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Yangthang in West Ladakh: An Analysis of the Economic and Socio-Cultural Structure of a Village and Its Relation to Its Monastery

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The small village of Yangthang (*Yang thang*) is situated in western Ladakh. From Uletokpo (*u lu grog po*) on the Indus River it takes approximately three hours to ascend on foot northwards up a side valley. Yangthang's close connection with the Geluk pa monastery, Ridzong (*dGe lugs pa dgon pa ri rdzong*) is responsible for some very specific socio-economic features which are discussed in this article under sections 2 and 3. The special relation between the monastery and the village is covered in section 4.¹

A summary is given in section 5. The thematic focus of this essay will be on architecture and local planning and development, the former being dealt with at greater length in section 1.

1. Architecture

The present-day village

Yangthang may be seen in its present form in Fig. 2 and in the photo (Fig. 1). Its densely built houses with their flat roofs cover a rectangle of 45 x 90 m. The size of the village is defined by the number of 'main houses'; in Yangthang, the smallest possible social unit for local customary forms of organisation was the decisive factor (see below). The buildings consist of a ground floor and upper floor, though in places along slopes there may be two upper floors. This local method of construction, in keeping with the arid climate, makes use of clay and wood, and features outer battered walls made of clay. The walls of houses at the edge of the village present a picture of joint compactness. The need to defend oneself or simply discourage intrusion may have been of concern at one time. The centre of the rectangle is



Fig. 1. Elevation of Yangthang from the North-East. The view is from the lha-tho. The compact construction in the form of a rectangle is easily recognizable. The Labrang in the right-hand part of the village stands out because of its great height. Formerly no house was allowed to be taller. Also noticeable is the position of the village at the verge of the plateau, this serves to obtain more land for fields. The Indus Valley lies at the other side of the chain of mountains in the background.

highlighted by the village temple together with the public square. Along the southern edge of the village, stables (*rta ra*) and fenced dens have been laid out, and in among them is a second, highly frequented square. Threshing

1. The gathering of data for this analysis of the village, as well as a survey of the settlement and its surroundings, took place from the middle of October to the beginning of December 1996. Knowledge of and former contacts with Ri-dzong were the decisive factors in selecting the village. Information collected for the plan drawings was compared with drawings from the *Preliminary Report of Ladakh Settlements* (1908). Various checks were run during the data collection. Tables incorporating the data were made only when the latter were being sifted through, so that any new questions that arose from the tables could no longer be taken up. This study would not have been possible without the help of others. I should like to thank Thupstan Chhostok, Murup

grounds are to the west and north of the village limits. To the west and south-west, the village boundary runs along the edge of a slope. There are five houses that lie beyond this boundary: a group of three to the west, one house close to the village to the east, and one house along the river (exact locations and descriptions below).

The oldest part of the village: ordering of space and architectural history

On the plan (Fig. 2) that was drawn, the cross-hatching indicates the oldest part of the village. Formerly the built-up area extended in a U shape to the west, north and north-east. There were no residential houses to the south, only stables (*rta ra*) and gardens. Certain prominent buildings, as well as areas inhabited by particular social groups, are spatially ordered, which in part is due to spiritual and idea-related backgrounds.

The strongest sacral protection lies in the northern and north-westerly directions. In the north-west there is the village's only gate (T), which has only symbolic value, while a cult structure (R) protects the entrance to the village in the north, where a number of frequently trodden paths converge. It is the well-known *rigs gsum mgon po* facing out into the fields — the group of three chortens (*mchod rten*) that represent Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi. They are often erected in order to ward off various negative influences in the village. In principle, each direction is assigned a particular meaning, which might be of significance in selecting the location of protective structures.² Where the fields come to an end at the cliffs in the north-west, there is the so-called metho site (*me to*; Fig. 6), where 'evil' is symbolically extirpated from the village on New Year's Day (*me to 'phang sa*). The direction assigned for protection against negative forces and for their destruction is analogous.

Rigzin, Wangchuk Fargo, and Wangchuk from Uletokpo, Phunchok Dolma and Yangchan Dolma, as well as Nina Walcher, Ralf Kühbacher, Peter Schwieger, Pascale Dollfus and Philip Pierce. For the reader without knowledge of Tibetan philology Ladakhi words are presented in an anglicised, roughly phonetic form without diacritics. If a transliteration of a term is given for clarification, it is set in brackets. Peter Schwieger, who uses a form of Dieter Schuh, helped me with transliterations; finally a form according to Wylie is used.

2. In the description of a wedding ceremony, certain characteristics of the directions are mentioned, which might play a role in other connections as well. Wind in the north in order to destroy the negative powers, and fire in the west in order to bring the three worlds under control (Brauen 1980: 59).

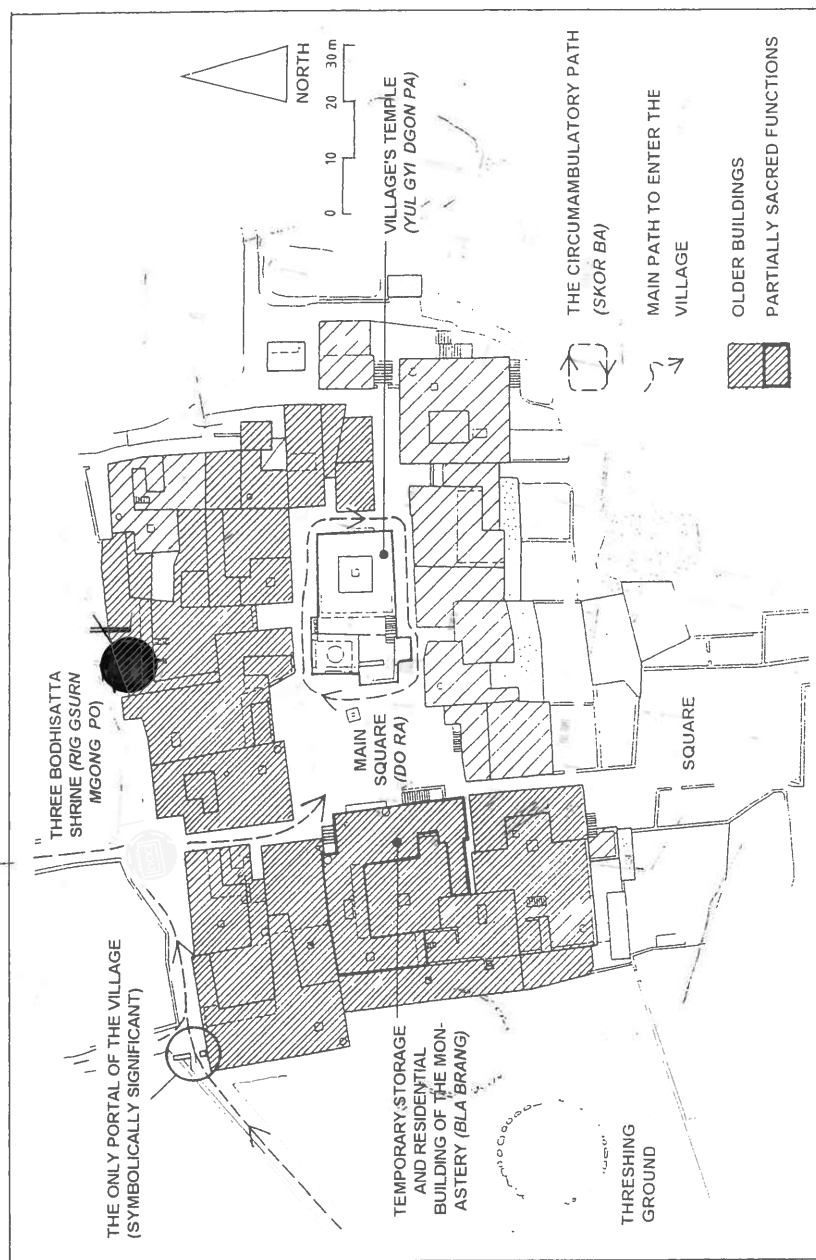


Fig. 2. Plan of Yangthang with its oldest part

One striking feature is the direct, relatively broad approach from the portal and protective structure to the public square, the main function of which comes into play during important festivities. Further noteworthy is the fact that the most important buildings of the village are situated on this square, emphasising its purpose as a centre of activity: the Labrang (*bla brang*) flanks the square to the west, and the village temple (*yul gyi dgon pa*) to the east. A ritual circumambulatory path, a so-called skora (*skor ba*), winds around the temple. The skora and village square merge into one another.

The Labrang is the dominant building in Yangthang, as manifested by its greater height; formerly no one was allowed to build a house higher. It contains a cult chamber of its own, provides lodging and fare for the monks, has storerooms for the temporary placement of field products brought in as levy, and boasts a large courtyard. The courtyard of the Labrang was previously the focus of village feasts (thanksgiving, the old New Year's), which have little to do with the festivities of the 'high religions'. The large kitchen was a necessity during these feasts.

The temple contains a completely enclosed courtyard in front of it, a hall with four pillars and a construction for a dome-like lantern affixed to them, as well as a large prayer-wheel (*man ni dung phyur*) facing the square. The village temple serves as a place for meetings and devotions, and differs from corresponding spaces in the monastery in its less rich adornment. Among the adornments are sculptures of Avalokiteśvara, Padmasambhava and Jo-bo (Cho), the throne for the Dalai Lama (or for Sras rin po che) and numerous Buddhist texts. A multitude of *tshva tshva* are placed on the lantern structure (*kerkides*); the part of the building is a kind of *tshva tshva khang*.

The emphasis on the single entrance to the village in the west or north-west in combination with a nearby square is found in other villages as well. The same assignment of functions in and around the square is also common. And then there is the spatial assignment of the populated quarters, roughly analogous to the situation in Lamayuru.³ The north-western part of the village near the main square and portal has been claimed by the lamas in the Labrang and by the amchi (*am chi*) for their residences. This is also seen in the seating arrangements for festive occasions, where the lamas and the amchi are taking the seat representing the top of the social hierarchy (Fig. 4).

3. Herdick, 1997a: 290, 221.

Dwelling houses

House types are uniform in terms of the functional patterns they display, but not as regards form and orientation of the ground plan and the shape of the house. The houses are very much interconnected, having 'grown together' without any space in-between, although they do in many cases have 'court-yards' on their upper floor. The orientation of the kitchens, which can be observed from the roofs containing air vents (*thog skar*), is not consistent. The size of kitchens is apparently the same in the old part of the village, as everywhere two wooden posts (*ka ba/ka ril*) per kitchen are noted (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). One exception, however, with four wooden posts, is in the Bla brang pa, a 'family' that nowadays lives in the Labrang (*bla brang*). This again emphasizes the dominant size of the building; the large kitchen is designed for large numbers of guests (from the whole village). All secondary houses (*khang-bu*), on the other hand, have small kitchens with only one central pillar (Fig. 3). In lieu of other sacred functions or small sacred spaces, there are two cult objects on the roof level (*gsum thog*) of all houses: as may be seen from the figure, all have a shrine to the serpent god (*klu bang*) and a fire altar (*sbyin sreg*), whereas there is no *lha tho* and no *lha khang*, which is replaced either by the village temple or a *lha tho* outside the village at the edge of the fields (see Fig. 7). The dead are therefore not laid out at home but in the village temple.

The development of the village

The old structure described above corresponds to the structure at the time of the founding of the village by Lama Tsultim Nima (*bla ma Tshul khriims nyi ma*) around 1841.⁴ According to descriptions, the first hermitage before the founding of the village must have been located in the vicinity of present-day Yangthang (ibid).⁵ What is still today the largest barley field, the major part of the irrigation system and the regulations regarding levies all go back to the time of Tsultim Nima. Other buildings from that period are situated above the village and beyond the fields on the path from Likir (*klu 'khyil*) to Hemis shug pa can. This path is the reason why the only chorten and mani-

4. Thupstan Chhostok 1981: 5-6.

5. Based on: bLo bzang tshul khriims chos 'phel. n.d. *Nges pa dam gyi grup pa'i dbang phyug rje Tshul khriims nyi ma'i rnam thar*. Rizong Monastery. Blockprint. See also: Thubstan Paldan 1976: 11. *A Brief Guide to the Buddhist Monasteries and Royal Castles of Ladakh*. Varanasi.

NUMBER / KHANG PA	NAME OF THE KHANG PA / MAIN HOUSE KHANG BU / SECONDARY HOUSE	NUMBER OF PILLARS IN THE KITCHEN	NO. OF MAIN CROSS BEAMS IN THE KITCHEN	SACRAL FIRE PLACE ON THE ROOF	KLU BANG ON THE ROOF	SPUR KHANG, EAST OF THE VILLAGE	OTHER SPUR KHANG	YUL GYI DGO PA AS LHA KHANG	BKRA SHIS BSTAN SKYONG AS LHA THO	TSA BANG
1	TO GO CHE KHANG CHEN; TO GO CHE KHANG KHANG BU	2 1	2 1	x	x	x		x	x	
2	LHAR JE PA (LHA RJE PA) LHA RJE KANG BU LHA RJE KANG BU	1 ? ?	1 ? ?	x	x	x		x	x	
3	PHARKA PA PHARKA KHANG BU	2 1	2 1	x ?	x ?	x		x	x	x
4	SOL PON PA (GSOL DPON PA) GSOL DPON KHANG BU	? ?	? ?	x	x	x		x	x	
5	DKYIL GRONG KHANG BU (OLDER) SKYIL TONG PA (DKYIL GRONG PA)	2 1	2 1	x	x	x		x	x	
6	YOK MA PA	?	2	x	x	x		x	x	
7	TON SPON PA (DRONG DPON PA)	?	?	x	x	x		x	x	
8	KOR PON PA (DKOR DPON PA)	2	1	x	x	x		x	x	
9	LABRANG PA (BLA BRANG PA)	4	2	x	x	x		x	x	
10	GING GO PA (ZHING 'GO PA)	2	2	x	x		x	x	x	

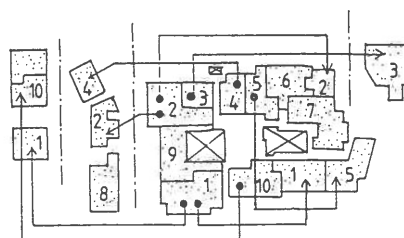


Fig. 3. House and ritual structure.

wall of the village are here. In addition there is a *mani*-watermill (*ma ni chu skor*) at the fork of the path leading to the main irrigation channel below, and, above it, the *lha tho*. According to the locals, various *klu bang* and *tshva tshva khang* date back to this time. Further, the eight 'main houses' (*khang pa*) can be assigned to the founding period — their family members probably having come from Utel, Hemis shug pa can and Likir.⁶ The number eight is occasionally found in the context of original village centres. For instance, in Lamayuru there are eight superordinate *lha tho* and *pha spun* groups.

The further development proceeded as follows (cf. schematic sketches in all tables). Various families erected secondary houses or relocated from their main houses to new houses in the old area of the village. Following the addition of two other main houses, on the order of the monastery, a group of ten *khang pa* came into being.⁷

Three other secondary houses were put up to the west, and one main house to the east, close to the village (see below). A schoolhouse and a small community hall were constructed, and a bus connection via Likir to Leh went into operation (twice a week).

2. Social structure and organisational forms

Organisational groups and hierarchy

The original eight, and today ten, main houses are tied to one *pha spun* group with only one *lha tho* and one *pha lha* (a single *lha tho* thus covers the whole territory of the village). The exact names of the ten main houses have been listed in the 3 tables, combined there with further information. With the extension to ten main houses, a correspondence is obtained to the traditional size of a *bcu tshogs* group. The *pha spun* and *bcu tshogs* consist of the same number of people but differ in their vertical and horizontal structuring respectively, and have separate functions and separate occasions for celebrating feasts. The *bcu tshogs* group meets in the kitchen of a *khang pa* member on the tenth day of every Tibetan month. Apart from ritual acts (*bka' thang bsdus pa*), there are discussions on village affairs, during which either a vote is taken

or a decision is made by the village head ('*thus mi*). The village head is elected annually from within the *bcu tshogs* group at the time of sowing crops. There is no '*go pa* because of the small size of the village.

The *pha spun* group (in Yangthang these do not have special names) is responsible for the worship of the *lha tho* and for initiations, such as wedding and death ceremonies. It seems to be a feature unique to the village that the group does not assist at births; help in this case comes from one's own family or a neighbour. Among the ten main houses there are two that are in charge of the animals of the monastery (*Pharka pa*, *Dkyil grong pa*). The members of the two main houses added later by the monastery are more strongly bound to the monastery by way of special rights and duties (*Bla brang pa*, *Ging go pa*). They have obtained fields from the monastery, but they do not own their houses; they need not provide animals to the gonpa; they feed visiting monks in the Labrang; etc.⁸

The hierarchy observed in the village can best be witnessed during public feasts. In Fig. 4, two feasts including dancing held on the village square were selected as being exemplary (marriage and *lo gsar*, the New Year's festival). The most important persons in the hierarchy are seen to sit in the north, and the most important individual always in the north-west. The musicians, who are lowest in status, sit to the south. The hierarchy is always the same:

1 lama (*bla ma*), 2 amchi, 3 village head ('*thus mi*) and 4 elders according to age. Thus the lama and amchi (a kind of healer) surpass the 'worldly' village head in importance. In other villages the hierarchy is different; for example, the '*on po* (astrologer, also in charge of various rites) is above the village head, whereas there is none in this village. In contrast to other villages, women do not take part in the festivities on the wedding square. Even the bride is absent.

Rotational procedures

Here it becomes clear that the 'main house' is a social unit. Numerous duties are discharged on a rotational basis by members of one of the ten main houses (*khang pa*). These are exclusively of a socio-religious nature, with the exception of the *bcu tshogs* meetings focusing on village politics, when each main house by turns entertains the representatives of the other main houses.

6. In the Togochehangchen (To go che Khang chen), for example, the men came five generations ago from Likir, and the women from Hemis shug pa can.

7. First, the Labrang was significantly extended to accommodate a family (*Bla brang pa*), and then a family erected a house on an unbuilt piece of land in the south-west, left it for lack of space, moved into a new house on the river and transformed the old house into a stall.

8. The question whether they own *shas zhing* fields needs to be rechecked, given one contradictory notation. *Shas zhing* is explained in item 3 under 'Classification and Size...'.¹

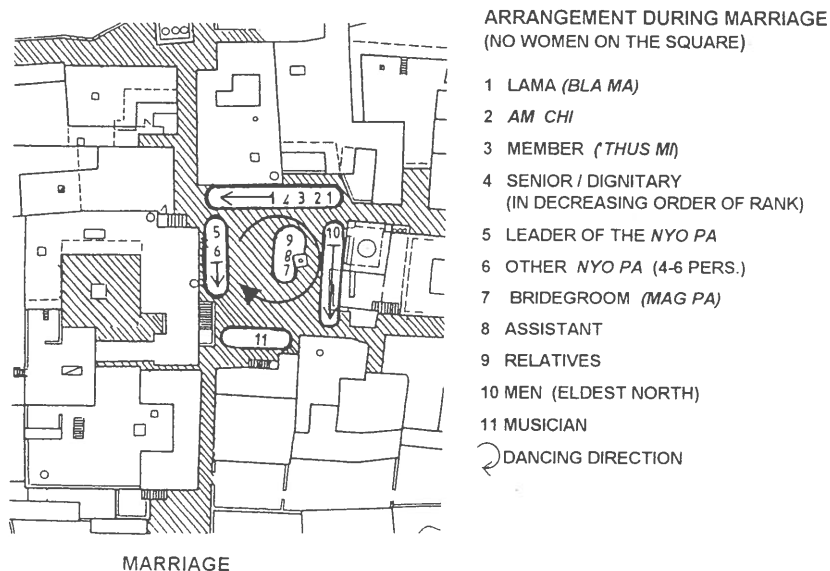
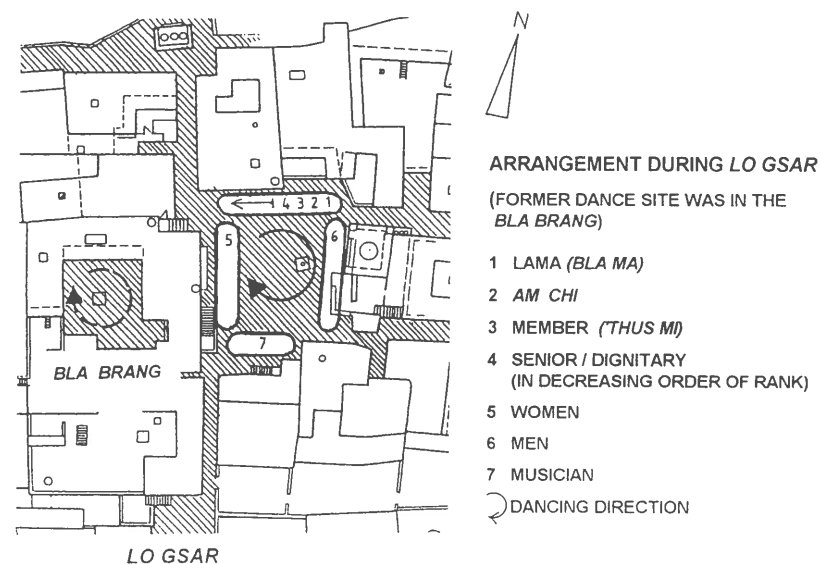


Fig. 4. Hierarchy during marriage ceremony and lo gsar situation on the main square.

One *khang pa* has the following responsibilities, in the following rotations:

Monthly:	<i>bcu tshogs</i> meeting in one of the <i>khang pa</i> , entertaining
Yearly:	the costs of festive occasions in connection with the reading of texts by the monks (<i>bskang gsol</i> and <i>chos bsil</i>)
Yearly:	the renewal of the <i>lha tho</i> (and <i>yul lha</i>) by the <i>lha bdak</i> together with a <i>blama</i> who makes a <i>lha bsang</i>
Yearly:	the setting up of the <i>dog pa</i> (' <i>brog pa</i>) during the 'Ladakhi' New Year's celebration
Every 2 years:	the annual whitewashing of the cult buildings
Every 2 years:	the duties of the <i>ko gnyer</i> in the temple

Agriculture

Given the short growing season, the village community is dependent on mutual support. The completion of the main work, such as tilling the fields in spring, making the irrigation system operational and harvesting in autumn, has to be done quickly (middle of May to beginning of July and middle of September to middle of October).

Under the so-called *glang sde* system, two families always work the field together at the time of ploughing. Relationships are close, too, on another level. It is often a matter of commonly using a hardy draught animal for ploughing. I have not been able to find out about the so-called *bes* institution of pairing, which applies to all work throughout the year. Those who keep watch that domestic animals do not forage in the fields are called *lo ra pa*, and they are deputed by two *khang pa* in yearly rotation. There is no need for specific forms of organisation for the mills. Yangthang has eight mills which is quite enough, although only one mill is on the plateau close to the fields. There are also communities of herdsmen (*ra res*). Members of two main houses keep watch for two days and then are relieved rotationally.

The irrigation system is repaired by the entire village community on a proportional basis, according to the size of the fields. It is not a *chu dpon* like in Lamayuru but the village head ('*thus mi*) who supervises the irrigation activities and adjudicates in cases of conflict over the water. He is the one who opens the main channels in spring. In general, there is sufficient water available. The fields of each half of the village are irrigated every alternate day (nowadays five *khang pa* per day; earlier four). The opening of new plots

to irrigation has to be approved during a *bcu tshogs* meeting. Within the secondary occupations there is a special organisation.⁹

Some data on demography

Demographic data, as summarised in Fig. 5, will complete the discussion of social structure. The data again refer to the social unit represented by the main houses (*khang pa*). Approximately 7 to 14 persons (average 10) claim membership in a *khang pa*. The point of concern here is not kinship relations but the spatial-social network that can be read out of the demographic data.¹⁰ From the individual columns relating to family structure, for example, the large number of children invites attention (on the average four per family, approximately 40% of the village population). Further, insofar as there are secondary houses (*khang bu*), it is the grandparents and grown siblings who traditionally live in them. The frequency of polyandry is striking (eight of ten households), which may be termed unique to this region. Of the reasons for polyandry that have generally long been under discussion, I should like to note only a few points. As an economic reason, for example, one could cite the tendency not to divide up property among brothers. For Yangthang, an additional economic fact must be considered: corvée labour on monastery lands around Chuli chan (*cu li can*) and work on one's own fields required for discharging levies cannot be accomplished single-handedly. Polyandry here seems to go hand in hand with existential constraints. This point has been made also by Grimshaw,¹¹ who carries the argument further by positing a causal connection between polyandry and the celibacy of the monks (and nuns) (*ibid.*).

9. In between the two phases of intense cultivation (sowing and harvesting) and during the cold part of the year, there is time for other activities. In Yangthang there are:

- 5 weavers: Pharka pa, Dkyil grong pa, Gsol dpon pa, Bla brang pa, To go che
- 1 stonecutter: Dkor dpon pa
- 2 masons: Lha rje pa, Gsol dpon pa
- 1 carpenter: To go che
- 1 healer: Lha rje pa

All families engage in cobbling. Blacksmiths (*gar ba*) come from Hemis shug pa can, as do musicians, particularly during weddings, though for birthday celebrations at New Year's, locals are drawn upon. Astrologers (*'on po*) and *lha pa* come from Hemis shug pa can. There are no 'low status groups' in Yangthang.

10. The male-female symbols are not the standard ones used in ethnology. Not being an ethnologist, I have chosen to use other, more commonplace symbols

11. Grimshaw, 1983: 133.

NUMBER / KHANG PA	NAME OF THE KHANG PA / MAIN HOUSE, KHANG BU / SECONDARY HOUSE	FULL LISTING OF MEMBERS	MEMBERS OF THE KHANG PA / KHANG BU	MARRIED PERSONS (VARIOUS COMBINA- TION OF STATUS)	CHILDREN	OTHER ADULTS	GRANDPARENTS
1	TO GO CHE KHANG CHEN TO GO CHE KHANG KHANG BU	11	9 2	♂ ♂ ♀	♀ ♂ ♂	♀ ♂ ♂	♂ ♀
2	LHAR JE PA (LHA RJE PA) LHA RJE KHANG BU LHA RJE KHANG BU	14	9 4 1	♂ ♂ ♀	♀ ♀ ♀ ♂	♀ ♂	♂ ♀
3	PHARKA PA PHARKA KHANG BU	12	7 5	♂ ♂ ♀	♀ ♀ ♀ ♂		♂ ♀ ♀
4	SOL PON PA (GSOL DPON PA) GSOL DPON KHANG BU	12	8 4	♂ ♂ ♀	♂ ♂ ♂ ♀ ♀		♂ ♀
5	DKYIL GRONG KHANG BU (OLDER) SKIYL TONG PA (DKIYL GRONG PA)	9	9	♂ ♂ ♀	♀ ♀ ♀ ♂ ♂		♂
6	YOK MA PA	6	6	♂ ♀	♂ ♀ ♀		♂
7	TON SPON PA (GRONG DPON PA)	9	9	♂ ♀	♂ ♂ ♂ ♀ ♀		♂ ♀
8	KOR PON PA (DKOR DPON PA)	10	10	♂ ♂ ♀	♂	♀ ♂	♂ ♀ ♀
9	LABRANG PA (BLA BRANG PA)	7	7	♂ ♂ ♀	♂ ♂	♀	♂
10	GING GO PA (ZHING 'GO PA)	7	7	♂ ♂ ♀	♂ ♂ ♀		♂
ON THE AVERAGE No. 1-10			10	3	4		
TOTAL SUM No. 1-10		97			37	9	20

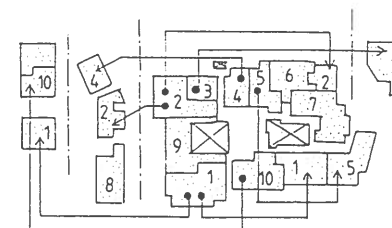


Fig. 5. Demography table.

3. Aspects of the economic structure of the village

The area around the village

The Tokpo River (*brog po*) flowing from north to south joins the Indus at Uletokpo (*u lu brog po*). Yangthang lies above the Tokpo River near the route connecting Likir (*klu 'khyil*) and Hemis shug pa can. Along the ten-kilometre highly declivous — and in parts gorgelike — valley between Uletokpo and Yangthang are riverine meadows with shrubs (e.g. juniper), willows, and poplars, as well as cornfields and orchards in the vicinity of Chuli chan (*cu li can*), the convent, and the complex of buildings at Labas, where two nuns live. From Chuli chan, a small, steep and arid side valley leads north-west to, after some three kilometres, Ri dzong Gonpa (*ri rdzong dgon pa*). Yangthang itself lies a fair distance from the convent, on the edge of a slightly sloping plateau encircled by mountains, approximately 70 metres above the river and its steep valley incision (Fig. 6). Because of the climate, only barley grows in Yangthang, whereas in Chuli chan wheat and apricots can also thrive. The terraced 'plateau' of Yangthang, originally consisting of areas of alluvium and detritus amidst desert-like surroundings, represents almost in its entirety the area under cultivation (see the cross-hatched areas of Fig. 6).¹² The soil is described by the inhabitants as being less fertile than that of neighbouring villages.¹³ The eastern bank of the flat Tokpo Valley belongs to Yangthang and features stands of trees, areas of pasture land and a few fields. Two steep side valleys lead up into the plateau from the Tokpo River; they, too, serve as pasturing sites and contain relatively rich stands of poplars and willows allocated to the village.

A meditation house (*mtsham khang*) is situated in one of these side valleys, while a meditation cave (*mtsham phug*) is found below, along the Tokpo River, and a cave with a temple (name like the area: *spang 'go*) further north.

12. The geographically varied area around Yangthang is the economic lifeblood of the village. I went over it for mapping purposes, making on-site measurements with a compass, while at the same time comparing the data with the old scaled field measurements (see Khushi 1908, footnote 1).

13. Chaudhri Khushi Mohamed (1908: 14-15) provides the exact classification of soil types recognised by the Ladakhis. The best soil is *mazhin* land, followed by *barzhing*, *thashing* and *chhas is*; the poorest quality is *sasik* land. *olthang* and *bagh* plots refer to particular types of cultivated plants (oil-bearing, fruit-bearing). Then he lists the individual types of landownership, but these do not apply to Yangthang (1908: 17). These classifications are still valid and the Urdu word *bagh* is still used in this context (also for trees).

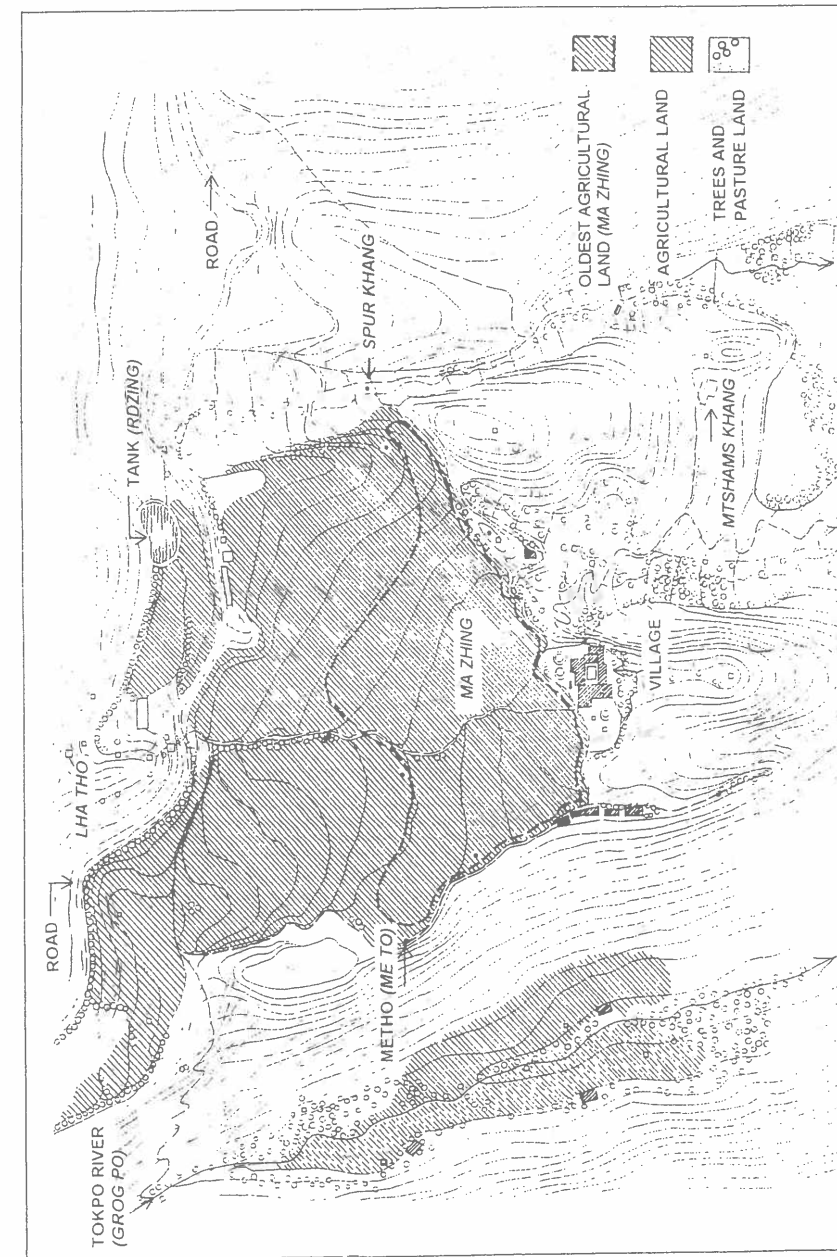


Fig. 6. Environment of Yangthang.

West of the fields of the plateau, on the cliffs overlooking the Tokpo River the previously mentioned Metho site is located, and to the east, along the edge of the river, is the village's only cremation site (*spur khang*), while a particularly sacred preserve lies north of the fields.

The closed complex of buildings that make up Yangthang stands in the middle southern portion, on the edge of the plateau, with the aforementioned trio of houses beyond the village boundary lying some 100 metres to the west, the single-standing house an equal distance to the east, and a further house below on the Tokpo. There are additional willows and a bit more pasture land along the two feeder channels described below, as well as along the main distributor channel running from north to south. At the northern border of the plateau, below the two feeder channels, is the relatively level road from Likir to Hemis, along which the village school-house stands.

Irrigation system (see Fig. 7)

In this desert or steppelike landscape (Yangthang — *thang* a term for a barren plain), the irrigation of the fields, pasture land and trees is necessary for the existence of the village, and has been going on ever since its founding by Lama Tsultim Nima (*bla ma Tshul khrims nyi ma*). The first feeder channel A runs parallel to the slope, having branched off from the river some kilometres upstream. Finally it leads to a spot above the fields, at the middle of the edge of the plateau, where it flows into the main distributor channel C. This main distributor (*ma yur*) descends in steps down the slope, dividing into small dead-end channels, which pass to the left and right of the village and replenish the vegetable gardens along its edge.

Mr Sonam Dawa kindly pointed out that the second feeder channel B was constructed some fifty years later (1891). It was this second channel that ensured the supply of water needed to enlarge the agricultural plots. The original contiguous fields (*ma zhing*) lie directly north of the village, as indicated on the map. The second feeder channel B, again tapped from the river, likewise runs parallel to the slope, seven metres above the first feeder A. It does not flow into the main distributor that heads downhill but a) on the east side along the same elevation to a large reservoir measuring approximately 25 x 10 m (*rdzing*) and b) into an underground channel beneath the reservoir and further towards the east. East of the fields, this channel turns downhill and irrigates the above-mentioned trees and pasture land until it reaches the river, while the other channel leads from the foot of

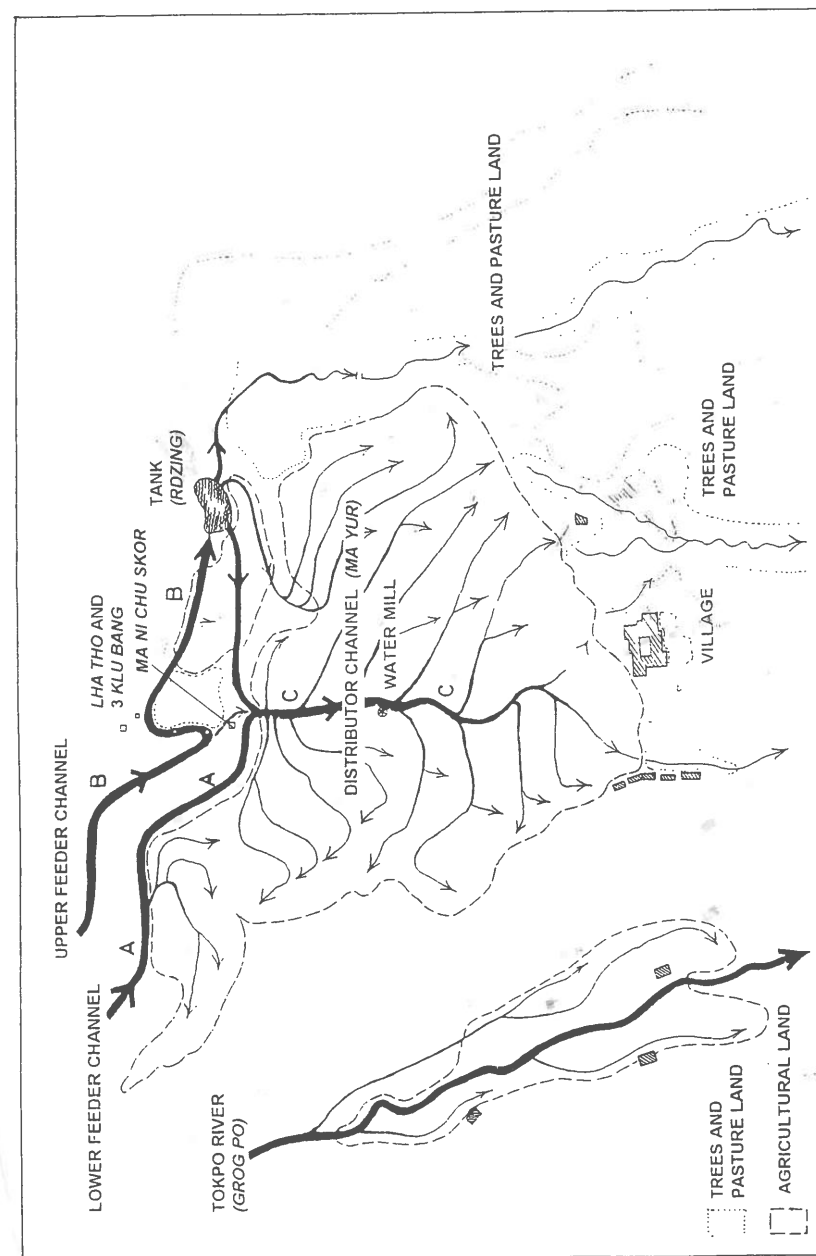


Fig. 7. Irrigation system.

the reservoir back to the distributor C. The reservoir is filled during the day, and its contents fed to the distributor during the night.

Numerous distributing channels parallel to the slope branch off to the left and right from the main distributor that leads down to the village; they generally run along the foot of terrace outcroppings. The narrower dead-end channels lead across to the slope from these channels, which have opened up the crescent-shaped fields to cultivation. The dead-end conduits feed the furrows which run in regular parallels to the slope. 'Crescent fields', enclosed within earth embankments, are small blocks of land, the plots always being fed at a trickle by means of furrow irrigation, and never submerged under water. The furrows do not meander, and the surplus of water is discharged through small openings into the the field below.

In the spring, the channels are cleaned and made operational for the approximately four-month irrigation period. In the dry season, in spite of the aridity, cracks sometimes are formed by ice. Particularly the long, open feeder channels are no longer serviceable, due to stone detritus and landslides, and the river branches also shift widely. During the irrigation period, these faulty channels require almost daily monitoring. Occasionally, there is a significant loss of water even at apparently low-risk places, which often are difficult to find. The daily rhythm of irrigation, however, is an indication that, in principle, a lot of water is available. Enlarging the area irrigated would be difficult in view of the lack of workers.

There are large numbers of comparable irrigation systems in the various cultures of western Himalaya where climatic conditions and elevations are similar, particularly in Hunza.¹⁴ Brauen has further noted, that forms and backgrounds of festivals of the 'old' New Year's celebrations, are similar as well,¹⁵ which may be seen as an overlapping of technical and cultural influences in the western Himalayas.

Classification and size of field holdings, vegetable plots, and livestock

Now something will be said, and data provided, about the economic situation of the village. In Fig. 8, three areas of economic activity are distinguished: 1) the three different kinds of fields, 2) gardens, stands of trees and pasture land, and 3) livestock. These three complexes appear in the three

14. See in the Bibliography the works by G. Meier, H. Kreuzmann, P. Snoy and K. Hase-rodt.

15. Brauen, 1980: 90-92.

columns, which are further subdivided. The rows refer to the main houses of the village, and provide locations.

Basically, the land under ownership within the entire area belongs to the monastery. There are also, however, the levy-free *cha zhing* fields (see Column 2). These are linked to other services for the monastery (see below). The largest fields, the so-called *shas zhing*, are shown in Column 1, and carry a levy payable to the monastery. The third category of field, the *thong ros*, is a combination of the first two types, being land that has recently been made arable, and which remains free of levy for four years, after which time it is treated as a *shas zhing* field. Because of the additional labour and levies involved, there are few new fields.¹⁶

The size of fields is defined according to the amount of seed needed to sow them properly: the so-called *khal* system. In the case of *shas zhing* fields, double the amount (*gyur*) of the required seed must be supplied to the monastery after the harvest (see Column 4 under the gonpa), a rule that according to the villagers was introduced by Lama Tsultim Nima (*bla ma Tshul khrims nyi ma*) (the total delivered: 669 *khal*).¹⁷ The total amount of seed corresponds roughly to the level of the levy as a whole. The meeting of private needs is therefore possible, in the case of the *shas zhing* type, only after obtaining a threefold return, including the new seed. According to the inhabitants, little is left over when the harvest is bad, though when it is good one can count on a five- or sixfold return.

The yields and acreage of the *khang pa* are fairly evenly distributed (approximately 50 *khal*); three *khang pa* have larger fields, however, (*Lha rje pa*, *Dkyil grong pa*, *Yog ma pa*), with one of them being assigned to the slightly higher-ranking amchi. In terms of the per capita field size, the latter two are some 50% above the mean. The levies are always stored in the Labrang (*bla brang*). About half of the straw is also needed for the monastery, since it also has animals. As stated above, monastery levies on other villages are collected by the farmers of Yangthang.

16. A few remarks to the classification of the three types of fields: *Cha zhing* refers to fields owned by the farmer himself. Services for the monastery cannot be attributed to this category — but are bound to the *khang pa*. *Shas zhing* is often used for farmers with large fields, who can only cultivate about 50 per cent by themselves; in this village they are a kind of tenant of the monastery. With *thong ros*, the subsequent ownership depends on the uncultivated intermediate spaces between the fields. If they are directly linked to other fields, they will become a *shas zhing* later, whereas in the outer areas it is regarded as *cha zhing*, unless this outer area is considered to belong to the monastery.

17. According to Chhostok 1 *khal* = 14 kg; according to Brauen 13.5 kg (1980: 178).

FIELD SIZE AND LEVY RATES, VEGETABLES / TREES, LIVESTOCK															
NUMBER / KHANG PA	NAME OF THE KHANG PA / MAIN HOUSE KHANG BU / SECONDARY HOUSE	SHAS ZHING LAND (KHAL)	CHA ZHING LAND (KHAL)	THONG ROS LAND (KHAL)	SUPPLIED TO THE GONPA	TREES	GARDENS	PHU / DOG (PASTURE)	SHEEP	GOATS	COWS	HORSES	DONKEYS	DZO	YAK
1	TO GO CHE KHANG CHEN TO GO CHE KHANG KHANG BU	30	10		60	?	x		9	45	3		1	2	1
2	LHAR JE PA (LHA RJE PA) LHA RJE KHANG BU LHA RJE KHANG BU	30 8 2	30 7		60 16 4	50 6	x x	1 1		10 18	5 4		1		2
3	PHARKA PA PHARKA KHANG BU	20 5	10	25	40 10	70	x			30 5	4 2		1		1
4	SOL PON PA (GSOL DPON PA) GSOL DPON KHANG BU	25 5	15 8		50 10		x		3 3	15 3	7 5		1		2
5	DKYIL GRONG KHANG BU (OLD) SKYIL TONG (DKYIL GRONG PA)	27	25	25	55	?	x		2	15	7		1		2
6	YOK MA PA	80	20		160	?	2		3	10	4				1
7	TON SPON PA (DRONG DPON PA)	20	20		40	50		1	7		7	1	1		2
8	KOR PON PA (DKOR DPON PA)	40	15		80	20				30	3				1
9	LABRANG PA (BLA BRANG PA)	30	10		60	280	x		6	15	7				
10	GING GO PA (ZHING 'GO PA)	12	15	20	24	100			25	60	10	1	1	3	2
	SUM 1 - 10	334	185	70	669	436		3	58	256	68	3	7	15	3

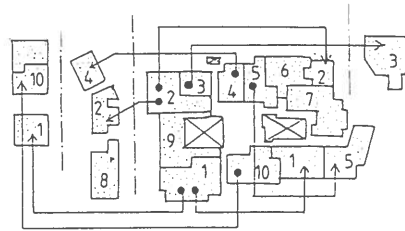


Fig. 8. Economy table

Additional remark: The size of fields is defined according to the amount of seed, in khal, needed for the field in question. There are three types of field. According to Chhostok one khal is ca. 14 kg.; according to Brauen (1980: 178) 13.5 kg. There are three types of field. The amounts sown: 334 khal for shas zhing, 185 khal for cha zhing, 70 khal for thong ros. The amounts sown: the gonpa receives 334 khal after the harvest.

The head of livestock can be seen in Fig. 8. There are some 380 goats, sheep and cows, and 30 draught animals. Two families possess mountain pastures (*phu/dogs*), apparently under an organisational arrangement with the neighbouring village of Hemis shug pa can. The herds are driven up to pasture by the end of April, the sheep are shorn in the middle of June, and then the draught animals, in particular, are needed for the harvest, after which they are driven back up. The herds are driven back down sometime around the first week in November. The two families that are responsible for the animals belonging to the monastery are allowed to keep some of the milk and wool for themselves (*Pharka pa* and *Dkyil grong pa*). An average of sixty trees per main house for construction and fuel are listed. Most of these houses have gardens with fruit trees and vegetable plots.

Work for the monastery

Work for the monastery is regulated. One adult male member per main house is required to work on the lands of Chuli chan (*cu li can*) some 15 days ploughing and sowing, 15 days at harvest time (barley, wheat, apricot), and 15 days in the winter cutting wood. One woman per main house has to do weeding there for three or four days (per year), and devote the same amount of time to the apricot harvest. The climate-induced difference in the growing period in the two different zones (Chuli chan and Yangthang) is of decisive importance. This effects a seasonal shift in labour activity of 25 days, thus allowing the same work to be done at different times in different places.

Then there is the 'collection' of levies for the monastery in the two other villages. This involves three trips with donkeys and dzo. The first trip, made by four families, is to Hemis shug pa can. The second one, undertaken by four other families, returns to the same village to collect the remainder. The third trip sees three other families go a single time to Sa spo tse. According to the villagers, 300 *khal* is owed by Hemis shug pa can, and 100 *khal* by Sa spo tse. All levies are stored in the Labrang (not permanently, as far as I know).

In Ri dzong Gonpa (*ri rdzong dgon pa*), carpenters and masons were on one occasion observed to have pledged themselves to construct a new part of the building, the compensation being worked out informally, as mutual obligations (it is an additional service, performed by the villagers). The construction took almost three months, and occurred between the main periods of field work in the village (sowing, harvest).

4. Relations between the monastery and village: particular activities relating to the form of economy and society

There exist socio-economic links between Ri dzong and (Yangthang aside) Sa spol, Sa spo tse, Utel, Leh, Likir, Hemi shukpa chan, Chuli chan and Labas. The Labrang (*bla brang*) in Leh, Sa spol and Nimu are under the monastery; Sam tan ling (*bsam gtan gling*) monastery in Nubra is also subordinate to Ri dzong.

Yangthang and Chuli chan, however, enjoy substantially closer ties to the monastery than the other villages. It is noteworthy that certain social groups were not present at the founding of Yangthang, which occurred entirely within the context of the founding of the monastery, so that certain cults are less practised. Given this reduced social structure, Yangthang might be viewed as part of Hemi shug pa can ('*onpo*, *lha pa* and musicians come from Hemi for weddings).¹⁸ Hemi, though, falls under various monasteries and schools, while Yangthang, being a village with links to only one monastery, arose much later — also with families from other villages.

Private household and hearth deities are not found in Yangthang (e.g., the *lha tho* on the roof), but, from the beginning have been outside and reduced to one object. The *lha tho* no longer functions as the deity who bears a relation to the household community (as it does, for instance, in Lamayuru), having only retained the generic function of referring to the *pha spun* group. This group calls in monks to take ritually part in the worship of the *lha tho* every month and at Losar. Also, the household functions of the *lha khang*, which is found in every house in other villages, has been replaced in Yangthang, for all homes, by a village temple (*yul gyi dgon pa*) which is served by monks, officiating in birth and death rites, performing rain-making ceremonies, and the reading of texts in the summer and autumn every year (*bskang gsol*, *chos bsil*), as part of the worship of Buddhist deities.

Tangible forms of protection of houses from a 'spirit' (*btsan mdos*) are not placed in the form of systematised sacred stones either on top of the house (as in Lamayuru) or around the house (as in many places in the Indus Valley) but are exclusively painted, in a very simple manner, on house walls. The astrologers ('*onpo*), who come from outside to perform these and other types of protective acts are not seen at village festivals, and do not sit among the honoured guests.

18. According to Dollfus, the neighbouring village regards Yangthang as its 'own' territory with the border running along the pass to Likir. Yangthang is just seen as a *bla brang*.

The monks, on the other hand, have introduced the fire rites (*jing sark ge thab* or *sbyi sreg gi thab*), which usually are restricted to monasteries, to the sacred area (*sbyin sreg*) located on every house roof; these translocated rites provide for the welfare and protection of inhabitants, animals and harvests.

Important village festivals such as the New Year's dance (*lo gsar gyi rtses*) and the harvest festival (*sruub lha*) are held in a building of the monastery complex (*bla brang*), being relocated to the more common main square only when space becomes cramped. Certain festivals are reduced in form or entirely dispensed with; thus there are no *cham* dances performed by monks for the laity in the Ri dzong (*ri rdzong dgon pa*). The site of the villagers' New Year dances is striking: on the one hand, the village square, and on the other, an area in front of the monastery.¹⁹ The particular nature of the reciprocal relationship between village and monastery as seen in the choice of site is confirmed by the analogous handling of similar occasions. Further, in the '*du khang* the heads of the monastery (*rin poche*, *gnas stan* and *nir pa*) are required to pay respect at *lo gsar* for the coming year to the representative of the village (*lo gsar meme*), who stands symbolically and mystically for a long life, and to offer him gifts (money, the statue of an ibex, the return of the *katak* etc.). In this way too — apart from the invitation to all villagers to dine that same day — the work of Yangthang's inhabitants on behalf of the monastery is duly honoured.

Anna Grimshaw refers in her economic study of Ri dzong to the processes involving production, means of production and reproduction (theories of value, surplus value and social surplus product, along the lines of modern social theories, are offered in a new guise). She describes the sequence of activities from 1) natural products, their processing and the services flowing between the village and convent (*cu li can*) on the one hand and Ri dzong on the other; 2) exchange with outside traders (the qualitatively altered wares of the convent being exchanged for trading goods), and 3) the countervailing feedback process, in which the villagers and nuns obtain luxury items like sugar, cooking oil and kerosene in exchange for their work and products, as well as being provided with the entire complex of religious ceremonies.²⁰

Comparisons with social forms of the European Middle Ages are less apt. It is particularly the value of work per se, and food and its production, that have more of a religious dimension to them. In the Christian culture there

19. The dance site is located at the guest-house (*phyin mtshams*) located on the way to the lower spring, and is regarded as lying outside the precinct held to strict monastery law.

20. Grimshaw, 1983: 130.

is something similar in the *ora et labora* commandment to monks. Certain Christian-oriented groups with a strong sense of community practise forms of economy that in the end do not fit into an industrial society, while doubtless able to co-exist with it.²¹

Ripley refers to extracts from Grimshaw's dissertation (1983) and Cozort (1986) and explains the observations on the religious merit acquired in Buddhism through labour and the status of food and body.

... (Grimshaw) points out that one of the distinguishing features of Mahayana Buddhism and Tantrism is their emphasis on the body, particularly as a 'focus for ritual attention'. In that regard it is not surprising that food has an important function in the rituals of both. Furthermore, of the three Buddha bodies, the intermediate one ...as the 'Body of Reciprocal Enjoyment' (p. 130) ...or (Cozort) the 'Complete Enjoyment Body', experiences a state of satisfaction through its Form Body which is the result of the collection of merit (p. 25). Since the merit is returned to his human benefactors through the medium of food, I wonder if the 'enjoyment' may be as much a capacity to 'accept' or 'ingest' food (as a human body would) as an ability to return the food transformed as merit or blessing ...' (Ripley 1985: 167).

Ripley lists further aspects concerning the importance of food in Ladakh.²²

The value the nuns have for the production process in the monastic village is overrated by Grimshaw.²³ Previously manual labour was widespread among monks. At present there are two nuns in Chuli chan (*cu li can*) who

21. I may cite here the followers of Jakob Hutter in the United States who seem to be the same group as the 'Herrnhuterer' (Moravian) in Leh/Ladakh, and thus of exemplary interest. The 1984 documentary film by Klaus Stanjek, of the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Berlin-Babelsberg, dealt with these Hutterites. He was able to capture quite well their communal Christian spirit and sense of solidarity, and the fact that, despite private simplicity and the banning of many consumer products, the group functioned outwardly as a highly competitive and profitable firm within a capitalist setting. The 'Beginen' group in Donauries in southern Germany, dominated by women, engaged in similar forms of livelihood, but were later wiped out (13th century).

22. 'Food is a point of reference in Ladakhi culture, and a very significant one. As a generic reference food is sustenance, food is hospitality, food is an item of exchange. In these various capacities food generates meaning (Ripley 1985:166).' 'Let me conclude by commenting that in view of how much food and foodstuffs are given away on ceremonial occasions ... it's no wonder that Ladakhi households experience food shortages, except that food is really an exchange commodity, and therein lies the key to village economy...' (Ripley 1985: 175).

23. Grimshaw, 1983: 130-33.

still play a small role in this regard, and many young male novices, most from surrounding villages, who perform the work in the fields previously done by nuns — alongside the workers from Yangthang. The remaining nuns still act as intermediaries between the various interests of villagers and the convent. The convent has lost its position as an intermediary for luxury products, since such products can easily be obtained by bus from Leh.

The production processes in agriculture and the relationship between village and monastery acquire a new importance in view of Grimshaw's and Ripley's observations. Religious view of the world, economy and labour still seem to be closely linked. I do not want to interpret more recent developments because they are a separate subject. But let me briefly state a few changes. The first seasonal workers from Nepal are now hired in Yangthang and their wages are relatively low. Another aspect would be the difference between the legal position of tenants in the modern Indian state and in the traditional theocratic society.

Another subject relating to Yangthang has separately been dealt with in another article about the 'sacral landscape of the village and the monastery'.²⁴

5. Conclusion

The small village of Yangthang is situated in a side valley north of the Indus. The village originally comprised eight, and nowadays ten, main houses (*khang pa*) with a total of 97 inhabitants. The village is laid out as a large, densely built rectangle with a central square between the village temple (*yul gyi dgon pa*) and the Labrang, and a symbolic entrance gate in the north-west. The evolution of the square, the Labrang (as the highest and dominant building) and the temple (which can be ritually circumambulated) was governed, among other things, by their functions as meeting places (meetings in the courtyard of the Labrang have nowadays been shifted to the square).

Given the comparatively recent and simultaneous foundings (ca. 1841) of the village and Ri dzong monastery, the village has specific economic and socio-religious features which, to a large extent, can be documented on the basis of demographic surveys. The village plays a key role among the villages and households that fall under the influence of this Ge lukpa monastery.

The functioning of the irrigation system and the legal status of the various types of field, for instance, were described in more detail. The idea-oriented

24. Proceedings of the Colloquium 'Sacred Landscape of the Tibetan Himalaya' at Heidelberg University, Internationales Wissenschaftsforum, May 25-27, 1998.

household structure also has specific characteristics with certain ritual functions lacking here that can, however, be found in the overall conception of the village. The social order is also reflected in the seating arrangements for festivals on the square. Another feature of the seating arrangement is the fact that women including the bride are not present during wedding festivities.

The close ties with the monastery lead to a greater dependence of the villagers, heavily influencing the social structure. The village stands as a specific example of the smallest possible structure of a village community with only one *bcu tshogs* — and one *pha spun* group and is shaped by the strict monastic school and its period of origin.

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