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LADAKH, A TRADING STATE

This article is the result of interviews and surveys done in Ladakh from 1977 to 1981 with people who had been involved in trade in the past or who still carried out local trade. Most of the information was obtained during surveys of various villages in the Indus Valley area of Leh tehsil (particularly Matho (Mang-spro), Choklamsar, Sasportse, Sa-spol, Temisgang-Tia [sometimes Timusgang, actually gTing-mo-sgang), and in Leh itself. I have also made less extensive investigations in Zanskar, Suru-Khartse and Purik. It also includes information from travellers and historical accounts of Ladakh which are available in English and French. Since the account I give is based on information from the 1820's to the present day, it will obviously present a somewhat simplified picture, but nevertheless it is possible that we can still make some valid points about Ladakhi society.

The map shows the areas and places in which I am most interested. Rupshu in the South East of Ladakh is inhabited by nomads who, from their large flocks of sheep and goats produce some lower quality *lena* (pashmina) which is the under-wool of a special goat which is used for the manufacture of Kashmir and other shawls; and sheep's wool (*bal*). They also collected salt from the salt lakes and deposits in the area and borax (*phul*, for colouring tea and dyeing) from Puga and other places. To the East of them lies the much larger area of Changthang (Byang-thang) which is part of both Ladakh and Tibet. They produce the same products as the Rupshu nomads but their pashmina is of higher quality. In both areas the nomads also keep yaks.

Leh area, Stot (Stod) contains many villages where people practise a mixed farming growing mainly barley (*nas*) and some wheat; and keeping goats, sheep, cows, yak and their hybrids (*dzo/dzomo*; *mdzo/mdzo-mo* and also *ga-ru/gar-mo*, *garu/garmo*, see page 37). Leh itself besides having been the centre of international trade for centuries is also the main bazar and administrative centre of Ladakh. In the Leh area there are also several large monasteries containing many monks (*lama*; *blama*) and many noble houses (*skutraks*, *skudrag*).

To the North of Leh and at a lower altitude lies the area of Nubra with a mixed population of Buddhists and Muslims. In the main river valleys there is an abundance of pasture and hence of grazing animals and of wood due to the warmer weather and plentiful water. The crops and animals are very productive. The higher more pastoral villages of Nubra produce large quantities of *dzo* and *dzomo* and butter; and in the East they collect borax and *phaps* (*phabs*) for making *chang*, the Ladakhi beer.

Lower and to the West of Leh lies Sham (gSham), the area of Ladakh most famous for its traders. In the lower villages there are rich crops and many fruit trees. Apricots are the common and from these they produce dried apricots (*phating*, *pha-ting* [high quality] and *culi*; *cu-li* [low quality]) and apricot kernels (*tsigu*; *rtsi-gu*) for oil. They can also grow two crops a year

including such things as mustard and lucerne. The higher villages gave a lot of animals and also provide pasture for the animals of the lower villages in the summer.

Over the Fatu La from Lamayuru lies Purik another part of Ladakh with a mixed population of Buddhists and Muslims. There they practice a mixed farming with large numbers of sheep, goats and horses. This area is famous for the playing of polo. Around Kargil, which is now the main bazar and administrative centre of the area, a number of different crops are grown like mustard and they grow two crops a year including a lot of wheat. To the south of Kargil lies muslim valley of Suru-Khartse which is also part of Purik. It has a higher rain and snow fall than most of Ladakh and hence very rich and extensive pastures. There they produce a lot of butter and high quality sheep's wool and they breed cows and *dzomo* (*mdzo-mo*).

Zanskar to the South of Suru-Khartse is relatively high and cold and is almost treeless. There are, however, extensive pastures and they produce surpluses of butter and peas, but they do not produce sufficient grain for their own needs. Horses are also bred in Zanskar.

As can be seen from this brief description, due to differences in altitude, water supply and rainfall; certain areas of Ladakh produce surpluses which can be used for trading for other goods which are scarce. In addition, in the days when the international trade routes were busy, villagers on the main routes could make an extra income by supplying food, fodder and wood to traders and by supplying them with animal for transport.

By far the most important area for Ladakhi traders in their own right was Sham, (gSham) from where traders dominated the pashmina trade from Changthang. I will first describe the trading in and out of the village of Temisgang which in the past a centre of trade.

The typical Sham (gSham) trader was a brother in a polyandrous marriage in a rich house. He would spend most of the year on trading missions to one place or another and not take much part in farming work. The main trade routes covered by the people of Temisgang were those to Leh, Changthang, Skardu and Srinagar.

The winter was the time for trips to Skardu as the road stayed open all year. Typically, men would go from several houses in the village taking salt and wool, which they had brought from Changthang, and a little money or silver. In Skardu they would buy or exchange these goods for dried apricots, other dried fruits, apricot kernels, clay cooking pots and butter. The trip to Skardu, including stops to trade (and drink *chang*) in villages on the way would not take more than a month. After that, the traders would have a period of rest in their village during which they could collect barley and some dried fruits from other houses in the village and also barter the goods which they had brought from Skardu.

In the fourth Buddhist month (*i. e.* in the spring — often before ploughing) the traders would set out on the long journey to Changthang. Many of the traders we have spoken to went

to places as far as one month's march away. On addition to this, as most of them traded with villages and people along the way, the time could easily be doubled and it was not uncommon for a trader to be travelling for as much as four months. Once the traders go to the destination in Changthang, which would be a place where they had established a personal trading relationship with the nomads, each man having his own partners, most of them would stay there for more than a month. Some men did not return to their homes until as late as *losar* (*lo-gsar*, Ladakhi New Year) in the tenth month.

Although they only usually took a few animals to Skardu: to Changthang each man would take as many as twenty donkeys or more sheep loaded with their merchandise. In addition, they would have at least one and up to six horses for riding and taking loads. They would usually go in a group of about ten traders. A trader with a large number of animals would also take a servant for assistance. They carried their own barley flour (*bakphe*; *bag-phyé*), dried apricots and vegetables as well as some of these procured from their neighbours, and dried fruits and apricot kernels from Skardu. From Leh and Srinagar they would also buy rice, sugar spices and other provisions to exchange with the nomads.

Because of the burning heat of the sun they walked at night and rested by day, stopping occasionally to trade in the settlements through which they passed. Although at most times they did not have to pay taxes, there was a great danger of being caught for the informal "tax" levied by bandits on the road. There is hardly an old Changthang trader in Ladakh who has not had animals and goods stolen and fought gun-battles with bandits, or had to pay them a share of his merchandise to make them leave him alone. Traders would carry swords and later flintlocks for their own protection. In such encounters the Tibetan commander (*dzongspön*; *rdzong-dpon*) at Rudok or Gartok was ready to send soldiers with the Ladakhis to help regain their goods. The Ladakhis exchanged all their goods with the nomads for wool, pashmina and salt. There was also a very expensive type of wool *tsoskhul* (*gtsos-khul*) which came from a wild goat called *tsos* (*gtsos*) which had to be shot and then the hair plucked.

In the autumn the traders would return to Leh with their loads. In Leh they could sell their pashmina to Kashmiri merchants for silver or money, or to Ladakhis who took it to Srinagar; or they could carry it themselves down, to Srinagar and there sell it and buy rice, sugar and other provision for their own consumption and the next year's mission. The sheep's wool and salt would be sold and exchanged in their own village and area; and possibly take part of it up to Baltistan (Skardu) to exchange there.

In more recent times, if they had time for it before the Zoji la closed, the trip to Srinagar was probably a welcome rest after the perils of the Changthang route. The round journey was possible in less than a month particularly from Sham rather than Leh. They took donkeys with them although, as in the case of the Skardu route, less than the twenty odd they usually took to Changthang. Before the Dogra conquest (c. 1840) though, the road was not passable by animals and most of the pashmina was carried done by Ladakhi doing *begar* ('*u-lag*) (labour service) for the king (*gya(l)po*; *rgyal-po*).

By the end of the year, a busy trader would have only been at home for three to four months of the year and would have mis-

sed all the farming work three. While he was away three would have been a degree of indirect trading between his village and Nubra in the North. Temisgang is linked with Tia, the village at the top of the valley in which it lies. The people of Tia, who provided grazing for the animals of Temisgang in the summer in return for milk products, also traded with high-altitude villages in the Nubra valley.

The trading trips to the Nubra villages were of very short duration, usually only few days, and required only a small investment. They could be made with only two or three donkey or yak-loads of goods and still be profitable. Therefore they were not restricted to the richest households, but could easily be carried out by a family just to obtain its own goods and those for one or two neighbours. The goods obtained from Nubra were butter, nettles (for soup on the winter), *phaps*, *dzo*, *dzomo*, etc. used for ploughing and milk production and some goats and sheep for meat. In return, the Sham people took rice, tea, spices and other provisions not produced in Ladakh, which they had brought from Leh, or possibly Srinagar, plus their own grain. Some houses made these journeys several times a year and may have been Changthang traders as well. In the past they resulted in a good supply of meat and butter in Temisgang and Tia. Nowadays the trade has fallen off because of the opening of roads and shops supplying local needs in Nubra.

Nearer to Leh along the Indus, in Sasportse, the trading with Nubra changes in character. The products of eastern Nubra such as salt and borax were exchanged for rice, tea, sugar and spices. The people of Nubra also came down to Sham and Leh to trade on their own account. In the recent past it was not unusual for Nubra women to go on these trips whereas the Sham traders were almost exclusively men. A house in Sasportse would have a trading partner in Nubra, and they would offer each other hospitality whenever they visited. Typically these expeditions would take place in the middle of the summer or in the autumn after the harvest and before the passes blocked for the winter. Until recently these trading trips were always undertaken by the two richest houses in Sasportse who also traded to Kargil to exchange salt from Rupshu nomads for butter. They traded their own barley with the nomads when they came down to Sakti, east of Leh, every year for a trade fair.

As we can see from the preceding account, the traders of Sham were and are still, a very enterprising group of people. In order to be a big trader you clearly needed to have enough animals and a large enough surplus of grain at the beginning of the year. One of the ways that this seems to have been achieved was by the trading house having several houses tied to it in a grain debt-bond, under which the subordinate house *trongchung* (*grong-chung*) would take a loan from the richer house *trongchen* (*grong-chen*) in the spring and repay it in the autumn with interest. This system had two objects for the trading house. Firstly, they had a increase store of grain every autumn, due to interest on loans given in the spring (which in the past was /again and more recently 1/8 again); and secondly the house which wished to take a loan in the spring were obliged to work for the creditors house in order to secure the loan. Thus the houses with more land were able to appropriate labour from those with less and therefore replace the labour they lost through having a trader in the family. There was

nothing to stop a dependant house building up its own land, flocks and household and becoming a trading household itself. The households also acted as middlemen for the dependant households, taking their grain and dried fruits to Changthang and bringing back the wool essential for warm winter clothes and salt for their tea. From this trade they could make a reasonable profit, as their dependent neighbours would not have the grain or animal resources to make the journey themselves. One of the richest and the most famous traders of Leh, who traded to Chanthang, Srinagar and Skardu, had large numbers of houses, even in Leh, under his sway grain debt bondage.

In recent times in Sham the most extreme example of such a trading "house" was Ridzong *gonpa* which has a whole village (Yangthang) as its area of dependent households. This monastery was only founded about 150 years ago, presumably largely with money from wealthy Sham traders. The *gonpa* (*dgon-pa*) had large herds of sheep and goats looked over by *cangpa* (*byang-pa*) in Changthang. The people of Yangthang would go on the *gonpa*'s trading missions to Changthang, carrying grain, etc. from Ridzong *gonpa* land. They would return with traded wool, borax and salt in addition to the wool, butter, etc. from the *gonpa*'s own animals. Hemis *gonpa* had similar arrangements with nomads in the area of the *gonpa* of Hanle (Wam-le) and the settlement of Karnak in Rupshu.

In the 1947 India-Pakistan war, Skardu became part of Pakistan and all trade from thereto Ladakh was ended. Meanwhile the border with Yarkand closed after the Chinese revolution of 1949. By the early sixties all the major routes had ceased to operate. Trade between Ladakh and the Tibetan parts of Changthang ended a few years after the 1962 war between India and China. The traders say that the a) Chinese fixed exchange rates and levied taxes, thereby making the trade unprofitable and b) the Indian authorities prohibited Indians from crossing the border. In 1963 a motorable road was opened from Srinagar to Leh, meaning that taking animals to trade in Srinagar was no longer sensible.

Other parts of Ladakh are center of trade but the people there did not travel to any great extent as traders much themselves. This is because in those areas the trade is inward rather than outward. A good example of this is Zanskar, into which traders traditionally came from many directions to exchange goods, whereas Zanskaris themselves only occasionally traded and usually only to Leh in the winter or very locally.

The trading in and out of Zanskar in the past was very varied. However, the trade was usually only in very small quantities of good, and apparently only the trade with Lahul actually gave the Zanskaris money with which to pay taxes to the central Ladakhi or Dogra Kashmiri government. The grain received from Padar (Kishtwar) is said to have been very important until recently to supplement the grains grown in Zanskar but most of the rest of the of trade was in luxury goods. With the exception of one or two families which were engaged in international trade to Tibet, it appears that each household only traded for their personal needs for consumption and taxes and very small extra amounts to exchange with fellow villagers. Business enterprises and expansion were not a particularly significant features of this area; nor did trade act as a significant drain on labour; but lots of labour was taken up by lords and monasteries who seem to own large proportions of land and animals in Zanskar.

Comparing Zanskar and Sham it must be noted that Zanskar itself produces a poor grain harvest and no fruit; only its milk and animals being abundance.

By contrast Sham has abundant grain crops, and further crops of mustard in some villages, lots of fruit vegetables and wood, as well as higher villages such as Tia, and Sasportse. Zanskar is also out off by snow in the winter excepts for the very dangerous Chadar (*ca-dar*) route on the ice to Nimmu (Nye-mo) and Leh. As for position of Sham traders since the trade routes were closed, comparing Saspol and Matho (Mang-spro) which was a village of only one trader, Saspol (Sa-spol) people have moved on to far more government and army jobs than the Matho people, despite Matho's proximity to Leh and the main road. Similarly, the vast majority of shops in Leh owned by Ladakhi Buddhists are owned by ex-traders usually from Sham or Leh. There is also a difference in the marriage pattern from Matho to Saspol. In Sham it was more usual in the past for all the brothers in a house to marry one woman in an polyandrous marriage and even if there were more than two brothers they would not send a son to a *gonpa* to be a lama whereas in Matho and in Leh area it was much more likely that the third son would be sent to a *gonpa* (*dgon-pa*).

Now we come to look at the international trade through Ladakh. As was said earlier I will look at it from the point of view of the involvement of Ladakhis and the state in it.

Before the Dogras (pre-1835) the *gya(1)po* (king) was the paramount ruler of Ladakh. From the 17th century his kingship was tied closely with a parallel but less powerful authority of the *rinpoche* (reincarnate high lama) of Hemis *gonpa* but, despite frequent revolts by the peasants of Ladakh, it does not seem that for the few centuries before the Dogras there was ever any question of the paramountcy of the *gya(1)po*. He and his ministers (especially the *kalthon* (*bka'-blon*) and *lhonpo* (*blon-po*) of Leh) were engaged in every aspect of trade.

First the *gya(1)po* was a trader in his own right although he probably did not go on the expeditions himself. In 1820 he and the *kalthon* dominated the trade in pashmina. Even after the Dogra conquest (post-1840), the deposed *gya(1)po*'s in Stok and Matho were still allowed to trade with Lhasa, Gartok and Shigatse with the agreement of the Tibetan government. The *gya(1)po* also levied taxes on all the foreign traders going through Ladakh, the Ladakhi and some Tibetan traders being tax exempt. In the heyday of the trade revenues from this were very large. He also decided who traded in certain commodities and on certain routes. For instance in 1820 the *gya(1)po* and *kalthon* used to buy all the tea from the *chapba* (*ja-pa*, the annual tea bringing mission from Lhasa). The *gya(1)po* could also appoint certain houses as the *drakshos* (*drag-shos*) in Khalsi/Khalatse (mKhar-la-rtse) the rights over an annual trade mission to the Kashmiri government return for exceptional services in a war. The *gya(1)po* must have been involved in the rights to trade on the three yearly *lopchag* (*lo-phyag*) mission to Tibet, which although being on the behalf of the Ladakhi state, went under the auspices of the *rinpoche* of Hemis *gonpa*.

The *gya(1)po* also had the right to extent *begar* labour service from his subjects. According to Cunningham, every main house (*khangchen*) in Ladakh (*khangchung* were exempt) was liable to pay tax to the *gya(1)po* except for those in his or his families' estates or in estates of monasteries. This tax was gra-

ded according to the wealth of a house. Using Cunningham's figures, only about the top 2000 houses could probably afford to pay the taxes in money or grain and rest paid them in labour. He cites a distinction of *kangdro* (*rkang-'gro*; foot-goers) who did *begar* and *lagdon* (hand-doers; *lag-'don*) who paid taxes therefore didn't have to do *begar*. Obviously any trading house would be *lagdon*. Nowadays the category of *trongpa* houses which are not very rich and are called *trongchung* (little *trongpa*) must be similar to the *kangdro* of old and obviously formed the majority of the population and *trongpa* households.

Begar labour seems to have been very arduous. It was used for all the major official trading expedition as well as for journeys of the *gya(1)po* and other important people. Villagers who lived along the main routes had to carry goods for a stage on the route near to their village until they passed on the loads to the next village on the route. When it was their turn they had to wait at the side of road for several days. Until the Dogra times much of the carriage was done on people's back and that was still often the case until quite recently villagers also had to supply attendants and food and firewood for important lay and religious visitors and their entourages which could number tens of people. Moorcroft reports that a *skutraks* woman he met was travelling with 50 attendants and yaks.

In addition *begar* labour was used for the repair of the tracks and the roads and such public works as the repair and build of irrigation canals. The systems apparently remained almost unchanged after the Dogra conquest (post-1840); although by the early 20th century labourers were paid a very small amount for repairing the Leh-Srinagar track.

Under the *gya(1)po* there were a number of *skutraks* who were lords or ministers who although subjects to the *gya(1)po* had their own area of control *barlik* (*bar-lig*). Some of them were hereditary and some appointed as governors of an area by the *gya(1)po*. He had the right to promote or demote people to and from the position of *skutraks* and in extreme cases could take away all their lands. The estates they controlled could be as large as 70 villages as was the case of the Bangka Kalhon who based around Chimre but whose authority extended as far as Chushul by Pangong lake. It must be noted here that the *skutraks* did not own most of the land in their *barlik* (*bar-lig*) as the majority of it belonged to the villagers and the *skutraks* would just have had quite a lot of land to farm themselves.

The *skutraks* had the duty of extracting the taxes in kind, money and labour on their own area and of paying most of the money and grain plus other locally produced products to the *gya(1)po*; while retaining a part for themselves. They could also levy a tax on the foreign trade through their area, such as was done by the Mulbekh *kalthon* and the *co* (*jo*) of Gya. They too were also frequently traders in their own right. Many of these families had rights to trade to centres in Tibet; for instance, the Karsha *lhonpo* in Zanskar has a scroll from the Panchen Lama who is the Tibetan *rinpoche* with overall responsibility for Karsha *gonpa* to trade in Gartok and Shigatse. The richer among them, like *gonpa*, also had flocks grazed in Changthang and were involved as middlemen in the pashmina trade. It is stated in several sources that *skutraks* would use *begar* labour for their own trading expeditions and that they even hired out *begar* labourers to Kashmiri merchants as por-

ters. It must be remembered that since subject houses would often be reliant on the lord for loans of grain, they could not easily refuse these requests. *Skutraks* families were often based in several places as they would try to expand their influence and enterprises. Moorcroft describes meeting members of an important *skutraks* family in different parts of Ladakh on missions of road building and trade; they might also have had land in several different villages. Unlike the *trongchen* trading families of Sham these families did not practice polyandry as a rule and the women often led important caravans on long journeys.

As was mentioned above, monasteries such as Hemis had regular religious and tribute missions to Tibet which were also trading missions. They also had areas of estates which were exempt from tax and where the villagers were required to work for the *gonpa* and tend their flocks as well as most of them being in grain-debt to the monastery. In addition to this, *gonpas* actually owned large amounts of cultivable land in Ladakh which villagers work on and give a share of the crop to them.

In many ways the position of the monasteries in trade and influence was comparable to that of the *skutraks*. Looking at the map of Ladakh it is clear that, with a few exceptions, in each village or area there is usually only either an important monastery or an important *skutraks* house. Also, just as the chief lama of Hemis was in the past sometimes the brother of the *gya(1)po* a large number of the *rinpoche* of *gonpas* and important officials (e. g. *chagdzo*; *phyag-mdzod*) come from *skutraks* families.

The other main group of Ladakhi international traders were the Muslim merchants of the Leh area. These families were mainly descendants of Yarkandi and Kashmiri merchants married with Ladakhis and settled in Leh. In recent times they were involved in trade on all the routes including taking goods from the plains to exchange with the Changthang nomads for pashmina. Their wealth and position was and is similar to that of the Buddhist *skutraks* and, until recently, these two groups sometimes intermarried and considered themselves a class together. At Hemis festival some of these families enjoy the privilege of places on the balconies of the *gonpa*. Certain Muslim trading families have in fact become Buddhists and are now considered as *skutraks* or *trongchen*. The Muslim merchants often retained family and trading relationship in areas outside Ladakh such as Kashmir, Yarkand, Skardu, Lahul and Tibet and that must have improved their chances in the competitive trading business.

The ordinary villagers, if they weren't traders themselves, could also make something out of the international trade in several ways. They could sell food and wood to foreign traders; apparently most of the wheat grown to Ladakh was sold in this way. They also supplied thousands of wool and yak hair bags to traders to carry the goods in. In villages such as Chushot and Choklamsar near Leh and along the routes, houses would give grazing for the traders' animals when they halted.

Some men went as paid animal drivers for Ladakhi and foreign traders, even on the Yarkand route; but the majority would

not take such long-term work. From villages such as Temisgang men would go as porters but would not usually travel outside of Ladakh or be away from home for very long.

The main income though came from hiring out animals for carriage. This was a particularly important source of income along the Leh-Srinagar road in Purik where they hired out horses, mules and donkeys; and in Nubra, Leh and Gser-khri where yak (and in Nubra even some camels) were kept for transport. In 1890 there were said to be 250 horses, lots of donkeys and 1000 yaks for carriage in central Ladakh and 600 horses in Dras and Kargil (Purik; Bod-rigs).

Obviously all these activities could only be done by houses sufficient wealth to have food, animals or labour to spare. Thus in some non trading areas villages the *trongchen* (*grongchen*) would be the houses with large number of animals to rent out. For instance in Gonpa village above Leh only houses kept yak to hire out to traders crossing the 18,000 ft khardong La to Nubra. Those houses were also among those *trongchen* which lent out grain to other poorer houses and commanded regular labour from them as well as having several servants. *Skutraks* families and presumably the king, also engaged in provisioning traders in these ways on a large scale.

The nomads of Rupshu, were also required to do *begar* for missions passing through their country and most of them were also subject to monastery or *skutraks* from central Ladakh. As well as being visited by other Ladakhis they traded their own wool, pashmina, salt and borax to the annual trade fair at Gser-khri, to Zanskar and borax to the annual trade fair at Sakti, to Zanskar and to annual market on the borders of Lahul. Nomads are known as *cangpa* (*byang-pa*) by Ladakhis and were considered as being lower class than *trongpa* partly as a result of their greater involvement with the slaughter of animals. In the past, *cangpa* (*byang-pa*) children sometimes came as servants to work in houses in central Ladakh as did the children of poor families from villages. These servants often stayed all their lives in the rich house and this was another important way that the richer houses increased their labour power.

From this brief description most of the major classes in Ladakhi society have emerged. At the very top is the *gya(1)po* and below him the *skutraks*, *rinpoche* and some important *cagdzo*t and their monasteries. The majority of Ladakhis lie in the middle class of *trongpa* with its divisions of *trongchen* and at the end there was and still is a small number of low caste musicians and blacksmiths (*mon*, *beda* and *gara* who were obliged to work for all other houses in return for grain.

Taking Cunningham's figures from 1842 (Cunningham, 1854; although this is after the Dogra conquest, the system was apparently almost the same); he says that out of 24,000 households in Ladakh 18,000 were tax-payers; 4,000 were the estates of *gonpa*, 1,000 of the *gya(1)po* and 1,000 of the *gya(1)mo* (*rgyal-mo*, queen) and other members of the royal family; there are also a few houses such as *lharje* (*lha-rje*, *amchi*-doctor), *lhardak* (*lha-bdag* watcher over of the *gya(1)po*'s *lha*), *solpon* (*gsol-dpon*, *gya(1)po*'s cook) and *onpo* (*dbon-po*, astrologer) which are tax exempt. Out of the 18,000, 400 large houses paid full rate of tax, 1,600 paid half that and 16,000 small houses paid a quarter, thus we see that

the vast majority of houses were small houses which may correspond to some extent with *trongchung* and do seem to be the *kangdro* (*rkang-gro*).

The position of these different classes was expressed among other ways in different consumptions of the products of trade. The *gya(1)po* and *skutraks* had houses of two storeys with ornamental windows and doors. In the past only they and the richer *trongchen* had *chotkhang* (*mchod-khang*) which were private chapels filled with *thangkas* and statues from Tibet. Significantly, in Sham there are many ex-trading *trongchen* houses with very beautiful *chotkhang*.

Dress is also very important sign of status in Ladakh, as can be seen in the Kesar Saga, in which the narrative constantly dwells lovingly on descriptions of the hero's clothes. Traditionally *skutraks* wore *goncha* (*gon-che*?) dyed red and ordinary people wore plain coloured *goncha*. When ordinary people started to use red dye *skutraks* started to use extensive foreign cloths such as *koshen* (*gos-chen*; a satin brocade from China) boots and velvets from central Asia and brocade and machine-woven cloths from brocade from India. The use of *koshen* and brocade was until recently restricted for the use of *skutraks* and *rinpoche*, or for the decoration of monasteries and borders for *thangka* (*thang-ka*). Only *skutraks* women were allowed to wear a *kau* (*ga-u*) a huge necklace pendant made of gold; and the use of gold as an ornament was restricted only to *skutraks* and the royal family. The *perak* also showed a woman's status. A *skutraks* woman would have up to nine lines of turquoises (from Persia via Yarkand and Tibet) and the poorest women would only have one short line. The *skutraks* also monopolized the use of foreign clothes such as velvet hats and boots from Yarkand.

Trongpa wore woolen *goncha*, the men's being white in accordance with the rules. *Trongpa* women had silver jewelery, if they could afford it. The *trongchen* could live in two storey houses with a *chotkhang* and eat meat, fruit and vegetables in addition to barley and wheat and drink butter tea. They also enjoyed some foreign luxuries such as rice, sugar and spices. Their kitchens would be decorated with pots of clay and brass and silver from Ladakh, Skardu and even Yarkand. The *trongchen* would live in smaller houses and eat mainly *thukpa* (*thug-pa*, soup) and various dishes of barley *nganphe* (*ngan-phe*) and drink *chang*. They could rarely eat meat and never had tea until quite recently.

The low castes traditionally wore black woolen cloth and ate dishes of barley. Their houses were usually very small and *beda* are originally tent dwellers. The *cangpa* although considered lower by Ladakhis, actually ate more meat and less barley and had plenty for butter. They wore clothes of sheep skin to keep out the bitter cold of the higher plateau regions.

We can see then that *skutraks* and the *gya(1)po* monopolized the use of most foreign goods which passed through Ladakh. This was convenient in terms of Ladakh's position as an entrepôt since it was profitable for the *gya(1)po* and *skutraks* to have large numbers of goods passing through on which they could make money through tax and carriage. By not allowing the majority of the population to get hold of these goods of what might be called "the higher sphere of exchange", they also secured their own symbols of prestige.

To conclude, we can see that trade played a major part in the

Ladakhi states and the power of the *gya(1)po* and *skutraks*. As Ladakh has been lumped in with Tibet in analyses of feudal society, it is important to stress that the class differences, although important, were mild compared to those of Tibet. There was no class of serfs in Ladakh, except possibly the domestic servants. The vast majority of households had their own land. Also there were limitations on the powers on the *gya(1)po* and *skutraks* and severe punishment and ostracisation seem from the literature to have been seldom resorted to. There also seem to have been frequently rebellions in Ladakh against *gya(1)po*'s who were seem to be too rapacious or incompetent and Ladakhis often make jokes about the relative class consciousness of Tibetans.

It is clear that much research needs to be done on the historical details of trade in Ladakh. One fruitful area for this would be to examine the history of trade from the point of view of the Muslim population and traders of Ladakh. There is a wealth of written material, particularly records of trade in various languages which has not yet been published to any great extent. Also it is important at the moment the oral testimony of those who were involved in trade is recorded as thoroughly as possible before the record is lost.

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RESUMÉ : Il existe plusieurs livres, pour la plupart encore disponibles, qui décrivent en détail le commerce entre différentes nations et passant par le Ladakh venant de, ou allant vers, des régions telles que Yarkand, Srinagar, et Lhasa (Radhu 1981; Rizvi 1983). Je ne vais donc pas décrire en détail les itinéraires caravaniers. Par contre, peu de choses ont été écrites sur le commerce plus local entrepris par les Ladakhi et concernant des biens produits au Ladakh même ou chez ses voisins immédiats. Dans cet article, j'essaye de décrire les régions impliquées dans ce commerce local ses tenants et aboutissants : produits, animaux de bât, travail. Je tente ensuite d'établir les relations entre le commerce (local aussi bien que inter-régional) et le système de strates dans le district de Leh où la religion bouddhiste dominait avant 1959. Il s'agit tout particulièrement de savoir comment les biens qui circulaient, étaient répartis entre les strates.

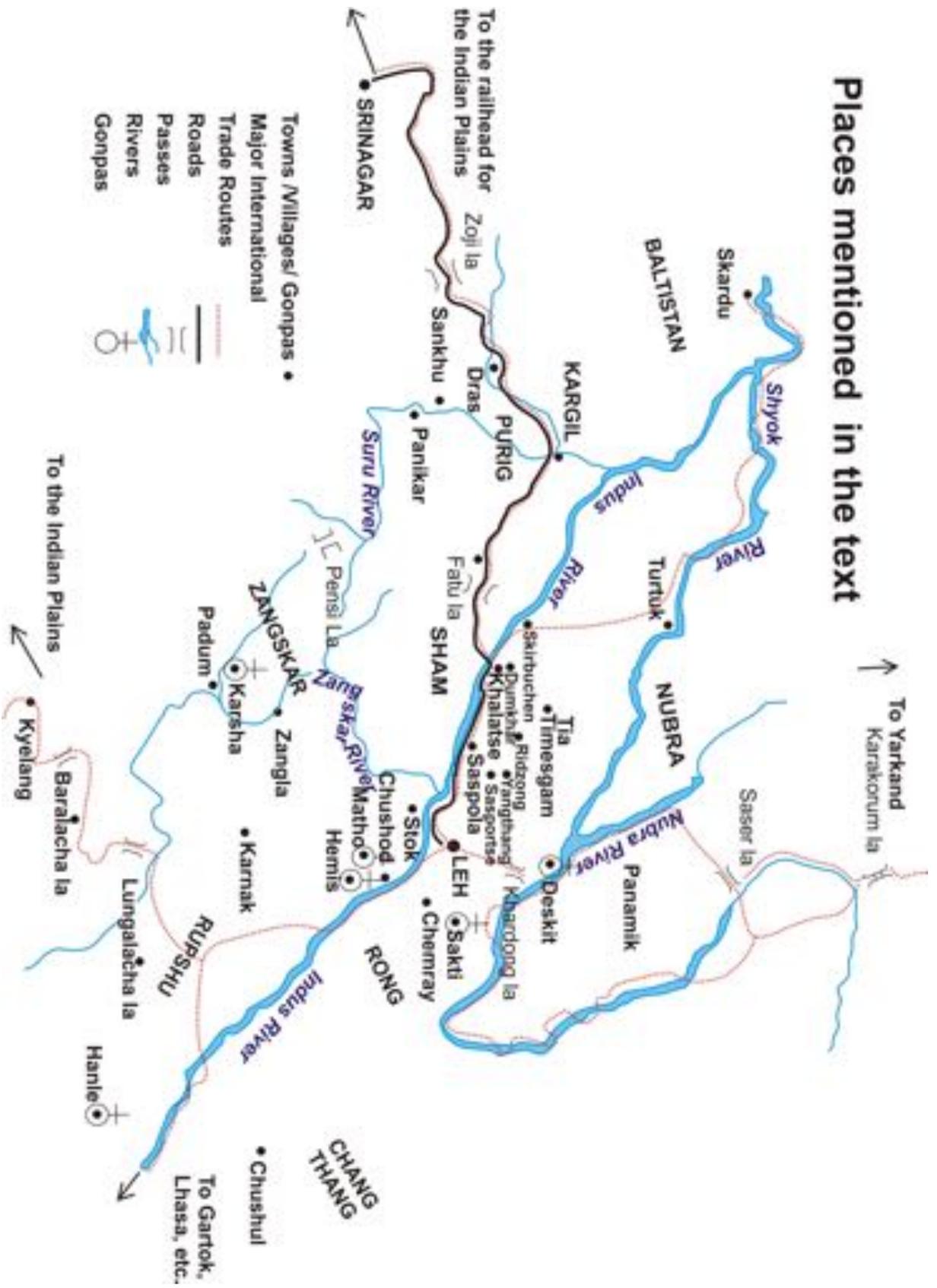
SUMMARY: There are several books now generally available which describe in detail the international trade through Ladakh to such places as Yarkand, Srinagar and Lhasa (Radhu 1981, Rizvi 1983); so I will not describe the details of those trade route again. However, not much has been written in detail about the more localised trade carried out by Ladakhis and involving goods produced in Ladakh and his close neighbours.

I will therefore try to describe the areas involved in this more localised trade and the resources available for it i.e. goods, carriage animals and labour. I will then attempt to tie up the connections between trading (both local and international) and the class-system in the predominantly Buddhist Leh Tehsil pre-1958. I will particularly look at how the goods obtained through trade are distributed among the classes.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Es gibt bereits einige Bücher, in denen der internationale Handel durch Ladakh zu Städten wie Yarkand, Srinagar oder Lhasa abgehandelt wird (Radhu 1981, Rizvi 1983). Ich will deshalb nicht die Einzelheiten dieser Handelsrouten abermals beschreiben. Wenig jedoch wurde über den von den Ladakhis betriebenen Handel und insbesondere über die in Ladakh und seinen Nachbargebieten produzierten Güter geschrieben.

Ich versuche deshalb, jene Gebiete zu beschreiben, die in den enger umgrenzten Handel involviert waren, und auch die dafür notwendigen Ressourcen, wie Güter, Packtiere und Arbeitskraft, einzubeziehen. Ferner will ich versuchen, eine Verbindung zwischen dem Handel (lokal und auch international) und dem vorherrschenden Klassensystem im buddhistischen Verwaltungsbezirk Leh vor dem Jahr 1959 herzustellen. Mein besonderes Augenmerk gilt der Art und Weise, wie die durch den Handel erworbenen Güter innerhalb der einzelnen gesellschaftlichen Schichten verteilt wurden.

Places mentioned in the text





Yaks carrying loads in Leh bazaar. (Photo Syed Ali Shah, Leh)



Bergers du Changthang utilisant les moutons comme animaux de bât, vers 1910.
(Photo Moravian Church House Library, Londres)