (“Method”) the capacity of Buddhist rites and teachings to perform specific functions. Also one of the dominant qualities of Buddhahood.

T’abs-la-khaspa [thabs.la.mkhas.pa, Skt.*upāyaśāukalya*): (“skilful means”) the doctrine that the presentation of Buddhist teachings and exegesis should be in line with the listener’s specific understanding, in order that it be of the most benefit to them.

Tashi rtag gyed [bkra.shis.rtags.brgyad]: the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism.

T'egpa chenpo [theg.pa.chen.po, Skt. *Mahāyāna*]: The "Great Vehicle" of Buddhism.

Traba [grwa.ba]: Novice, unordained monk, or monk in general.

Tralgo [gral.mgo]: "head of the line" of seating.

Tralzhug [gral.gzhug]: "bottom of the line" of seating.

Trus [khrus]: A cleansing (literally "washing") rite, often performed with reference to a mirror within which the desired object of cleansing (a divinity, a local domain, etc.) is visualised, when blessed water is poured on it. This has two sections: *chandrebn trus* and *namjom trus*.

Ts'ams [mtshams]: meditation retreat performed by religious practitioners and other 'advisors' (*khaspa*), such as astrologers and *amchi*.

Tsechu-alak [tshes.bcu.a.lag]

Ts'ogs [tshogs]: the monastic assembly, and crucible of monastic ritual activity.

Tulku [sprul.sku]: "Emanation Body", or 'incarnation'; this is a general term used for incarnate Lamas.

U-chung [dbu.chung]: The preparatory monastic office to that of *umdzat*.

Umdzat [dbu.ḍzad]: Master of Ceremonies in the monastery, who must start all prayers in the *dukhang*, and therefore should know them all by heart. Is also (in Lingshed at least) the preparatory post to that of *lopon*.

Wang [dbang]: Tantric empowerment, involving the transmission of divine essence from the Lama to the student, such that they might then practice specific tantric rites.

Wangpa'i metog [dbang.pa'i.me.tog] - "flower of the senses".

Yamāntaka : The tutelary divinity (*yidam*) of Lingshed monastery, but held generally as one of the main protectors of the Gelukpa Order.

Yardag [byar.bdag]: The monastic office charged with maintaining the ritual integrity of the summer retreat (*yarnas*) at the monastery.

Yarnas [byar.gnas]: The annual monastic Summer retreat. Lasting one and a half months, monks are confined to the immediate precincts of the monastery, unless they receive specific permission from the *yardag*.

Yidam [yid.dam/yi.dam] Usually tantric tutelary deity. For tantric purposes this divinity is elevated to Buddha status, and is often ritually consubstantiated with one's personal *lama*.

Yugu [g.yu.gu]: flat triangular offering cake used in *skangsol*.

Yul [yul] Local area, especially an inhabited domain, often bounded by certain forms of protective ritual device, such as entrance *chorten*. It also has the philosophical designation of being the object of consciousness or thought.

Yullha [yul.lha] A class of local divinity that have power over the affairs, weather, and fertility of a specific *yul*.

Zaspa [zlas.pa]: “repetition” of the name of divinities; part of the *skangsol* rite.

Zhidag [gzhi.bdag]: General class of numina who have power over limited local domains.

Zhindag [sbyin.bdag]: Sponsor to a monastic rite.

APPENDIX D:
Transliteration of Proper Names

Bo-Yig ['bo.yig]
 Changsems Shesrabs Zangpo [byang.sems.shes.rabs. bzang.po]
 Chenresig [spyang.ras.gzigs, Skt. *Avalokitesvara*]
 Chosgyal [chos.rgyal, Skt. *dharmaraja*]
 Dibling [grib.gling]
 Dorje Chang [rdo.rje.chang, Skt. *Vajradhāra*]
 Dorje Jigjet [rdo.rje.'jigs.byed, Skt. *vajrabhairava*]
 Dregpa Chamsing [dregs.pa.lcam.sring]
 Duskhor [dus.khor, Skt. *Kālacakra*]
 Ganden [dga'.ldan]
 Gombo [mgon.po, Skt. *Mahākāla*]
 Jampel Yang ['jam.pel,dbyangs, Skt. *Mañjuśrī*]
 Jamyang Sheyba ['jam.dbyangs.bzhad.pa]
 Karsha [dkar.cha]
 Kumbum [sku.bum]
 Likir [klu.dkyil]
 Lingshed [gling.bsnyed/ling.shed]
 Lobzang Geleg Yeshe Dragpa [blo.bzang.dge.legs.ye.shes.grags.pa]
 Marpa [mar.pa]
 Mune [mu.ne]
 Nam Sras [rnam.sras; Skt. *Vaiśravaṇa*]
 Ngari Rinpoche [mnga'.ris.rin.po.che]
 Nyerags [nyi.rags]
 Padma Kathang [padma. bka'.thang]
 Palden Lhamo (dpal.ldan.lha.mo; Skt. *Śrī Devī*)
 P'ukht'al [phug.dar]
 Rangdum [rang.'dum]
 Rizong [ri.dzong]
 Rinchen Zangpo [rin.chen.bzang.po]
 Samye [bsam.yas]
 Sangde Jigsum [gsang.bde.'jigs.gsum]
 Sangdus (Skt. *Guyasamāja*)
 Sangwa'i Zhin-Ngag [gsang.ba'i.sprin.ngag]
 Shar Chyogs [shar.phyogs]
 Shinje [gshin.rje; Skt. *Yamā*]
 Skyumpata [skyu.mpa.da]
 Srongtsen Gampo [srong.brtsan.sgam.po]
 sTongde [stong.sde]
 Trisong Detsen [khri-srong.lde.brtsan]
 Tsewang Namgyal [tshe.dbang.rnam.rgyal]
 Tsongkhapa [tsong.kha.pa]
 Yulchung [yul.byung]
 Zangskar [bzang.dkar]
 Zhal Zhi [zhal.bzhi]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ames, M. (1964) "Magical Animism and Buddhism", in Harper, E. (ed.) Religion in South Asia. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Aris, M. (1988) Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- (1987) "The Boneless Tongue", in *Past and Present*, No.115: 131-164.
- (1980) Bhutan. New Delhi: Vikas.
- Aris, M. & Aung San Suu Kyi (eds.) (1980) Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson, Oxford 1979 New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- Asad, T. (1993) Genealogies of Religion, London: John Hopkins.
- Austin, J.L. (1962) How to do things with words, Oxford: Clarendon.
- Aziz, Barbara (1974) "Some Notions about Descent and Residence in Tibetan Societies", in Furer-Haimendorf, C., (ed.) (1974) Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, London.
- (1976) "Reincarnation Reconsidered - or the Reincarnate Lama as Shaman", in Hitchcock & Jones (eds.) (1994) Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas, pp.343-360
- (1978) Tibetan Frontier Families. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing.
- (1979) "Indian Philosopher as Tibetan Folk Hero Legend of Langkhor", in Central Asiatic Journal, 23: 19-37.
- Aziz, B. & Kapstein, M. (1985) Soundings in Tibetan Civilization, (Proceedings of the 3rd Seminar of the International Association of Tibet Studies) New Delhi: Manohar.
- Bell, C. (1989) "Religion and Chinese Culture", in History of Religions, 29. Review article.
- Bertelsen, C.B. (1995) "Early Modern Buddhism in Ladakh". Paper presented to the 7th Colloquium of the International Association of Ladakh Studies, Bonn/Sankt Augustin 12-15 June 1995.
- Beyer, S. (1973) The Cult of Tara University of California Press.
- Berglie, P. (1978) "On the Question of Tibetan Shamanism", in Brauen & Kvaerne, (eds.).

- Bloch, M. (1992) Prey Into Hunter Cambridge University Press.
- (1986) From Blessing To Violence, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology.
- (1980) "Ritual Symbolism and the Nonrepresentation of Society", in Foster & Brandes, (eds.) (1980) Symbol as Sense.
- (1977) "The Past & the Present in the Present", *Man* (N.S.),12.
- (1974) "Symbols, Songs, Dance and the Features of Articulation" *European Journal of Sociology*, 15.
- Bloch, M. & Parry, J. (eds. 1982), Death and the Regeneration of Life, Cambridge University Press.
- Blondeau A.M. (1980) "Analysis of the Biographies of Padmasambhava According to Tibetan Tradition", in Aris and Suu Kyi (eds.).
- Bourdieu, P. (1991) Language & Symbolic Power, Polity Press.
- (1972) Outline of a Theory of Practice, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology Cambridge University Press
- Brauen, M. (1980a) "The *pha-spin* of Ladakh", in Aris & Suu Kyi (1980) Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson: Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tibetan Studies, Oxford 1979.
- (1980b) Feste in Ladakh, Akademische Druk-u.Verlanganstaltdt, Graz.
- (1982), "Death Customs in Ladakh". *Kailash.*, 9(4): 319-332.
- Brauen, M. & Kantowsky (eds.) (1983) "The Cosmic Centre in the Ladakhi Marriage Ritual", in Kantowsky & Sander (eds.) (1983) Recent Research in Ladakh.
- (1978) "A Bon-po Death Ceremony", in Brauen & Kvaerne (eds.) (1978) Tibetan Studies Presented at the Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Zurich June 26 - July 1 1977.
- Brauen, M. & Kvaerne, P. (1978) Tibetan Studies Presented at the Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Zürich June 26 - July 1, 1977, Volkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich.
- Bunnag, J. (1973) Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burghart, R. (1987) "Gifts to the Gods", in Cannadine & Price (eds.) (1987) Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies.

----- (1983) "Renunciation in the Religious Traditions of South Asia", *Man*, 18, pp.635-653.

----- (1978) "Hierarchical Models of the Hindu Social System", *Man*, 13, pp.519-36.

Burghart R. & Cantlie, A. (1985) "Indian Religion", Collected Papers on South Asia, No.7, Curzon Press, London.

Cannadine, D. & Price, S. (eds.) (1987) Rituals of Royalty. Cambridge University Press.

Cantwell, C.M.(1996b) "To Meditate Upon Consciousness as Vajra: Ritual Killing and Liberation in the rNying-ma-pa Tradition". Unpublished manuscript.

----- (1996a) "Religious Tradition in the articulation of Tibetan Ethnicity and Political Resistance". Unpublished manuscript.

----- (1995) "The Dance of the Guru's Eight Aspects". *International Journal of Tantric Studies*, [ijts-list@shore.net]: No. 2.

----- (1992) "The Black Hat Dance". *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 1: 12-23.

----- (1989) An Ethnographic Account of the Religious Practice in a Tibetan Buddhist Refugee Monastery in Northern India, Ph.D., University of Kent.

----- (1988) "Buddhist Ritual and Tibetan Identity", paper given at University of Goteberg.

----- (1985) "A Tibetan Buddhist Ritual in a Refugee Monastery", in *Tibet Journal*, X, iii.

Carrasco, P. (1972) Land and Polity in Tibet. London: University of Washington Press.

Carrithers, M. (1979) "The Modern Ascetics of Lanka & the Pattern of Change in Buddhism", *Man*, 14, pp.294-310.

----- (1983) The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka, Delhi: O.U.P.

Cech, K. (1992) "A religious geography of Tibet according to the Bon tradition", in Tibet Studies - Proceedings of Vth Seminar of the International Association for Tibet Studies, Narita, 1989. Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, pp.387-392.

Chang, C.C. (1977) The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa. Boulder and London: Shambhala, 2 vols.

Clarke, G.E. (1980) The Temple and Kinship amongst a Buddhist People of the Himalaya, D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford.

Collins, S. (1992) "Nirvana, Time, and Narrative", in History of Religions

----- (1988) "Monasticism, Utopias and Comparative Social Theory" in Religion, **18**, 101-135.

----- (1982) Selfless Persons, Cambridge University Press.

Corlin, C. (1988) "The Journey Through The Bardo", in C.Corlin, S.Cederroth, and J.Linstrom (eds.), On The Meaning Of Death, Uppsala.

----- (1980) "The Symbolism of the House in rGyal-thang", in Aris & Aung San Suu Kyi (eds.) (1980) Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson, Oxford 1979.

----- (1975) The Nation In Your Mind. University of Goteberg.

Cozort, D. (1986) Highest Yoga Tantra, Snow Lion Publications.

Crook, J. (1994a) "The History of Zangskar", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.).

----- (1994b) "Social Organisation and Personal Identity in Zangskar", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.).

Crook J. and Crook, S. (1994) "Explaining Tibetan Polyandry", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.)

Crook, J. & Osmaston, H. (eds.) (1994) Himalayan Buddhist Villages, University of Bristol.

Crook, J. & Shakya, T. (1994) "Monastic Communities in Zangskar", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.).

Crowden, J. (1994) "Butter-Trading down the Zangskar Gorge", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.).

- Dagyab Rinpoche (1995) Buddhist Symbols in Tibetan Culture; Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- H.H. Dalai Lama (1996) The Good Heart, London: Rider.
- (1990) Freedom in Exile, London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- H.H. Dalai Lama & Hopkins, J., (1985) The Kalacakra Tantra. London: Wisdom.
- Daniel & Keyes (1981) Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dargyay, E. (1988) "Buddhism in Adaptation", in *History of Religions*, 29.
- Das, S. C. (1991) A Tibetan-English Dictionary, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Das, V. (1977) Structure and Cognition, Oxford University Press.
- (1985) "Paradigms of Body Symbolism", in Burghart and Cantlie (eds.) (1985) Indian Religion.
- Davis, J. (1982) Religious Organisation and Religious Experience, *ASA 21*, Academic Press, London.
- Day, S. (1989) Embodying Spirits, Ph.D.Thesis, London School of Economics.
- (1990), "Ordering Spirits: The Initiation of Village Oracles in Ladakh", in Icke-Schwalbe & Meier (eds.) Wissenschaftsgeschichte und gegenwärtige Forschungen in Nord-west-Indien.
- Decler, H. (1978) "The Working of Sadhana: Vajrabhairava", in Brauen & Kvaerne (eds.) (1978) Tibetan Studies Presented at the Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Zurich June 26 - July 1, 1977.
- Dollfus, Pascale (1989) Lieu de neige et de g n vriers, Paris: Editions du Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique.
- Douglas, K. and Bays, G (1978) The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava. Emeryville, California: Dharma.
- Douglas, M. (1966) Purity And Danger, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- (1968) "Pollution", in The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol.12, ed.David Sills, Macmillan & Free Press.

- Dowman & Paljor (1980) The Divine Madman, London, Rider.
- Dumont, L. (1970a) Religion/Politics and History in India, Paris/Hague: Mouton.
- (1970b) "For A Sociology of India", in Dumont, L. (1970a).
- (1970c) "World Renunciation in Indian Religions", in Dumont, L. (1970a).
- Eckel, M.D. (1990) "The Power of the Buddha's Absence", in Journal of Ritual Studies, IV, 2: pp. 61-95.
- Ekvall, R. (1964) Religious Observances in Tibet: Pattern & Function, University of Chicago Press.
- Evans-Wentz (1960) The Tibetan Book of The Dead, Oxford University Press.
- Favret-Saada, J. (1989), "Unbewitching as Therapy", American Ethnologist 16 (4).
- Femia, J. (1981) Gramsci's Political Thought, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Fisher, J.F. (1978) Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface, The Hague: Mouton.
- Foster, M. & Brandes, S. (1980) Symbol as Sense, Academic Press, London.
- Freemantle, F. and Trungpa, C. (1987) The Tibetan Book of the Dead. London: Shambala.
- French, R. (1994) The Golden Yoke. Typescript.
- Furer-Haimendorf, C. (1990) The Renaissance of Tibetan Buddhism, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- (ed.) (1974) Contributions to The Anthropology of Nepal, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, London.
- (1978), Forword to Fisher, J.F. (ed), Himalayan Anthropology, The Hague, Paris: Mouton.
- (1964) The Sherpas of Nepal. London: John Murray.
- Gardner, D.S. (1983) "Performativity in Ritual: The Mianmin Case", Man, 18, pp. 346-360.

- Geertz, C. (1980) Negara. Princeton University Press.
- Gelek, S.W. (1986) "Government, Monastic and Private Taxation in Tibet", *Tibet Journal*, XI (1).
- Gellner, D. (1994) "Priests, Healers, Mediums and Witches: The Context of Possession in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal", in *Man* (N.S.).
- (1992a) Monk, Householder and Tantric Priest, Cambridge University Press.
- (1992b) "Ritualised Devotion, Altruism and Meditation: The Offering of the Guru Mandala in Newar Buddhism", in Indo-Iranian Journal 34: 161-197.
- (1990) "What is the Anthropology of Buddhism about?", Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford, 21/2: 95-112.
- Getty, A. (1978) The Gods of Northern Buddhism. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Gilbert, Michelle (1987) "The Person of the King: Ritual & Power in a Ghanian State", in Cannadine & Price (eds.) Rituals of Royalty.
- Goffman, E. (1961) Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates, New York; Anchor Books Edition.
- Goldstein, M. (1989) A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951. Munshiram Manoharlal (by arrangement with the University of California Press).
- (1973) "The Circulation of Estates in Tibet", Journal of Asian Studies, XXXII, 3: 445-455.
- (1971) "Stratification, Polyandry and Family Structure in Central Tibet", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 27, 64-74.
- Goldstein, M. & Paljor Tsarong (1985) "Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism", in *Tibet Journal*, 10, i.
- Gombrich, R.F. (1971) Precept and Practice. Oxford.
- Good, A. (1982) "The Act and the Actor", *Man* (N.S.), 17, 23-41.
- Goodman, S.D. & Davidson, R.M. (eds.) (1992) Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation, SUNY Press, Albany.

- Gopalan, S. "Identity theory against the backdrop of the Hindu Concept of Dharma", in Hans Mol (ed.) Identity and Religion.
- Grimshaw, A. (1983) Rizong: A Monastic Community in Ladakh, Ph.D, Cambridge.
- (1992) Servants of the Buddha, Open Letters Press, London.
- Grist, N. (1990) "Land Tax, Labour and Household Organisation in Ladakh" in Wissenschaftsgeschichte und gegenwärtige Forschungen in Nordwest-Indien: Staatliches Museum Für Völkerkunde Dresden Forschungsstelle.
- Gudeman & Riviera (1990) Conversations in Columbia, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.
- Guenther, H.V. (1971) Treasures of the Tibetan Middle Way, Berkeley.
- (1963) The Life and Teachings of Naropa, Oxford University Press.
- Gutschow, K. (1993) "Kinship in Zangskar: Idiom and Practice". Typescript.
- Gyatsho, T.L. (1979) Gateway to the Temple. (trans. Jackson, D.P.), Bibliotheca Himalayica, Series 3, Vol.12, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Gyatso, Geshe K. (1992) Great Treasury of Merit. London: Tharpa Publications.
- (1986) Heart of Wisdom. London: Tharpa Publications.
- Gyatso, Janet (1992) "Genre, Authorship and Transmission in Visionary Buddhism", in Goodman & Davidson (eds.), Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation.
- (1987) "Down With The Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet", in Willis (ed.) Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet. Ithaca: Snow Lion.
- Hannah, S. (1994) "Vast as the Sky: The gTer-ma Tradition in Modern Tibet", in Samuel, Gregor & Stutchbury (eds.) (1994) Tantra and Popular Religion in Tibet.
- Heffler, M. (1993) "A Recent Phenomenon: The Emergence of Buddhist Monasteries Around the Stupa of Bodnath", in Tofflin (ed.) The Anthropology of Nepal. Kathmandu: French Cultural Centre, French Embassy.

- Hitchcock & Jones (eds.) (1976) Spirit Possession in The Nepal Himalayas, Delhi: Vikas.
- Hoetzlein, N.A. (1991) "Sacred Ritual Dance: The Gu Tor Tradition at Namgyal Monastery", *Chö Yang*: 314-320.
- Holmberg, D. (1989) Order in Paradox. Cornell University Press.
- Hopkins, J. (1983) Meditation On Emptiness, Wisdom, London.
- Hopkins, J. (ed. & trans.) (1980) Compassion In Tibetan Buddhism, Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.
- Holy, L. & Stuchlik, M. (1983) Actions, Norms and Representations, Cambridge University Press.
- Howe, L. "The Social Determination of Knowledge: Maurice Bloch and Balinese Time", *Man*, 16, pp.220-34
- Huber, T. & Rigzin, T. (1995) "A Tibetan Guide for Pilgrimage to Ti-Se (Mount Kailas) and mTsho Ma-pham (Lake Manosarovar)", *Tibet Journal*, XX, i: pp.10-47.
- Huber, T. (1994) "Putting the *gnas* back into *gnas-khor*", *Tibet Journal*, XIX, ii: pp.23-60
- (1990) "Where Exactly Are Carita, Devikota and Himavat?", Kailash, Vol.16, nos.3-4: pp.121-65.
- Icke-Schwalbe, L. & Meier, G. (1990) Wissenschaftsgeschichte und gegenwärtige Forschungen in Nord-west-Indien, Proceedings of the Colloquium of the International Association of Ladakh Studies March 1987, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden Forschungsstelle.
- Jackson, M. (1983) "Knowledge of the Body", *Man*, 18, pp.327-345.
- Jackson, R. (1993) Is Enlightenment Possible?, New York: Snow Lion.
- Jackson, R., Geshe Lhundup Sopa, and Newman, J. (1985) The Wheel of Time: The Kalacakra in Context. Madison: Deer Park Books.
- Jina, P.S. and Namgyal, K. (1995) Phyang Monastery of Ladakh. Delhi: Indus.
- Kantowsky, D. & Sander, R. (eds.) (1983) Recent Research in Ladakh, München.

- Kapferer, B. (ed.) Transaction and Meaning, ASA Essays in Social Anthropology 1, Philadelphia:
- Kaplanian, P. (1981) Les Ladakhi de Cachemire. Paris: Hachette.
- Kapstein, M. (1992) "Remarks on the Mani bKa'-bum and the cult of Avalokitesvara in Tibet", in Goodman, S. D. & Davidson, R M (ed.) Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation.
- Karmay, S. (1975) A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon, Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko, 38, 171-217.
- Kertzer, D.L. (1988) Ritual, Politics and Power, Yale University Press.
- Klein, A. (1986) Knowledge and Liberation, Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.
- Lambek, M. (1992), "Taboo as Cultural Practice among Malagasy Speakers", *Man* (N.S.) 27, 245-266.
- Leach, E.R. (1978) Culture and Communication, Themes in Social Sciences, Cambridge University Press.
- (1968) "Polyandry, Inheritance, and the Definition of Marriage: With Particular Reference to Sinhalese Customary Law", in Leach, Re-Thinking Anthropology, Athlone Press.
- (1964) "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse", in Lenneberg, E.H. (ed.), New Directions in the Study of Language, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. Reprinted in Lessa & Vogt (eds.), 1965.
- Lekden, K.N. (1974) Meditations of a Tibetan Tantric Abbot, trans. & ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala.
- Lessa, W.A. & Vogt, E.Z. (eds.) (1965) Reader in Comparative Religion. Harper & Row.
- Lewis, I.(ed.) (1977) Symbols and Sentiments, Academic Press, London.
- Levine, N. (1988) The Dynamics of Polyandry, University of Chicago Press.
- (1978) "Fathers and Sons: Kinship Value and Validation in Tibetan Polyandry", *Man*, p.267.

- Levi-Strauss, C. (1966) The Savage Mind (Eng. trans.), Weiderfield & Nicholson, London.
- Levy, Robert I. & Rajopadhyaya (1992) Mesocosm, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Lichter, D. and Epstein, L. (1983) "Irony in Tibetan Notions of the Good Life", in Keyes, C. and Daniel, E. (eds.) Karma: 223-259. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lienhard, S. (1978) "Problème du Synchrétisme Religieux au Népal" BEFEO 65: 239-70.
- Ling, T.O. (1962) Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil, London.
- Locke, J. (1980) "Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal", Kathmandu, Sahayogi.
- Lopez, D.S. (1996) "'Lamaism" and the Disappearance of Tibet", in Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol.38 (1).
- Loserius, A. (1994) "Sacred Geography and the Individual in Central Tibet", Tibet Journal, XIX, iv, pp.46-58.
- McDermott, J.P. (1980) "Karma and Rebirth in Early Buddhism", in O'Flaherty (ed.) (1980) Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions.
- Madan, T.N. (1987) Non-Renunciation. Oxford University Press.
- Malalgoda, K. (1972) "Sinhalese Buddhism: Orthodox and Syncretistic, Traditional and Modern", Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, n.s.2: 156-69.
- Marko, A. (1994) "'Cham: Ritual as Myth in a Ladakhi Gompa", in Samuel, Gregor and Stutchbury (eds.) (1994) Tantra and Popular Religion in Tibet.
- Marriott, M. (1976) "Hindu Transactions", in Kapferer, B. (ed.)
- (1955) "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization", in Village India, Studies the Little Community, (ed.M.Marriott), Chicago University Press.
- Mills, M. (1997) "Notes on the History of Lingshed Monastery, Ladakh". Ladakh Studies 8, journal of the International Association for Ladakh Studies.

----- (1996) "Precious Human Rebirth: The Status of Incarnate Lamas in Tibetan Buddhism". Typescript: paper presented at the Conference of the South Asian Anthropologists Group, Edinburgh, 16-17 September 1996.

Milner, Murray Jr(1993) "Hindu Eschatology and the Indian Caste System", JASianS, 52, no.2: 298-319.

Moacanin (1988) Jung's Psychology and Tibetan Buddhism. Wisdom Publications.

Moore, H. (1994) "Embodied Selves", in Moore, A Passion for Difference, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Mumford, S.R. (1989) Himalayan Dialogue, University of Wisconsin Press,.

Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. de (1993) Oracles and Demons of Tibet, Kathmandu: Tiwari's Pilgrim's Book House.

Norberg-Hodge, H. and Russell (1994) "Childrearing in Zangskar", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.).

Norbu, Dawa (1994) Review of Samuel's Civilized Shamans, Tibet Journal, XIX, No.3.

Nowaks, M. (1984) Tibetan Refugees.

Obeyesekere, G.(1982) "The Principles of Religious Syncretism and the Buddhist Pantheon in Sri Lanka", in Clothey, F.W. (ed.), Images of Man, Madras: New Era Publications.

----- (1970) "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Sri Lanka", Modern Ceylon Studies, 1, No.1: 43-63.

----- (1966) "The Buddhist Pantheon in Ceylon and its Extensions", in M.Nash (ed.), Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism, Yale University Southeast Asian Studies No.13, Chicago University Press.

----- (1963) "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism", JAS 22 (2): 139-53.

O'Flaherty, W. (ed.) (1980) Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions, Berkeley, University of California Press.

----- (1980) "Karma and Rebirth in the Vedas and Puranas", in O'Flaherty (ed.) (1980) Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions.

- Ortner, S. B. (1978) Sherpas Through Their Rituals, Cambridge University Press.
- (1989) High Religion, Princeton University Press.
- (1975a) "Key Symbols" in American Anthropologist.
- (1975b) "Gods' Bodies, Gods' Food" in ASA3, The Interpretation of Symbolism, Roy Willis, ed.
- Osmaston, Frazer & Crook (1994) "Human Adaptation to Environment in Zangskar", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.).
- Paine, R. (ed., 1981) Politically Speaking. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Parry, Jonathan (1985) "Death and Digestion: The Symbolism of Food and Eating in North Indian Mortuary Rites", *Man* (N.S.), 20: 612 - 630.
- (1982) "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic", in Bloch & Parry (eds.) (1982) Death and the Regeneration of Life.
- (1981) "Death and Cosmogony in Kashi", Contributions to Indian Sociology, 15: 337-65.
- "The Brahmanical Tradition and the Technology of the Intellect" in ASA24, ed.J.Overing
- Paul, R. (1982) The Tibetan Symbolic World, University of Chicago.
- (1976) "The Sherpa Temple As A Model of the Psyche", American Ethnologist, 3: 131-146.
- Perdue, D. (1976) Debate in Tibetan Buddhist Education, Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- (1992) Debate in Tibetan Buddhism, New York: Snow Lion.
- Petech, L. (1977) The Kingdom of Ladakh,c.950-1842a.d., Rome, Serie Orientale Roma, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estrema Orientale.
- Piessel, M. (1980) Last Place on Earth: Nodrup's Monastery. BBC video documentary.

Pommaret-Imaeda, F. (1980) "The Construction of Ladakhi Houses in the Indus Valley", in Aris & Aung San Suu Kyi (eds.), Tibetan Studies in Honour of Sir Hugh Richardson.

Phylactou, M. (1989) Household Organisation and Marriage in Ladakh, Indian Himalaya. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London.

Powers, J. (1994) Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism. Ithaca: Snow Lion.

Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark (1978) "Tibetan Oracles", in Fisher, J. (ed.) Himalayan Anthropology.

----- (1963) A Study of Polyandry, The Hague.

----- (1956) "The *pha-spun* of Leh Tehsil in Ladakh, Eastern Kashmir, India", East and West, Vol.7: 138-146.

Pye, Michael (1978) Skilful Means, London: Duckworth.

Rabgias, T. (1984) History of Ladakh Called the Mirror Which Illuminates All. Leh: Namgyal and Taru.

Rabinow, P. (1984) The Foucault Reader, London: Penguin.

Ramble, C. (1995) "Gaining Ground: Representations of Territory in Bon and Tibetan Popular Religion", in Tibet Journal, XX, No.i.

----- (1990) "How Buddhist are Buddhist Communities?" JASO, 21/2: 185-97.

Ramble, C. and Brauen, M. (1993) Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya, Ethnological Museum of the University of Zürich.

Redfield, R. (1956) Peasant Society and Culture. Chicago.

Reis, R. (1983) "Reproduction or Retreat: The Position of Buddhist Women in Ladakh", in Kantowsky & Sander.

Riaboff (1995) "The *lha*, a Fluctuating Zangskari Category". Paper given at the 1995 Conference of the International Association for Ladakh Studies, Bonn.

Robertson-Smith, W. (1894) Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, London.

Roerich, G.N. (1988) The Blue Annals, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

- Samuel, G. (1993a) Civilized Shamans. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- (1993b) "Shamanism, Bon and Tibetan Religion" in Ramble and Brauen (eds.).
- (1985) "Early Buddhism in Tibet: Some Anthropological Perspectives", in Soundings in Tibetan Civilization, (eds. Aziz and Kapstein).
- (1978) "Religion in Tibetan Society - A New Approach", in *Kailash*, 6: 43-63; 99-112.
- (1975) The Crystal Rosary: Insight and Method in an Anthropological Study of Tibetan Buddhism, Ph.D dissertation, Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge.
- Samuel, G., Gregor, H. & Stutchbury, E. (eds.) (1994) Tantra and Popular religion in Tibet, International Academy of Indian Culture, New Delhi: Aditya Prakisha.
- Sanderson, A. (1991) "Vajrayana: Origin and Function", to appear in Mettanando Bhikkhu et al. (ed) Buddhism in the Year 2000, Bangkok: Dhammakaya Foundation.
- Saul (1996), "Deities Within A Landscape: The Changing Face of Village Protectors in Northern Nepal". Paper given at the Seminar for South Asian Anthropologists, Edinburgh 1996.
- Schlutter, G. (1971) "Die letzten tibetanischen Orakelpriester: psychiatrisch-neurologische Aspekte". Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner.
- Schopen, G. (1991) "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism", in *History of Religions*.
- Schrempf, M. (1994) "Tibetan Ritual Dances and the Transformation of Space". *Tibet Journal*, XIX: 2.
- Schwalbe, K. (1979) The Construction and Religious Meaning of the Buddhist Stupa in Solu Khumbu, Nepal. Ph.D Dissertation, Berkeley.
- Sen, A. (1984) Aspects of the Economic and Social Organisation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, M.Litt, Oxford.
- Shakya, T., Rabgias, T. and Crook, J. (1994) "Monastic Economics", in Crook and Osmaston (eds.).

- Sherpa Tulku. and Guard, R. (1990) Meditation on Vajrabhairava, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala. Restricted text.
- (1991) Self-Initiation of Vajrabhairava, Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives . Restricted text.
- Sharpa Tulku and Perrott, M. (1985) "The Ritual of Consecration", in *Tibet Journal*, Vol.X, No.2.
- (1987) A Manual of Ritual Fire Offerings, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, India.
- Sherpa Tulku, Khamlung Tulku, Berzin, A., and Landaw, J. (1977) "The Structure of the Ge-lug Monastic Order", *Tibet Journal*, Vol.2, No.3 (Autumn): 67-71.
- Siklos, B. (1990) The Vajrabhairava Tantra. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- Skorupski, T. (1995) "Tibetan Homa Rites after the gTer ma Tradition", in *Tibet Journal*, XX, No.4.
- Slusser, M. (1982) Nepal Mandala. Princeton University Press.
- Snellgrove, D.L. (1957) Buddhist Himalaya. Oxford: Cassirer.
- (1959) The Hevajra Tantra. 2 Vols. (London Oriental Series 6.), O.U.P.
- (1966) "For A Sociology of Tibetan Speaking Regions", *Central Asiatic Journal*, 11.
- (1987) Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Serindia.
- Snellgrove, D. & Richardson, H. (1986) A Cultural History of Tibet, London: Shambhala.
- Snellgrove, D. & Skorupski, T. (1979 & 1980) The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh, Vols. I & II, Warminster.
- Southwold, M. (1983) Buddhism in Life, Manchester University Press.
- (1982) "True Buddhism and Village Buddhism in Sri Lanka", in J.Davis (ed.).
- (1975) "Buddhism and the Definition of Religion", *Man*. (N.S.)

- Spencer, J. (1990a) A Sinhalese Village in a Time of Trouble: Politics and Change in Rural Sri Lanka, O.U.P., Delhi.
- (1990b) "Tradition and Transformation: Recent Writings on the Anthropology of Buddhism in Sri Lanka". Review article, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 21/2: 129-40.
- Spiro, M.E. (1970) Buddhism and Society, Allen & Unwin, London.
- (1967) Burmese Supernaturalism, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- Srinivas (1995), "Witch Possession in the Nubra Valley: The Analysis of a Case". Paper presented at the VIIth Conference of the International Association for Ladakh Studies, Bonn, June 12-16, 1995.
- Stablein, W. (1980) "The medical soteriology of Karma in the Buddhist Tantric Tradition", in O'Flaherty, W. (ed.) (1980) Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions.
- (1976) "Mahakala the Neo-Shaman", in Hitchcock and Jones (eds.).
- Stein, R.A. (1972) Tibetan Civilisation, Faber & Faber, London.
- Stobdan, T. (1994) "Reflections on the Religious, Political and Economic Aspects of Stok 'Jagir'", paper presented at the Conference of the I.A.L.S., Bonn 1995.
- Strenski, Ivan (1983) "On Generalised Exchange and the Domestication of the Sangha", in *Man*, pp.463-477 .
- Stutchbury, E. (1994) "Perceptions of Landscape in Karzha", in *Tibet Journal*, XIX, No.4.
- Tambiah, S.J. (1985a) "The Magical Power of Words" in Tambiah, S.J., Culture, Thought and Social Action, Harvard University Press.
- (1985b) "A Performative Approach To Ritual" in Tambiah, S.J., Culture, Thought and Social Action, Harvard University Press.
- (1984) The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets, Cambridge University Press.
- (1976) World-Conqueror and World-Renouncer, Cambridge University Press.

- (1970) Buddhism and the Spirit-Cults of North-East Thailand, Cambridge University Press.
- Thurman, R. (trans., 1994) The Tibetan Book of the Dead, London: Harper Collins.
- (ed., 1989) The Speech of Gold. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- (1985) "Tsongkha-pa's Integration of Sutra and Tantra", in Aziz and Kapstein (eds.)
- (1982) Life and Teachings of Tsong-khapa, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala.
- Trewin, M. (1993) "Lha-rnga: A Form of Ladakhi "Folk" Music and its Relationship to the Great Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism", in Ramble and Brauen (eds.)
- Tsering, Nawang (1985) "A Study of the Spread of Buddhadharma in Ladakh", in Aziz & Kapstein (eds.) (1985) Soundings in Tibetan Civilization.
- Tsongkapa (1977) Tantra in Tibet, trans.& ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins, Unwin Hyman, London.
- (1981) Yoga of Tibet, trans. & ed. by Jeffrey Hopkins, Unwin Hyman, London.
- Tucci, G. (1989) Indo-Tibetica, (Eng.Trans.) 6 Vols. Part of Sata-Pitaka Series, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, N.Delhi.
- (1980) The Religions of Tibet. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- E.Tylor (1871) Primitive Culture, New York.
- Wadley, S. (1975) Shakti Power in the Conceptual Structure of Karimpur Religion, University of Chicago Studies in Social Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- Welbon, G. (1968) The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Willis, J. (1995) Enlightened Beings. Wisdom Publications.
- (1984) "Tibetan Ani-s: The Nun's Life in Tibet", in *Tibet Journal*, IX(4).

Wittgenstein, L. (1922) Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (tr.by C.K. Ogden),
London: Routledge.