THE RISE OF THE POLYANDROUS HOUSE:
Marriage, Kinship and Social Mobility in Rural Tsang, Tibet

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The Tagrab House
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NOTE ON TIBETAN TERMS

There is a significant discrepancy between the spoken and the written forms of Tibetan words, and it is often difficult for non-specialists to pronounce words romanized in accordance with the proper spelling. For example, the term for taxpayer is properly spelled khral pa, but pronounced trelpa, and the term for butcher is properly spelled bshan ba and pronounce shemba. Because there is no standardized system for transcribing spoken Tibetan, I have used my own simplified forms representing the approximate pronunciation of each word. The proper spelling of each word is given in the Glossary, where the Wylie (1959) standard for romanization is used. Personal names and house names are given in the spoken form only.
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INTRODUCTION

In one of the sunny afternoons in Sharlung, Drolma Potri, Pema and I were sitting in the porch of the Gongbo house, spinning wool and playing with the youngest baby. They had already answered many questions about family life in the village. Drolma Potri, the in-married wife of the three sons of the house explained to me: ‘In my birth village, only few people used to marry polyandrously, but now it is very much wide-spread. Now everybody marries like this.’ ‘Why?’ I asked. She smiled and simply answered that: ‘Everybody wants a better life.’ Being from a former landless labourer family, Drolma Potri is the first woman to marry polyandrously in her family’s history. As such, her history denotes the main interest in this thesis, namely what seems to be an increase in the popularity of fraternal polyandry in rural Tsang today.

Based upon nineteen months of fieldwork in Tibet Autonomous Region, of which five months were spent in the House of Tagrab in Sharlung village, Panam County in Tsang, this thesis aims to present new ethnography from rural Tibet that primarily describes life as found in an ordinary household, in an ordinary agricultural village. As such, it is intended to fill an ethnographic gap responding to the dearth of anthropological studies from Tibet Autonomous Region, and in particular from the rural areas. The prime concern in *The Rise of the Polyandrous House* is marriage patterns and preferences after the de-collectivization of rural Tibet, and the main questions asked are: Are new
polyandrous marriages arranged in Tibet today? And if so, in what ways have the Chinese take-over and restructuring of Tibetan society influenced rural marital practices in general, and polyandry in particular? To what extent do marriage practices relate to broader processes of social change in Tibet, and how are these relations to be understood? By answering these basic questions, the thesis has four main ambitions: First, to provide new ethnography on the social and cultural meanings of fraternal polyandry in rural Tsang today. Secondly, to develop an analytical framework that goes beyond the simplistic economic and ecological perspectives on polyandry by emphasizing the sociality of marriage, and particularly the role of marriage in a broader ongoing process of socio-cultural change. Thirdly, to suggest the use of ‘House’ as an analytical term in the study of social organization in rural agricultural Tibet, and fourthly, to employ a perspective that combines insights on marriage, sociality and architecture, on the one side, and relations of exchange on the other. By doing so, it is my intention to present a study that shows relevant aspects of the political, social, economical, and cultural context of a preference for fraternal polyandry in this area, and argues that polyandry today must be seen as a part of a process whereby common farmers engage in a social transformation of their traditionally small nuclear families into what is known locally to be trelpa Houses, that is, named estates of high social standing that in the traditional Tibetan society belonged to the local landholders and representatives of the government (trelpa and genbo).

The thesis takes as a starting point the dramatic events of Tibet’s recent history following the Chinese invasion in 1950, and the continued occupation of the country. During the last half century, the Chinese government has implemented dramatic structuring and re-structuring of Tibetan society that has influenced all aspects of life for Tibetans both in urban and rural areas. During these years, researchers have pointed to the dramatic changes in Tibetan social and cultural practices. However, there have also been indications of ongoing processes of cultural revival in the post-Mao era, particularly in Amdo and Kham, but also in Central Tibet where the research for this thesis has its based (cf. Goldstein 1998; Huber 2002). Without discussing cultural revival as such, the
thesis concerns changes and continuities of social and cultural practices within the context of Chinese power in Tibet, and it relates directly to the implementation of reforms following the de-collectivization in the 1980s. As such, this project falls within Harrell’s description of tendencies in anthropological studies in post-Mao China, as it can be defined to discuss ‘themes of recovery from the social and intellectual devastation of High Socialism’ (2001:140). However, my concern lies primarily with the social implications of the reforms rather than with the intellectual ones.

Marriage is an essential aspect of social organization in Tibet, as elsewhere. It is a social institution directly influenced by the rapidly changing, and to Tibetans foreign, Chinese state policies. Marriage is also an institution known in the social sciences to be of conservative character, hence resistant to change. Tibet has been well-known for the co-existence of various marriage types of which polyandry is perhaps the most unusual. Polyandry is found elsewhere in the Himalaya region to the south of Tibet, but is not found among the Han population in China. While polyandry is universally rare, some Tibetan communities have had high occurrences of such a marriage type. The literature that describes Tibetan society before the Chinese takeover in 1950 represents polyandry as a preferred marriage among landholders in general, and those termed taxpayers (trelpa) in particular. Hence, polyandry has been recognised as directly related to socio-political organization in general and land tenure and taxation systems in particular. Earlier studies agree that polyandry is a marital form that is very sensitive to changes.

Levine and Sangree writes in the conclusion of ‘Women with many Husbands: Polyandrous Alliances and Marital Flexibility in Africa and Asia’ (1980:405) that:

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1 In addition, Harrell defines ‘themes of progress toward a vaguely defined but highly desired modernity’ as the second grand theme in the anthropological studies of reform in China.
2 Polygyny and concubinage were common in parts of China (Davis and Harrell 1993; Palmer 1995), however, these were practices of a different rational than in Tibet and are therefore difficult to compare. Although polyandry was, and is, practiced among some minority groups on the Sino-Tibetan border, such marriages were unheard of in all Han Chinese areas (Wellens 2006).
3 In traditional Tibetan political organisation, the Dalai Lama owned all land. However, usufruct rights were divided between aristocratic and monastic estates, on the one side, and taxpaying administrators on government estates (zhung gwnba) on the other (see Chapter Two for details).
4 In a recent reportage produced for the BBC (2005), Haviland describes what is perceived to be a decline in polyandry in the remote western regions of Nepal. In this area Tibetans have married polyandrously for as long as villagers can remember, but now, they say, new economic and educational opportunities, as well as romantic ideas about marriage, may alter this.
Although we are now aware of a greater number of polyandrous societies, it is even more obvious that polyandry is a comparatively rare marital form and one which is fragile in the face of external pressures for social change. Missionaries and proselytizers of various faiths, together with administrators of modern nation-states, have provided sufficient opposition to effect the complete cessation or a decrease in the incidence of polyandrous marriages. Such appears to have been the case among Nayar, Sinhalese, the Kagoro of Northern Nigeria and undoubtedly among Tibetans as well.

Also in Tibet under China the administrators of the ‘modern nation-state’ have severely opposed the practice of polyandry. By prohibiting polygamy already in the first Marriage Law in 1950 (see Chapter Three) and frowning upon polyandry as ‘abnormal and primitive’ (see later in this Introduction), the Chinese government has effectuated a pressure similar to that which Levine and Sangree suggest will lead to ‘complete cessation or decrease in the incidents of polyandrous marriages.’ Melvyn Goldstein has expressed similar notions on the future practices of polyandry in Tibet, based not upon state intervention but rather related to the particular sensitivity of the economic rationale of polyandrous practices. He writes:

The custom, however, is very sensitive to changes in its political and economic milieu and, not surprisingly, is in decline in most Tibetan areas. … New opportunities for economic and social mobility in these countries, such as the tourist trade and government employment, are also eroding the rationale for polyandry, and so it may vanish with the next generation (1987:112).

Goldstein writes elsewhere that ‘An abundance of economic opportunities leads to less complete polyandry and monogamous family units’ (1976:232), also indicating a similar underlying notion of economic necessity to the prevalence of polyandry. The Chinese restructuring of Tibetan society has not only led to changing relations to land among the farmers, but also to alterations in the general economic possibilities in rural economy. In a recent study, Goldstein et al. document that the vast majority of the villagers consulted
in their broad study report that their livelihoods have improved during the last two decades (Goldstein et.al. 2003; see Chapter Nine for details). As such, following both Goldstein and others’ estimations, we could expect a decline in new arrangements of polyandrous marriages in contemporary rural Tibet. This thesis seeks to prove otherwise.

**THE ONGOING INCREASE AND SPREAD OF FRATERNAL POLYANDRY**

The main finding of this doctoral project is the ongoing increase and spread of fraternal polyandry among Tibetans in this particular agricultural area of Tsang today. While polyandry traditionally was a marital form of the upper classes, particularly those with hereditary access to land (*trelpa*), my material indicates that polyandry today is a practice for rural Tibetans of all social backgrounds, including the traditional landless farmers (*düchung*, locally called *yokpo*) and traditional skilled workers (blacksmiths, butchers, and corpse-cutters). Today, some 60 percent all marriages in Sharlung are polyandrous, and of the remaining 40 percent, 13 percent are partitions from previously polyandrous marriages. According to my informants, all those that have more than one son in the House arrange polyandry today in Sharlung. Such unexpected increase must, it is argued, be understood as closely related to the implementation of the last land reform in China (and Tibet) called the Household Responsibility System. With this reform, the household unit was re-established as the central locus for belonging and for the distribution of rights and duties, and as the main institution in the local socio-economic organisation. The renewed emphasis on households hence established all farmers as structurally similar to the traditional landholders in Tibet. These new relations to land did not, as earlier literature would indicate, necessitate polyandry among the farmers. Rather, I argue, the reforms enabled traditional landless farmers to fulfil the cultural potential found in the arrangement of polyandrous marriages, and to engage in what is for them a process of social mobility.

The local explanations of a preference for polyandry are to a large extent materialistic and founded in a wish to secure the estate across generations, on the one side, and to maximize male labour on the other. As such, it is a marital form closely
connected to the traditional three-folded economy of agricultural Tibet, in which male members of the same household engage in agricultural work, herding, and off-farm activities such as trade or in construction work. By employing polyandry, people say, they strengthen and secure perpetuation of the household (*khyimtshang*). I shall not argue against the significance of economic advantages of polyandry in Tibet. On the contrary, I suggest what is a broader perspective within which the economic rational of polyandry is interpreted in relations to its socio-symbolic premises and implications. Hence, my main concern lies with the locally expressed wish to strengthen the co-resident group called *khyimtshang*. This thesis argues that in order to analyse this wish to strengthen the home-group we should investigate beyond the economic sides and delineate significant socio-symbolic meanings and values of the *khyimtshang*.

The overall argument I make is that following the Household Responsibility System implemented in the 1980s, which emphasized the household as a corporate group, the local farmers in Tsang have engaged in a process of social mobility in which they incorporate social and cultural practices associated with the former landholders in traditional Tibetan society. Central to this process of transformation is, I shall show, the establishment of named estates and the formal arrangement of marriages and, within that, fraternal polyandry. In traditional Tibetan society, most landless farmers were organised into unnamed nuclear families (Aziz 1978a; Goldstein 1968). As they had no land to transfer across the generations, only limited emphasis was put on perpetuation of the household group. Upon the introduction of the first ‘Democratic Reforms’ in Panam in 1959, the houses and land of the landholders were redistributed by the new government and given to the former landless farmers. Encouraged also for organisational purposes by the government, the villagers gave these houses names that came to represent the group of people living in the household as well as the attached land. With the collectivization starting in 1960, the then named groups did not materialize as estates. However, the names were established and developed as reference points for belonging. Following the implementation of the Household Responsibility System in 1980-1981, fixed amounts of land were attached to these named groups, and these became named estates.
In the literature on Tibet, marriage (changsa) is often described as accompanied by elaborate wedding rituals and strong participation of the groom’s and the bride’s household members. This, I believe, is due to the dominance of upper class informants in earlier studies of Tibetan societies (see Fjeld 2005:22-23). Before 1959 the majority of the local farmers in Sharlung were married monogamously in what is termed khathug unions, translating as the ‘meeting of mouths’. These weddings were informal, often couple-initiated unions with very limited ceremonial elements, and could perhaps be described as a type of co-habitation that was culturally recognised and served to legitimize children. Khathug pa unions most often led to the establishment of new small households. Importantly, these unions involved the respective natal households only to a limited extent. Today, the majority of farmers in Sharlung marry in a way termed changsa gyab, a term that translates as both ‘marriage’ and ‘wedding’. These are formal, parent-initiated unions with elaborate wedding ceremonies within which the two households and their representatives play important parts. Inherent in changsa is a post-marital virilocal residence practice, except in the cases where there are no male heirs in the receiving household. Most importantly, with changsa, the newlyweds move into an already established household, and become the next generation of leaders and representatives of the same household.

It is within this context of newly established and growing named estates with formal marriages that fraternal polyandry stands out as a preferred and highly valued cultural practice. First of all, polyandry secures the perpetuation of the named estates. Due to equal inheritance rights of all sons, it does so by limiting potentially several heirs to one set per generation. These named estates; corporations embedded with social and cultural meaning beyond economic position. Secondly, polyandry is associated with the former landholders, the trelpa, in the area, and seen as a historical intricate part of trelpa estates. Thirdly, polyandrous estates have a long history of high social standing in the area. Hence, in Panam today common farmers establish trelpa-like estates and incorporate cultural practices associated with these, such as fraternal polyandry. I have termed this process of social transformation ‘trelpafication.’
These rising estates, I suggest, are best analysed within a perspective of the socio-symbolic House inspired by the contribution of Lévi-Strauss and his point that Houses are to be seen as moral persons or corporate bodies, with names, a biography and a reputation (1983:174). The House manifests material and immaterial wealth and constitutes a significant social institution with which individuals identify and are identified by others. Moreover, a House persists over time, and as such it is more than the constellation of people living there at a particular time. Central to my argument is that in order to analyse the expressed wish to perpetuate the established estate by arranging fraternal polyandry, we need to find analytical terms that are inherently diachronic. I hold that the ‘House’ is one.

My aim is thus to develop an analytical frame that goes beyond the local economic logic of polyandry, and this perspective in fundamentally rooted in the recent House-debate in the anthropological discipline. A House-perspective can be termed a socio-symbolic orientation, incorporating sociality and symbolism. The underlying idea is that marriage is both a strategy and a value, and that marriage practices must be understood as based within a social organisation constituted by symbolic and significant corporate institutions to which individuals belong. As such, I make a fundamental argument to see polyandry as a marital practice of a particular social organisation, rather than as a practice dependent upon a particular ecological and economic frame. I develop the House as the locus for prime social relations, that is, I see the House as the core in the web of relatedness in agricultural Tibet (cf. Aziz 1978a:177-134). As several anthropologists have argued, the House as an analytical concept enables a holistic perspective on relatedness (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Howell 2003; Hsu 1998). It is my intention to develop a more holistic perspective on marital practices and preferences in Tibet, seen in relation to social and symbolic meanings and cultural processes. Howell concludes one of her articles on ‘the house’, writing that ‘[t]he house as the object of the anthropological gaze, let alone the historical, the political and the economic gazes, will, I suggest, yield hitherto unsuspected new insights into old concerns’ (Howell 2003: 33). This, I claim, is true for the study of marriage in Tibetan society.
A spatial orientation in a study of the conceptualization and practice of social relations in rural Tibet is not in itself new. While classical studies have depicted Tibet as a society with patrilineal descent and clan organisation (see Stein 1962; Prince Peter 1963), Barbara Aziz was the first to argue against the dominating role given to descent in Tibetan social organisation, when she described and analysed descent and residence in Dingri, Central Tibet (1978a). She depicts agricultural Tibet as a society where the place of residence is of major importance, and where the household is the prime group to which individuals belong. She writes: ‘It is not the idea of descent, but rather the concept of household which stands out as the keystone around which social relations are articulated. It is the residence principle which is central’ (ibid.:117). Aziz’s study came to be paradigmatic in Tibetan kinship studies. Diemberger suggests that the turn away from a focus on patrilineal belonging came with the disappearance of clan and clan names following the fall of the kingdom and the rise of religious centres as political and social foci in the 12th century in Central Tibet. With this turn, he holds, Tibetans were defined by the ‘place of birth and residence and/or religious affiliation’ (1993:98); this prevails today. The residence group, usually interpreted as the household, is generically acknowledged in studies of Tibetan-speaking groups be the fundamental social unit in these societies (Levine 1988; Ortner 1978; Desjarlais 1992).

Despite the established perspective in anthropology of marriage as an intrinsic part of kinship studies, this connection has been made explicit to only a limited degree in the studies of polyandry in Tibetan communities. Many of these studies emphasize marriage as an economic strategy and primarily focus on the household as a unit for production and consumption. It is my intention to combine the well-established knowledge of the significance of residence to relations of relatedness among Tibetans, on

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5 Because Tibet proper was inaccessible until the mid-1980s, these conclusions were based on the assumptions of similarities between Himalayan communities of Tibetan-speaking groups outside Tibet, where research was conducted.
6 As Goldstein, Aziz produced her ethnographic material by conducting extensive interviews with Tibetan refugees settled in Nepal.
7 There are great variations among Tibeto-Burman groups in the Himalaya regarding the significance of linearity in general and patrilinearity in particular. Many Tibetan peoples in Nepal and India organise themselves in clans and other patri-groups (Diemberger 1993).
the one hand, with the importance of polyandry for the corporate household, on the other. Hence, I suggest that rather than seeing household and residence as identical, residence is suggested to be a broader principle into which economic, symbolic, social and spatial elements can be included.

A focus on the household, with its temporal and ad hoc connotations, can only bring limited understanding of corporate units and does not explore the full potential of ‘residence’ (see Gray 1992; Yanagisako 1979). ‘The residence principle’, as Aziz calls it, should not necessarily be operationalized as the analytical term ‘household’, but should rather, I hold, inspire to a general focus on residence, i.e. ‘the fact of living in a particular place’ (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 1995:996). Residence, as a principle, implies the actual place of living, the people who live there, and the social groups of which these people are members. These interconnections of elements are, I suggest, better analysed with the concept of the House. A house is a building for dwelling, but it is more than that: a house is also a representation of the connections between physical building, people and concepts and has ‘come to stand for social groups and present the world around them’ (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:1). In the following I use ‘house’ to denote the physical buildings, while the capitalized ‘House’ denote the named estate that comes to stand for local groups.

In what follows, I seek to combine various elements of sociality into the study of marriage by arguing that the underlying cultural logic to polyandry is not only economic, but is also founded in more general social processes. These, I suggest, could be seen as inward-focusing processes represented in the expressed wish to strengthen an already established social unit (a House). One of the means to strengthen the House is to establish polyandrous marriages. The centripetal implications of polyandry concur with symbolic values that are spatially represented in architecture and with the internal organisation of space, and these should be of concern when analysing the logic of polyandry, I hold. By focusing on the ‘fact of living in a particular place’, I intend to open up for a broader perspective, which includes not only the social, but also the symbolic, physical and cosmological aspects of dwelling places. Hence, I hold that the houses in which people
reside are more than dwelling places; and the households within which people organize their daily life are more than units for common economic endeavour. Moreover, cosmological representation defines the dwelling place as a unit that interlinks not only the different realms of existence, but also the past, present and the future. It is the perception of the House as a continuous category, perpetuating itself in spite of the changes caused by endless births and deaths of people residing there, that is of major interest here. The project suggests is thus to combine perspectives on households and Houses that enables an analysis of marriage practices that goes beyond the mere economic aspects, towards the socio-symbolic complex of relatedness and belonging. As we shall see, the people of Panam today, to an increasing degree, identify themselves with a named House into which they are ascribed membership through filiation, adoption or marriage. The House is not only a fundamental principle for relatedness in Panam; it is also a corporate unit with social, legal and ritual rights and obligations.

By focusing on the connection between polyandry and the residence group, this thesis cumulatively explores village life from the entrance into a House, through its internal organisation in terms of gender and relative age, to the symbolic and ritual aspects of the house, and finally to the differing levels of village relations. Underlying these descriptions and discussions is an aim to gain some insight into what the House does (cf. Howell 1995:152), and what a House means in Panam today. Before I introduce other levels of the perspectives of the thesis and their relations to hegemonic theories on fraternal polyandry in Tibet, I shall describe in some detail the earlier perspectives on polyandry as found in anthropological literature. I do so in order to contextualize my project and, particularly to point to the background and the limitations of the economic and ecological perspectives on polyandrous marriages.

POLYANDRY IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATES

Polyandry has not been treated as central to the development of kinship theories in anthropology. I suggest such theoretical periphery reflects two facts: firstly the fact that polyandry is an ethnographically rare phenomenon, and secondly, that this type of
marriage challenges fundamental perceptions of gendered sexuality and reproduction in a way that has led to a particularized understanding withdrawn from general theoretical kinship contexts.

The theoretical periphery of polyandry, I argue, could be seen as related to Schneider’s paradigmatic critique of the study of kinship, where he points to the underlying perceptions of the pre-eminence of procreation and biology in anthropological kinship theories (1968; 1984). Polyandry is a marital practice that implicates shared fatherhood and, as such, contradicts commonly found underlying perceptions of male sexuality and reproduction in Euro-American culture. Schneider challenges the assumption that kinship constitutes a distinct domain of social relations in all societies. He does so by pointing to various aspects, of which what he terms the ‘Doctrine of the Genealogical Unity of Mankind’ is the most significant here. Central to this doctrine is the idea that kinship has been seen to concern ‘human reproduction and the relations concomitant to that process’ (Holy 1996:153). This contention, he holds, is founded in the Western folk belief of blood being thicker than water, e.g. that ties of consanguinity are bonds of solidarity that are engendered by actual biological connectedness (op.cit.). With Tibetan fraternal polyandrous marriages, men are unable to, and uninterested in, identifying and establishing biological fatherhood. On the contrary, they readily accept socially validated paternity. Lack of recognised and socially significant ties of consanguinity has, I argue, left polyandry in a peripheral position in terms of kinship studies. Such periphery is seen, for instance, in the dominating emphasis put upon the definition and classification of polyandry (cf. Leach 1955; Prince Peter 1963) as opposed to the ethnographic descriptions and contextual analysis of polygynous marriage practices elsewhere.

Early studies of polyandry in anthropology were focused on definitional questions, i.e. whether polyandry could be considered not only as plural mating, but as plural marriage. In the much-cited work of Fisher, he concluded that all known cases of so-called polyandry were forms of polykoity or plural mating (1952) and, thus, denied the very existence of polyandry as a marital form. His argument was that in the known
unions of one woman to two or more men, she would be truly married only to one of the husbands, because he himself was sufficient to legitimate the offspring of such union.

Definitional discussions of this kind are clearly linked to the ongoing debate at that time on the contents of ‘marriage’ as an analytical and comparative concept, which has long been contested and, by some, rejected. The definition listed in *Notes and Queries* in 1951, suggested that marriage refers to a ‘union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are the recognized legitimate offspring of both partners’ (1951:110). The emphasis on legitimacy of a child was for long the primal characterization of what anthropologists referred to as a marriage (cf. Gough 1959). From the mid-1950s, however, the documented varieties of marriage-like institutions around the world forced a renewed discussion on the universality of the marriage institution as one to basically establish legitimacy of children, and broader definitions were suggested (cf. Goodenough 1970). Leach, in an article from 1955, argues that the *Notes and Queries* definition is too limited and that the category of ‘marriage’ should include other types of purposes as well. Although Leach points out that ‘all universal definitions of marriage are vain’ (1968:105), he does not argue against use of the term, also for comparative purposes. Rather, he lists six ‘distinguishable classes of rights’8 and claims that a marriage might serve to establish legal parenthood, establishing what he calls monopoly in the spouses’ sexuality, give right to the spouse’s labour, and rights to property, provide a joint fund of property for the offspring of the marriage and establish a ‘socially significant’ relationship of affinity (1955:183). Thus, Leach argues that the term ‘marriage’ could be used to cover any institutions that give rise to any of these establishments (Holy 1996:50), emphasizing variability and the multiple significances of marriages. In such a perspective, polyandry must be included into analytical category of ‘marriage.’

Central to other debates on the status of polandry has been the question of paternity. Keesing, for instance, discusses the distinction between plural mating as

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8 His list actually includes ten points, however for the eight first, one is listed for the wife and one for the husband, that is, two points are listed for both legitimizing parenthood, monopoly in sexuality, for labour rights and property rights.
marriage, or in a less organised way, as ‘extension of rights to sexual access’ (Keesing 1976:284). In this evaluation, he, writes, one should note to which extent fatherhood is shared or not, and only ‘where fatherhood is assigned to two or more husbands, or is in some sense collective, does this actually involve plural marriage’ (ibid:284).

In addition to the more general turns in kinship studies, there is, I believe, a significant gender aspect to the anthropological analysis of polyandry, which has limited a broader comparative project. In the literature on plural marriage I have found an apparent lack of comparative interest between polygyny, on the one side, and polyandry, on the other. This, I believe, is founded in an underlying perception of polygyny and polyandry as fundamentally different, as both marriage types are based upon the subordination of women (see Fjeld and Sommerfelt 2004). There are also interesting discrepancies in the position of polygyny and polyandry in anthropological debates, where the former has been given a central position in a larger socio-political context particularly in the classical African ethnographies. In the structural functionalist perspectives, polygyny was analysed as significant for the perpetuation of the patrilineage, on the one side (Radcliffe-Brown 1950), and in the context of property distribution, seen for instance in Gluckman’s discussion on ‘the house-property complex’ (1950:195ff, see White and Burton 1988) on the other. Also, Marxists and neo-Marxists, such as Claude Meillassoux working in West Africa, have dealt with polygyny in a larger, mainly economic, context. To the contrary, the early literature on polyandry has to a large extent dealt with the definitional question rather than ethnographically describing the social, cultural and political context of such marriage forms. There is a particularly curious lack of earlier perspectives that enabled an analysis of polyandry and kinship (cf. Steward 1936; Mandelbaum 1936; Otterbein 1963; Berreman 1962; Goldstein 1971a, 1978a, 1978b; Prince Peter 1963; with the exception of Levine 1988).

The isolation of polyandry in kinship studies reflects what might be called an underlying Eurocentrism in anthropological kinship theories. In principle, polyandry does

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9 In studies of polygyny Marxists and neo-Marxists have also centred their analyses around control and access to production and reproduction.
not offer any more definitional problems than its conjugal opposite, polygyny. The unwillingness to define a union of one woman and multiple men as anything else than cisisbeism or plural mating, reflects, I believe, an androcentric bias of earlier anthropological theories. Such bias is based in the lack of recognition of women’s reproductive and sexual capacities to be separate, while this seems to be easily done in the case of men. Berreman makes a similar point when he writes that ‘We have tended to regard monogamy as expectable (even moral), polygyny as reasonable (even enviable) and polyandry as puzzling (even disturbing)’ (1980:378). An androcentric bias is evident in much of the literature on polyandry, for instance, Levi-Strauss’ claim that men’s natural disposition has ‘deeply polygynous tendencies’ and from that assumes that polyandry is practiced when there are no other alternatives (Levi-Strauss in Levine 1988:4). Such a focus on the ‘polyandry puzzle’ has led to broad generalizations and theorization based upon assumptions, rather than a production of ethnography presenting data on the arrangement and organization of polyandrous marriages (Leach 1955; cf. Prince Peter 1963; Majumdar 1962).

Interestingly, in Chinese sociology we find similar underlying perceptions regarding polyandry. Chinese sociology has been strongly influenced by a Marxist analytical frame characterised by a strong evolutionary motivation. Within these analytical frames polyandry has been interpreted as a derivative of group marriage characteristic of the ‘feudal stage’. More particularly, polyandry is seen as a survivor from a period when Tibet was a matriarchal society, and is believed to have remained unchanged due to the economic limitations and isolation of Tibet in the transformation period. Although concerning legal issues polygamy is treated as a whole, Chinese scholars clearly separate polygyny from polyandry in their analyses, and while the former is simply termed a backward tradition, the latter is in addition claimed to be ‘primitive, abnormal, immoral and backward’ (Ben Jiao 2001:6). This is particularly the conclusion

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10 Leach for instance suggests that polyandry reduces hostility between brothers that would accrue on the basis of the separate property interests held by their wives. He thus, correlates polyandry with women holding inherited property in their own right, i.e. with the institution of dowry (1955). This has been invalidated by many examples already.
of earlier studies. In recent Chinese publications also cited by Ben Jiao, however, similar notions prevail as polyandry is described as a backward and abnormal form of marriage that is also emotionally harmful on women. He quotes Wu:11

In polyandrous families, women’s status was embarrassing. They were physically ruined by primitive and barbarous habits and mentally tortured by the feudal patriarchal authority. They did not have any equal rights because each of their husbands could dally with her, abuse her, and even beat her (Ben Jiao 2001:9).

These studies also hold that polyandry is harmful for children, as Wu continues, claiming that a father will not pay attention to a child with whom he does not have established genetic connection. The negative moral connotations reflect, I believe, Chinese kinship ideology and practice of patrilineal genealogy and descent, and by that an androcentric bias among the researchers, as well as the public opinion in general, and the continued practice of polyandry in Tibet today is therefore under public attack both in the popular and scholarly press in China (ibid.).

Following the scholarly debates on the definition of marriage and the establishment of ‘marriage’ as a multi-purposed institution, polyandry has been readily accepted as a type of polygamy, and the term is now used in reference to any situation in which a woman is married to two or more men simultaneously. At the same time is there a continuous emphasis on the puzzlement of polyandrous practices in anthropology, in which the assumption is that men would not prefer polyandry in contexts where there are alternatives (Cassidy and Lee 1989). Underlying and implied in this contention is the idea that with economic improvements, polyandry would be abandoned as a viable form of marriage (see Goldstein 1987). In this thesis, I shall argue otherwise.

11 Quoted from Wu’s: Tibetan marriage and family in Tibet before the Democratic Reforms (in Chinese).
MATERIALISTIC OR CULTURAL APPROACHES

The exception to the lack of ethnographically based studies of polyandry is the work of Melvyn C. Goldstein, on the one hand, and Nancy Levine on the other. These both worked with Tibetan communities in Nepal and India. However, while Goldstein primarily analyses marriage in traditional Tibetan society based upon extended interviews with exiled Tibetans residing South India, Levine’s material stems from fieldwork conducted among Tibetan speaking Nyinbas in far Western Nepal. In the Himalaya literature, Goldstein and Levine have been found to represent two opposed perspectives on polyandry, often termed the materialist perspective versus cultural values perspective. I described these briefly here in order to place my own position, and refer to Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of the two positions.

Goldstein has argued strongly for a materialistic explanation model of fraternal polyandry in traditional Tibetan society (1971a, 1978a, 1987, 1989). Being the first to investigate the distribution of polyandry in Tibet, he described that polyandry was found to a large extent among the landholders and taxpayers, and not among the poorer farmers. Polyandry among the landholding taxpayers was, he argues, a strategy to secure the transfer of the land from one generation to the next by reducing the set of heirs to one only. As such, polyandry was not a unique marital practice in Tibet; rather, it was only one out of a number of other acceptable alternatives of what could be termed a ‘monomarital’ principle. Goldstein argues that the emphasis on securing the transfer of intact land from one generation from the next must be explained in relation to the meager ecological environment on the Tibetan plateau and the limited possibilities to expand arable fields. Moreover, in the traditional Tibetan political organisation the taxpayers carried heavy corvée labour obligations towards their landlords, and a concentration of male labour enabled a household to fulfil these obligations. Polyandry was thus both a response to scarce resources and to extensive labour demands within the political organisation. It was not, however, a cultural value as such, but rather a means to accomplish a highly valued goal, namely, to sustain a good standard of living (1971a,
1976, 1978b, 1990). In fact, he writes that as a marital form, monogamy was considered by Tibetans to be superior to polyandry (1971a:73).

Goldstein’s analysis of polyandry is very much an adoption of the local explanations, in which the material advantages of minimizing fragmentation of land across generations and maximizing male labour constitute the core of the analysis. His perspectives are also in line with the dominant household theories in anthropology in the 1970s, in which a household was seen as a strategic unit that maximized its material interests by employing planned strategies, and where the goal of the household was seen to be the increase of material resources (Waldrop 1997; see Goldstein 1978a in particular). In his review of Levine’s monograph *The Dynamics of Polyandry* in 1990, Goldstein slightly reformulates his conclusions on polyandry to emphasize the social aspects of the economic gains, a rephrasing that could be seen as an attempt to adjust his theories to current trends in anthropology. However, already in 1978 he concluded that polyandry in Tibet is oriented ‘towards the social consequences of economic productivity, rather than towards subsistence per se’ (1978b:329), an emphasis that, I hold, has remained in the background of his writings on polyandry. I shall return to this argument in Chapter Three.

While Goldstein unfortunately has not yet published a monograph on family and marriage systems in Tibet, Levine has written one of the most comprehensive studies of Tibetan-speaking groups in the Himalayas (1988). The *Dynamics of Polyandry* describes in great detail social, cultural and political aspects of Nyinba villages, within which polyandrous marriages are central to the social organisation. Levine defines her project to be a criticism of materialistic approaches to polyandry, out of which Goldstein must be identified to be her main opponent, and argues that the importance of polyandry must be found ‘beyond the economics of it’ (ibid.:159). She points out that there must be a cultural component that informs Tibetans to choose polyandry, rather than other

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12 Goldstein writes in a footnote to his article on adjudication and partition in Tibetan families (1978a:206) that he is preparing a monograph on ‘kinship, stratification and politics in Tibet.’ This has unfortunately never appeared. The lack of extensive empirical descriptions in Goldstein’s early works is, I believe, a disadvantage when discussing new perspectives in the light of recent empirical developments.
strategies such as primogeniture; this is chosen by their Nepali neighbours, for instance, when living in an environment of scarce resources and having a wish to keep the estate intact from one generation to the next. Although Levine recognises the economic advantages of polyandry, her emphasis is placed on the cultural value of such a marital form. Most importantly, this is because of its relation to ancestors’ practices, on the one hand, and fraternal solidarity, on the other. Levine argues for a broader perspective in the analysis of polyandry, in which kinship, political and symbolic correlates should be included (1988:159).

It is my contention that there is a constructed difference between Goldstein and Levine’s perspectives, and in this thesis I shall develop analyses that reflect both materialistic and cultural orientations. My ambition is to develop a framework that enables an analysis of what Goldstein writes are the ‘social consequences’ of polyandry as practiced in Tibet today, and I shall do so by including what Levine states to be significant, namely kinship, political and symbolic correlates. Hence, I agree with Goldstein’s conclusions on the importance of the social consequences of polyandry; however, I shall argue that in order to grasp these social implications we need to institute analytical tools that in a better way enable a broader perspective than the elements of productivity. I shall consider alternative ways to conceptualise and analyse polyandry and develop a perspective that includes both polyandry as an economic strategy and also suggests a broader socio-symbolic perspective within which the establishment of Houses (as moral persons) constitutes the nucleus part of the argument.

CONTEXUALIZING THE PERSPECTIVES
Based in the house-debate within anthropology, the analytical perspectives of this thesis are inspired by structuralist orientations. The limitations of structuralism, and particularly the work by Levi-Strauss defined as a structural linguistics-based project that aims to find (mental) structures underlying social and cultural processes and patterns, are well known today. Most significant here is the criticism pointing to the overemphasis on intellectual aspects of culture, and the insufficient attention given to cultural and social practices. In
this thesis, the analytical concepts to be employed, e.g. House, encompassment, and moral networks of exchange, are taken from structuralist traditions, such as the work of Levi-Strauss and to a certain extent Dumont and Mauss. These concepts are found to enable an analysis that emphasises the social and symbolic aspects of inter- and intra-House relations. I have no intentions of developing a perspective that advocates predefined structures characteristic to earlier structuralist approaches; rather, my aim is to balance these approaches and concepts with a fundamental view that social relations and communities are constituted by practice and interaction.

My perspectives are thus concurrent with those represented in the recent anthropological literature on the house that seeks to discuss ‘beyond Lévi-Strauss’. The value of Lévi-Strauss’s ideas is not primarily found in his characterisation of the new social typology ‘house societies’, in fact such reification of a social organisation is highly problematic, but rather in the later developments of the house as a ‘heurestic device that opens up a new approach to the study of kinship’ (Hsu 1998:68; see also Carsten 2004). Further, new perspectives on the house serve as a starting point for a more holistic anthropology of architecture alongside the anthropology of the body, where the house, like the body, is taken as a prime agent of socialization (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:2). In Sharlung, I argue, we need to look at the conceptual constitution of the House as a social category and interpret how this social category is strengthened by the arrangement of polyandry. Houses constitute relatives; they manifest kinship and relatedness. Further, they represent the social standing of its members.

My overall interests here derive from my anthropological training, as well as a long-term following of Tibet studies. From an anthropological point of view my interest in polyandry is founded in its ethnographic rareness as a marriage form, the seemingly little importance given locally to biological relatedness and the emphasis on the pater rather than the genitor within such marriage systems, as well as the co-existence of various marriage forms. Plural marriages, and particular polyandry, challenge underlying Eurocentric ideas of anthropological marriage and kinship theories already pointed out by Needham (1973) and Rivière (1973) and later re-emphasised by Schneider (1984), and
constitute, I believe, an interesting case for a study of relatedness. These are integral parts of the anthropological subject, well illustrated by the famous statement by Fox that: ‘Kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy or nudity is to art’ (1967:10). Marriage is the web of reproduction, that is, human and social reproduction, and as such, it provides an eminent intake to the study of cultural and social life.

From a Tibetan studies point of view, polyandry is neither unknown nor rare, and my Tibet interest does not lie primarily in the existence of polyandry as such. On the contrary, I find polyandry interesting as an entrance to the study of changing social conditions and cultural practices in Tibet after the Chinese take-over. During these last fifty years, Tibet has undergone massive outside pressure not only on socio-economic organisation but also on cultural matters, most clearly seen in religious oppression and limitations in the use, and teaching, of the Tibetan language. During this period all citizens of Tibet have in some way or another had their lives altered by the intervention of the Chinese government. Underlying my long-term involvement in Tibet is an interest in local (Tibetan) responses to Chinese policies, that is, in the dynamics between state decisions, regional implementations and local implications.

THE CHAPTERS
The thesis starts by setting the ethnographic scene and introducing the field site where the material was produced, namely Sharlung Village in Panam County. There are some very particular methodological implications of conducting fieldwork within the TAR, and these are discussed in the second part of Chapter One.

Central to the study of polyandry is land tenure. Chapter Two gives a historical context within which my informants live and act. I start by briefly describing the political history of Tibet since the Chinese takeover in 1950. By describing the history of social reforms, I point to the significance that these have had for the local organisation of material and social life. Of particular importance is, I argue, the various loci for economic co-operation found in the individual work-point system of the collective era and the household-based organisation in the period following de-collectivization in the 1980s.
Chapter Three introduces the facts and the figures of the increased occurrence of polyandry as found in Sharlung and its neighbouring villages. By a narrative told by Tashi-la, my host in the Tagrab House, motivations and expectations of polyandrous marriages shall become apparent. The rise of the Tagrab House is a typical history in agricultural Panam today, as they have transformed themselves from a nuclear family of landless labourer (yokpo) status to a House similar to the traditional landowners (trelpa). The chapter presents the local explanation models of polyandry, and discusses the material nature of these.

Chapter Four sets out to describe the various categories of domestic groups in Sharlung, as well their constitutive character. I classify these into two main categories that I have termed ‘named Houses’ and ‘unnamed houses’. Throughout the chapter I develop a House perspective, by discussing the analytical potential of the terms household and House, and relating these to the hegemonic perspectives on Tibetan polyandry.

Chapter Five concerns the pathways to membership into a Tibetan House, and discusses the various implications of filiation, marriage and adoption. It sets out to critically discuss the Tibetan notion of ‘lineages’ (gyud) and the inter-connections of descent and residence, and emphasizes the contextual relevance of descent.

Having entered the house, Chapter Six focuses on the internal relations between co-husbands of polyandrous marriages. Central to the organisation of polyandrous co-partnership is relative age, seen in the distribution of authority and leadership, as well as emotional closeness. The dominant position of the eldest brother is not only found in the practicalities of household leadership, but also has a symbolic element in that he is seen to encompass the group of brothers, and by doing so, comes to stand for the House as a socio-symbolic unit.

Chapter Seven elaborates on gender aspects of a social organisation with high occurrence of polyandry, emphasising women’s perspectives on such marriage constellations as well as the various positions of the in-marrying wives in polyandrous Houses. By emphasizing the centrality and peripherality of statuses in a marriage and in a
House the processual aspect of the in-married wife’s lifecycle, where her status and position change dramatically throughout married life, becomes apparent. The chapter intends to show that in polyandrous marriages the in-married wives are both fundamentally subordinated at the same time as their position as married to more than one husband provides a potential for an individual consolidation of a strong position in the marriage and in the House organisation.

Chapter Eight deals with the physical building hosting the co-resident group, and focuses particularly on the spatio-symbolic organisation of its interior. Describing the microcosmic understanding of the Tibetan house in which the house not only represent a cosmological order but also finds it place within it, I discuss the various ways to protect and reinforce its significant external borders.

While the previous chapters have dealt mainly with the autonomy of the individual Houses, Chapter Nine focuses on the interdependence of these. It describes the networks in which individuals and Houses constitute parts, and discusses the processes of inclusion and exclusion from these. It shall become clear that ‘caste’ (rig) is a significant criterion for the participation in inter-House networks based on the morality of mutuality and reciprocity. Hence, this last chapter deals with social differentiation after the de-collectivization, by focusing on the development of new relations of dependency and patronage among the farmers and its connection to marriage.

The Epilogue closes the thesis by briefly commenting upon the parallel processes inherent in the title The Rise of the Polyandrous House.
Map 2: The 18 counties of Shigatse Prefecture. Panam is in the south east of the prefecture, just north of Yadong and east of Sakya (Map from The Panam Integrated Rural Development Project).
‘You can stay with us! We have a big house with many people. It is better for you. The public house is not clean. Please come! My father is away but I will ask him later, but please come!’ A young nun was smiling a beautifully open and friendly smile, inviting us to her house without her father’s consent. We were standing in one of the narrow paths leading from one house to the next; she was on her way home, and we were on our way back to our newly established shelter. She pointed to a white house behind the chörten and repeated ‘Come!’ Her offer seemed very tempting indeed, not so much because of the ‘public’ house’s meagre standards, but more because of my wish to participate in the daily life in a local household. We thanked her for the generous offer and said that we would very much enjoy staying with her family, but that we would have to ask the village leader, who, we said, ‘is currently away.’ She laughed again and explained: ‘But my father is the village leader! I will ask him upon his return tomorrow.’ As we walked back to our small house, Samdrup said: ‘We will move tomorrow.’ And so it went.
We had left Lhasa three days earlier. It was with a particular sense of anxiety, collapsed into excitement, that we drove our loaded land-cruiser out of the city, heading for Panam County; Samdrup, my co-researcher, Runa, my daughter, Pema, her nanny, and myself. None of us had been in this area of Tsang before, and, although I had prepared myself with lengthy talks with people from Tsang now living in Lhasa, I was uncertain of what to expect upon arrival. Samdrup, being from a village in Lhoka, and Pema, being from a village in Dulong, were looking forward to staying in the countryside for four months, however, not really knowing what their roles would be during this period.

As my main interest initially had been social mobility, with an emphasis on hereditary status in general and low ranked groups (menrig) in particular, I had chosen this valley because of people I had met and some remarks I had heard during my previous stays in Lhasa. While eating and drinking in small Tibetan restaurants, I encountered musicians who often come to play their dramnye, performing for a small fee. These are generically looked upon with some disdain and are most often referred to as beggars (longkhen) rather than musicians. My experience when meeting these people was that many were travelling beggars from Tsang, and, it seemed, often from three villages in Panam. Thus, my interest in Panam arose. Later, in Lhasa, when asking a friend from Tsang if he had heard about villages hosting menrig people, he laughed and said: ‘You have obviously not heard the saying: Sachung is purely a blacksmith place. Bargang is purely a butchers place.’

Armed with travel and research permits provided by the Tibet University, as well as an exchange agreement signed by the TAR regional government, Samdrup and I approached the Panam County administration building. Other researchers travelling in rural Tibet have often ended up staying in the county seat due to administrative

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13 ‘Sachung’ mgar bai mgar tshang yin. ‘Bargang’ bshas bai bshas tshang yin. (These are fictive villages names).
regulations, and it was our aim at least to be able to stay in the township centre and, hopefully, in a village. Samdrup explained our purpose for the stay to be a study of women in low ranked families, particularly in Sachung. After looking through all the permits, agreements, and letters of recommendations from Lhasa, the leader asked me if Norway is a part of the European Union. This puzzled me for a moment, but as I answered that ‘No, we are not’ and I saw the contented smile on his face, I realised that there might have been some controversy concerning a large EU development program in parts of the county. Norway’s non-membership in the EU seem to have settled the question, and the leader made his phone call to the township leaders, informing them about our arrival, and making sure that they would provide us with all necessities.

Driving on the dirt road from the county seat to Kyiling Township, we passed farming villages with people inspecting the ripe fields of barley and wheat. It was the beginning of harvest, and the narrow valley seemed a fertile and prosperous place. After an hour of driving we passed a village with more houses, and a monastery rising above them, and it seemed this was the famous Daching monastery, one of the few that was not destroyed during the 1960s and 1970s. Some time after Daching, we slowly passed a small village were a group of older people were sitting by the chörten, talking and spinning wool. The place had a special feel to it, and Samdrup and I agreed that it seemed a peaceful place.

Arriving in the township, three local leaders greeted us. Because the issues related to low ranked artisans (menrig) are considered sensitive in Lhasa, we agreed to limit our expressed interests to be local history and customs; however, we also mentioned metal work. Researchers had stayed in the township before, both Tibetans (see Ben Jiao 2001) and foreigners (Goldstein and, particularly, Beall, who was based there for a study of

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14 Daching gompa was used as a storeroom for grain and other agricultural produce and controlled by the army during the upheavals of 1960 to the end of 1970s, hence the building was not destroyed. The monasteries used as storage space for the military represent the few surviving monastic buildings in Tibet.
15 Menrig issues are not politically sensitive; on the contrary, it is one of the issues presented by the Chinese government as evidence of what they see to be the feudal and backwards Tibetan society. However, among Tibetans it is an issue that one needs to approach with some caution, especially because it is impossible to recognise menrig from others, and it is considered a great offence to directly mention menrig status to those it concerns (Fjeld 2005:47-49).
high altitude physicality, see Goldstein et.al. 2003 and Beall et al. 2004), and little explanation was needed to inform the leaders. Wöser, one of the leaders, agreed to my wish to stay in one of the villages and suggested that we settle in Daching monastery, as there were extra rooms that could host all of us there. Also, he said, ‘Daching is an important monastery in the local history and perhaps important for your work also.’ We agreed. However, while driving back the bumpy road, I realised that by staying in a monastery we would be located away from lay families, who were intended to be the key informants. Upon reaching the small village that we had passed earlier where people were still sitting, spinning wool by the chörten, Wöser explained that in this village there were many old people who knew about history, and they had a very good village leader. Still hoping to be able to stay in a local household, I asked: ‘How about this place – would it be possible for us to stay here?’ The driver slowed down, and Wöser, looking a little confused, said that he didn’t know if there was a proper house for us, but that if we wanted, we could perhaps stay in the ‘public house’ (chikhang). The small village was Sharlung, the main location in this thesis, an average village on the agricultural plains of Tsang.

Accepting the invitation of the village leader’s daughter, we moved in to the Tagrab house. As we waved farewell to the driver, neighbours and other villagers came to help carry our things into the new house. Inside, the nama (the in-married wife of the House) and achung (her youngest husband) physically and ritually cleaned and prepared our room by sweeping the dirt floor, sprinkling some water, and blowing the smoke of incense into all corners. By the evening we had settled in; Pema, my daughter and myself were in the main room, while Samdrup, with a thrill, accepted the offer to stay in the chökhang (room for religion), the room otherwise reserved for visiting monks and nuns. Because Samdrup is a scholar of Buddhism, the grandmother and the nun of the family argued that his proper place would be the chökhang. This arrangement was ideal for all involved parties, and it became the starting point of what I believe is a life-long friendship with the Tagrab family.
THE PANAM VALLEY

Panam Valley is located in Tsang, between and to the south of Shigatse and Gyantse towns. The origin of its name can be traced back to two Buddhist scholars of the 13th century, called Badra Nyima Drapa and Nalang Dorje Denshong, who practiced in this area; their two names are combined Ba Na which with time has turned into Benam (spelled pa nams, but pronounced locally as be na) (Ben Jiao 2001:34). Panam is a central area for grain production in Tibet, located between the Himalaya and the river Tsangpo. It is a mountainous river valley, covering some 120 km from north to south, and varying in width from the narrow and high-altitude pastoral areas in the north to wider areas of well-irrigated land in the south. In these lower southern areas, the five main grains are produced - barley, wheat, buckwheat, peas and rapeseed - as well as potatoes and radishes. Due to the harsh climate, the fields only produce a harvest once a year.

The climate in Panam is semi-humid/semi-arid, with a yearly average temperature of 6 degrees C. However, as in the whole Tibetan plateau, the temperature varies greatly, from 26 degrees in July to minus 26 in January. More problematic is the uneven distribution of rainfall in the valley, where 70 per cent of the rain occurs in July and August, leading to an unfortunate combination of drought in the early growing season and floods in the late season (Ben Jiao 2001:30-34).

Villagers are particularly concerned with floods, not only because it seems that these have occurred more frequently the last years, but also because the memory of the Gyantse area, hit by a natural disaster in the form of a flood in 1954, is still very strong. At that time, the Nyangchu River overflowed its banks, leading to the destruction of 20 villages in Panam, killing some 20 people and 1200 animals, as well as damaging huge areas of farmed land (ibid.). According to the current township leaders in Kyiling, there is some flooding every year; however, particularly serious floods harmed many villages in the township in 1998, 1999, and 2000. In some villages whole areas of fields were completely washed away, leading to the impoverishment of these smaller high altitude places in particular. When floods occur, the local county government might assist villagers with some equipment to make dams, but they do not provide food relief. In
2000, however, the Swiss Red Cross provided some butter to the hardest hit places, an event still remembered with great appreciation.

Panam County (xang) is an administrative unit under Shigatse prefecture, including eleven townships (xiang), out of which Kyiling xiang is an average place both in terms of scale, population and economic position. According to the xiang leaders, in 2001 there were 4512 people in the township, and these belonged to 595 households. Kyiling xiang consists of eleven administrative villages (cun) varying in size and basis for livelihood. Three of the villages are located in the narrow upper valley, located at some 5,000 meters, where there is little arable land or access to irrigation, leading the villagers to engage as samadrok, semi-pastoralists.

According to TAR Statistical Yearbook 2002, the average annual income in rural Tibet (in 2001) was 1,325 yuan (Yeh 2004:127); considerably lower than in urban Tibet and China in general. Panam is ranked number seventeen of the seventy-three counties in TAR, being one of the better-off counties (Goldstein et a. 2003). However, Kyiling is, according to the township leaders, one of the poorest in the County, and most of the samadrok villagers in these upper areas are very poor, i.e. they depend on help from the local government in order to provide sufficient food throughout the year. In the lower parts of Panam, at around 4,100 meters, people are agriculturalists, holding only limited numbers of livestock. Here most people are self-sufficient, but only to a limited degree engage in market activities. Goldstein et al. (2003) conclude that de-collectivization clearly has brought improvement in the livelihood and higher standard of living of rural Tibetans. However, they also point out that in this process a new stratum of poor households has arisen. This is true also for the Panam Valley.

Educational levels in Panam vary, but are in general low. This corresponds with the situation in TAR in general, where the illiteracy (of persons above 15 years old) rates increased from 43 percent in 2002 to 55 percent in 2003 (TibetInfoNet 2005). There are six primary schools (grades 1-3) in Panam, one secondary school (grades 1-6) in the township centre, and one middle school in the county seat. During the last years, the local government has implemented mandatory school enrolment for children, fining those
households that do not obey. Still, in the villages around Sharlung only very few children attend more than primary school. In addition to public schools, local monasteries and nunneries provide educational opportunities. Daching gompa with fourteen monks is the only monastery in the township; however, there are three smaller nunneries that host a total of sixty-seven nuns.

SHARLUNG VILLAGE

Sharlung is located in the lower part of the township, at about 4,200 meters above sea level, in a narrow part of the valley with limited arable land and irrigation options. Despite the claimed intentions from the regional government to introduce electricity to the villages, Sharlung has so far been excluded from the installation process. Wire-carrying constructions have been built from the county seat, but, according to the township leaders, a lack of wires caused the project to come to a halt between Sachung and Sharlung. For light, small homemade kerosene lamps are hung by the pillar in the main kitchen/livingroom (tabtshang) and carried around where needed, while those who have batteries also use torches bought at the market. As in most places in the Tibetan plateau, wood is limited; hence, people use iron stoves fuelled primarily by dried dung from cattle, and sheep and goats for cooking. There are obviously no televisions in the village, but many listen to the radio. Tibetan news programmes broadcasted from abroad are popular, in addition to music programmes sent in Tibetan, Hindi and Chinese. People’s preference for Indian radio programmes reflects a general interest in, and notion of, closeness to India and Nepal, rather than to China.

People in Sharlung actively relate to their immediate neighbouring villages within the township, but also to other close valleys to the south and to the north. People from these areas are related primarily through marriage, but also through common use of ritual and religious resources.

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16 In Sachung, each household has paid 800 yuan for the preparation of electricity introduction; however, by 2004, people were complaining that there had been a complete halt in the process by the last two years with no indications of continuance.
In 2002, Sharlung village consisted of forty-four households counting some 350 individuals. These numbers are obviously under constant flux, not only reflecting demographic processes of birth and death, marriages and divorces, but also household demise and new establishments. Most households consist of three generations sharing a house and cooperating economically. However, there are great variations in the constellations of people constituting a household, including single men and women with or without children, monogamous couples with children and monogamous couples with children and parents, as well as polyandrous married partners with children, and polyandrous partners with parents and children. Walking through the village one can guess the constellations of people by looking at the house, for not only does architecture reflect wealth and rank, it also indicates marriage forms. While I have found that polyandry is associated with poverty in nomadic areas such as Nagchu, in Sharlung, it is generically looked upon as a sign of prosperity and wealth. The relation between polyandry and prosperity is an underlying theme throughout this thesis.

**Significant places in Sharlung**

Walking around Sharlung, an outsider receives a rather hostile impression of the surrounding landscape, with a continuum of brown, and only a few small, designated areas where trees grow. As with most of the Tibetan land one wonders how it is possible to produce and reproduce in such a barren and dry place. The mountains surrounding the village are to a varying extent covered with stones in the lower parts, while the upper parts give life to small rough bushes serving to feed the animals, as well as providing juniper for incense and plants for medicinal production. The landscape is shaped by the attempts to irrigate, seen in channels and dams, and hence control the yearly floods that potentially destroy the fields. As Samdrup reminded me: ‘Considering how difficult life is here, it is not surprising that people make offerings to protectors of this place.’ And indeed, many activities concern protection of the village community’s land, of particular households, of born and unborn individuals, of animals, as well as of spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Panchen Rinpoche. Without going into the complex sacred
geography of Sharlung and its neighbours here,\textsuperscript{17} some main places in the landscape in which the villagers conceptualise their being-in-the-world shall be extracted. These include spaces of sacred and profane characters and reflect the villagers’ perceptions of blurred boundaries between these two categories.

Upon the question of where the most important place in Sharlung is, people answer with very few exceptions that it is locality of the \textit{yul lha}, the god of the place. He resides half way up the mountain slope, to the northern side of the village, and is visible by the shrine crowded by prayer flags and offerings (see photo 1). Much has been written on \textit{yul lha} in Tibetan culture and communities. They are classified as one of the five gods of this world (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956), often described as sacred mountains or mountain deities, a terminology causing ‘a certain amount of confusion’ (Dollfus 1996:3). I follow Karmay’s distinction made between cults of mountains as the residence of a local god, on the one side, and cults of holy mountains (\textit{neri}) which have regional importance as centres of pilgrimage, on the other (1996). In Sharlung, however, the \textit{yul lha} is perceived to be a protecting deity that is the owner and the protector of the land used by the village community only.\textsuperscript{18} Although being associated with the mountain where the deity’s shrine is located, this mountain is not perceived as a \textit{neri} (a mountain power place often used to describe mountain pilgrimage sites). A \textit{yul lha} can, if well inclined, protect individuals, families, households, and villages from malevolent spirits, but they can also intentionally cause harm by ‘unleashing the spirits on someone with whom they are displeased’ (Samuel 1993:189). The ambivalence and power of a \textit{yul lha} is reflected in numerous proverbs. Samdrup, my co-researcher, told a proverb that he had heard in Lhoka: ‘If benefit is brought to the land, it is a \textit{yul lha}. If harm is brought to the land, it is a ghost (bad spirit).’\textsuperscript{19}

The \textit{yul lha} of Sharlung is called Pho \textit{yul lha}, and he is characterised, as many other \textit{yul lhas} in the Tibetan communities (cf. Schicklgruber 1998), as a mythological

\textsuperscript{17} See Chapter Seven for more details on cosmological organisations.

\textsuperscript{18} Karmay argues that the origin of the concept of \textit{yul lha} deity was connected with the territorial divisions of the early clanic society (1996:67).

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{yul la phan na yul lha yin} / \textit{yul la gnod na yong ‘dre yin}. 
hero in the shape of a traditional warrior. As a warrior he is not omni-benevolent, but can also cause harm, particularly in the forms of infertility of the land and hail storms, depending upon the offerings made to him.\textsuperscript{20} Hence, many village activities concern the state of the \textit{yul lha}. Making offerings to the \textit{yul lha} is organised in much the same way as communal tasks, i.e. as public work (\textit{chile}). Because of the \textit{yul lha}’s power over the territory and fields (\textit{sa}) in general, his condition is a public concern, and all households are obliged to make offerings to him. However, the Shamshar House located just below the \textit{yul lha} shrine is perceived to hold a fundamental responsibility for his well-being due to their particular historical relation (see Chapter Four for details on the Shamshar - \textit{yul lha} relation).

Just above the \textit{yul lha} is the location of the newly rebuilt nunnery. When I arrived in Sharlung the first time in 2002, the nunnery consisted of one main house constituted of the assembly hall, a combined kitchen and sleeping place, as well as two storerooms. In addition, there were three old caves used for meditation that also served as extra sleeping space. When I returned in 2004 the nuns had just completed the building of living quarters (\textit{shak}) for the thirty-three nuns, providing new opportunities for the nuns to spend more time in the nunnery. The nunnery is the biggest building around Sharlung, and it is a place of importance to the villagers, not only as a ritual and religious place of increasing influence, but also because almost half of the households in Sharlung have sent a daughter to be ordained and be a member in the nunnery. It has been part of Sharlung history for as long as villagers can remember. Although the nuns throughout the centuries have played a less significant role in rural ritual life than the monks from Daching gompa in the neighbouring village, today the rebuilt nunnery is a place to which villagers refer with pride.

A little to the east of nunnery is the location of the sky burial site (\textit{todrö}) of Sharlung village. It is approached via the nunnery and is a significant place for the

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Pho yul lha} should be separated from another protector called \textit{pho lha}, the god of men, who resides in a northern part of the valley, outside Sharlung, and who is perceived to be a \textit{lha} for several of the patrilineages in the village. Making offerings to the \textit{pho lha} is one of the very few occasions where membership into a patrilineage is made relevant as a criterion for group membership, as will be discussed at some length in Chapter Four.
villagers, not only because of its inherent power but because it is the place of family members’ burial. The place consists of a flat spot on the ground, with stones and an enclosure made from three low walls where the monks that lead the ritual sit and recite the religious texts. The sky burial site is not visited outside ritual practices, but it is still an important ritual place.

While the nunnery, the yul lha and the sky burial site are located on the northern mountain slope to the eastern side of Sharlung, the centre of the village is perceived to be the location of the chörten. Meaning ‘the basic of offerings,’ this stone building represents an offering, not only from those erecting it but also from the whole community. Circumambulating the chörten is a daily activity, performed particularly by the elderly population and by people in passing. Close to the chörten is also the village school, a small building with three classrooms, one office, and the living quarters of the two visiting teachers. The schoolyard is fenced in a way similar to the neighbouring houses, and in half of the yard have the teachers planted potatoes and labu (turnips) adding to the food they buy in the county market. To the west of the school is the other public house in the village, actually called chikhang, the public house. The chikhang is the location of the mandatory village meetings, and the yard around it is the site of the newly established greenhouse.

Elderly villagers often sit and chat in front of the chörten, swinging their prayer wheels and drinking their buttered tea, and more often, chang. Here they can observe the children playing on their way to school and, most importantly, greet people that pass on the road from Panam County seat to the higher parts of the township, and back. Occasionally, pastoralists from the upper villages stop on their way to the market in Panam, ready to barter meat and wool with grain, and friendly exchanges are made either in goods or just in words. Cars and trucks pass the village perhaps once a day, if at all, most of the times bringing the township leaders to the county seat or back, or providing material to some construction work further up in the valley. Most often people pass on their tractors or horse carts, travelling to the market in Panam, to seek medical help for someone in the family, to repair something broken or simply to visit relatives or friends.
along the way. Often the tractors that pass are filled with drunken people travelling from one place to another; as is the local custom, they have stopped along the way to visit and drink chang with friends.

The people and their houses
In Sharlung, people are part of the house where they live in ways that are significant beyond a mere place of residence, i.e. they identify themselves and are identified by others with a named residence group. Hence, the houses are of great socio-symbolic meaning. A house represents the centre of sociality; it is the location of significant relations, and it is the locus of belonging. It is also the prime symbol of wealth and social position in the village, and the building and maintenance of the house is of great concern to the villagers. Houses, as physical buildings in the landscape, are also signs of orientation located in spaces with their own history and social significance.

Arriving in Sharlung, the beautifully decorated houses mark a colourful contrast to the brown and barren soil, giving an inviting layer to the valley. The village stretches out one kilometre in length and 500 meters in width – it is a small place. Agricultural areas of Tibet are recognised for their characteristic architecture, with two- or three storey houses built from hand-made dried earth bricks and only limited amounts of wood. Most houses are surrounded by a courtyard, in which farming implements and other valuables, such as a tractor or a horse are stored. While the courtyard is the public space of a house and people come and go freely, visitors would not enter the house itself without invitation. These houses are found throughout the Tibetan ethnographic region and vary only to a limited extent, depending on access to wood and general wealth (cf. Amundsen 2003; Toffin 1991, see Chapter Eight).

In Sharlung, the houses are clustered together into nine named areas, where three of these are said to be the important places, i.e. places of ritual significance. The localization of the houses depends upon astrological and supernatural estimates, as well as access to appropriate land. Although few of the houses are relocated upon rebuilding,
it is said that houses might be moved within the whole village area. However, in the recent history of Sharlung, houses have been moved, divided and rebuilt on several occasions. The land reform in 1981 divided all the land of the village: the fertile, non-fertile, and the grassland. This means that every household has access to plots of land of various qualities (see Chapter Two). The plots of one household were spread throughout the village, and, villagers say, new areas were named to help orientation around the new fields. These names were based on the houses already located in the area and herald the traditional social divisions of Sharlung.

Sharlung Cherup is always mentioned first when talking about named areas in Sharlung. It is the location of four houses today, including two influential Houses, the Sharlung and the Dagpo House. These were both landholders, and the latter was a representative (genbo) of the local government in the traditional society (i.e. the pre-1959 period). The second area called Lungko Nyikar is of recent origin, although the houses located there have long histories. Old people claim that this name was not used as a general term before the land division, but rather it simply referred to the two houses located there, namely Lungko and Nyikar. Today Lungko Nyikar, when said together, includes a total of six houses (Lungko, Nyikar, Lungtse, Namkyi, Menshō and Tarlho). Both Sharlung Cherup and Lungko Nyikar are the locations of the former economic and political authority in Sharlung, the landholders (trelpa) from which the rest of the villagers found their work (or were bound to work for). Before 1959, these two areas were markedly wealthier than the rest of the village, and their Houses represented this wealth. Today, Lungko Nyikar is also the location of Tashi of Lungtse, the local diviner (moba). He is of ngagpa lineage, but because his father died when he was very young he never learned the moba skills from him. Finding an interest in divination, Tashi bought the relevant pechas from the market in Lhasa and studied on his own and in his father’s ngagpa college outside Shigatse, until he had a ‘fair knowledge,’ as he says. His services are very popular among his co-villagers, and every week he rolls the dice go provide

\[21\] In addition to the astrological consideration, recent developments, such as the installation of public water taps, inform and motivate the location for the rebuilding of houses.
answers to questions on, among other things, health, fertility, and protection against harm.

It was not only socio-economic position which gave rise to influence in terms of naming in the village, and the third area defined as an important place today, with a name being more than a territorial term, is the Shamshar area. Shamshar hosts three houses today: the Shamshar, Shamlho and Lakyi. While Lakyi is a recent building, Shamlho is a part of the Shamshar house, which has also rather recently been established as a corporate unit on its own. Shamshar is also an old trelpa House, which, as opposed to Dagpo and Lungko, did not have numerous fields and, thus, did not employ workers (yokpo). However, Shamshar has a special relation with the yul lha, the place protector of the village, and has the overall responsibility of maintaining and securing the work of the yul lha. Thus, the significant places in Sharlung reflect both socio-economic divisions in a historical perspective, as well as religious aspects of the landscape and sacred places.\(^{22}\)

The fourth area, called Norchen, is the location of two houses. The one called Norchen is the natal home of several more recently established households resulting from a polyandrous divorce in 1960s, where one remaining man from the groups of brothers has remained and lives with his family of three generations. The neighbouring house is deserted. Lampo is one of the influential Houses in the village history and after a family dispute everybody moved, leaving only the House protector.

Most of the houses (twenty-one in number) are located in the fifth area, Kangdo. Kangdo is the centre of the village, containing the public places: the chörten, the school, the public house (the Party house) and the road. Kangdo is not defined as being a particularly prosperous or important area, but neither is it seen to be insignificant; rather, it is neutral and is referred to as being ‘just a place.’ The fact that most houses are located there relates to the low quality of the land which makes the area better suited for building than raising crops. Similarly, the remaining four areas can be seen as place names of

\(^{22}\) I shall return to the various categories of Houses and the social distribution of these as found in Sharlung in Chapter Four.
orientating character that host a variety of houses, but they do not connote meaning beyond practicality.

At first sight, most houses in Sharlung appear rather similar. They are two storeys, square buildings of various sizes, whitewashed with black frames and bright paint above the door and the small windows. The roofs are flat, some also framed with black paint, some also with visible red or white shrines, others showing only the dirt bricks. Seen from the outside, the houses give a fortress-like impression. The sloping, massive walls have only few windows, and these are located in the first floor. There are no visible outdoor areas around the house. A tall stonewall frames the courtyard and reinforces the impression of isolation (see Chapter Eight for details).

The fortress-architecture is common to all the buildings in the valley, while the variations are found in craftsmanship, size, in the (lack of) whiteness of the walls, the style of the roof, and importantly, the presence of shrines visible on the roofs. When one is walking around in the village, economic differences are readily apparent by looking at the houses. While perceptions of the ‘ideal’ house are shared among villagers in Sharlung, most often illustrated by the large Dagpo house, many of the poorer houses are small, uncompleted and unpainted, and the roof only cover some of the rooms. These small places are often the houses of monogamously married couples with little land and limited economic recourses (see Chapter Four).

In Sharlung today, there are many large houses, and most of these have been rebuilt during the last twenty years. There is a great interest expressed in building and rebuilding houses in Sharlung. Villagers say that it is one of the most important and fulfilling activities in life because, as one young man so clearly formulated it: ‘A beautiful house is your window’ (meaning that the house reflects the people living there). He said this while laughing and pointing at his own little house, with half a roof and no paint. The house is obviously an indicator of material wealth (building a new house is indeed costly), but it is also of great socio-symbolic importance.

Before I turn to the social and symbolic aspects of Houses, I shall discuss in some detail the methodological challenges and limitations of a combined interest in daily life
within and among people and houses, on the one side, and the aim to produce ethnography from a village in the contemporary Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), on the other.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPATION
The intention of this study has been to explore the social organization of daily life of Tibetans in rural areas of TAR today, a project with some methodological challenges. These challenges are primarily related to the contemporary political context in Tibet and the strict individual control activated by the Chinese government. Below I shall discuss the possibilities of producing ethnography from TAR, as well as describing in some detail the technicalities of this particular project.

During the past ten years I have conducted nineteen months of fieldwork in Tibet, mostly in Lhasa and Sharlung, but also in Shigatse and a shorter (two weeks) trip to Nagchu. Further, I have spent some six months in Kathmandu and one month in Dharamsala, focusing on language and library studies. However, the ethnographic material presented in this thesis is based primarily on three field trips: the first from September to December 2001 in Nagchu, Shigatse and Dharamsala; the second from August to December in 2002 in Sharlung; and the third in July 2004, also in Sharlung. I have to a lesser extent used material gained from the previous field trips to Lhasa in 1995-96 and 1997. The Lhasa material is not given a central part of the ethnography, but is utilised more as background for developing the analytical frames and perspectives. Still, I believe that these previous trips have been essential in order to develop an understanding of social and cultural processes in Tibet on a more general level, and this, I find, is particularly significant in the case of shorter research permits to rural areas.

Doing ethnography in Tibet
Some would argue that it is not possible to produce good ethnography from the Tibet Autonomous Region under China, due to the extent of the restrictions put on researchers by the Chinese government, on the one hand, and the extent of Chinese control of local
Tibetans, on the other hand. Tibetan culture is politicized in the PRC. Studies of social and cultural processes, particularly within the TAR, are under surveillance and controlled, leading both to censorship and, perhaps more significantly, to self-censorship among both local and foreign researchers. I believe that while one needs to take seriously the methodological restrictions inherent to Tibetan studies, interesting work can and is being done within the TAR today (see for instance Hofer 2005; Yeh 2003). I also argue that it is not only possible, but also important, that research is conducted despite the methodological difficulties experienced. Further, I believe that the monographic form, with large empirical parts, enables the readers to evaluate the strengths and limitations of the material presented and is thus to be preferred over article production.

Empirical knowledge about contemporary TAR remains limited, particular with regards to rural areas where some 80 percent of Tibetans live today. Most rural studies within the TAR are based upon (extensive) interviews conducted during brief visits in the county or township seats with local lay or ecclesiastic expertise, hence presenting what people say and, to a lesser extent, observations of what people do (cf. Holy and Stuchlik 1983). Accordingly, daily life of common Tibetans remains underrepresented in the increasing literature from contemporary TAR. My aim for this study has been to be able to observe daily life in a household within a Tibetan village for as long as possible, and providing, although limited, a complementary contribution to the knowledge production of contemporary life in TAR. In this respect, I believe this thesis to be of value. Having said that, there are some significant challenges arising out of conducting fieldwork in rural TAR, and these primarily concern the methodological implications of time restrictions.

**Methodological implications of time restrictions**

Initially it was my intention to study the bodily aspects of the social reproduction of hereditary status in rural Tibet, focusing particularly on people seen to be of a polluted kind (*menrig*). Central to this interest was the Tibetan concept of pollution (*drib*) as this manifested in daily social interaction between people living in a rural setting where ritual
and social standing were public and clearly defined. I intended to explore a phenomenological perspective on embodiment of knowledge and status in relation to social organization. This interest was based in the combination of an existential (experience-oriented) phenomenological perspective and symbolic representation and found in the literature on embodiment and personhood (e.g. Lambek and Strathern 1998; Csordas 1990) and much inspired by recent anthropological literature on Melanesia (e.g. Meigs 1984; Anderson 2003). However, I came to realise that such research focus involving the analytical concept of embodiment and an empirical material on small social categories would require long-term participation and observation of a larger population. I believe that it is not possible to conduct such ‘Malinowskian fieldwork’ in TAR at the present.23

As time passed, and negotiations with research institutions were initiated, postponed and in the end, agreed upon, this project was gradually changed into a project on social organization in relation to land tenure, as found to be observable and operationable within the time period available in the field. However, this change of focus is not all together negative. The change of focus has two main sources; restrictions on time spent in the selected field site, and unexpected findings upon arrival in the field site. Different from most foreign scholars in TAR, I was given the opportunity to stay in a local household; however, I was only given permits to stay for altogether five months. This led to reconsideration of my original plan. I came to realise that instead of focusing on issues that required in-depth symbolic interpretations as well as experience-near methods involving presence in one location over preferably a year’s cycle, I would focus on ongoing social processes that were defined to be important by villagers themselves. These were issues that were readily discussable, observable, and thus, realistic as a focus for production of ethnography.

Shortly after arrival in Sharlung, I began to notice the high incident of polyandrous marriages among people from all social backgrounds and positions. This fact surprised both Samdrup and myself. Given the fact that polyandry is perceived to be

23 The exception might be Melvyn Goldstein who has a particular history of co-operation in TAR.
declining in Tibetan communities among indigenous groups in Nepal (Goldstein 1987; Haviland 2005) and India (Mills 1997), exile Tibetans in India and elsewhere (Gombo 1986; Grent 2002), as well as in Tibet under China, the seemingly ongoing increase and spread of these marriages in Panam caught my scholarly curiosity. Since I was able to live in a polyandrous household, marriage appeared to be an interesting ethnographic vantage point, providing openings for more general questions concerning social organization and hierarchy. As described in the Introduction, the literature on Tibetan societies described polyandry as a practice of the landholders (Goldstein 1971a, 1976). Indeed, I found it particularly intriguing that polyandry in Sharlung seemed to be practiced in all social categories, i.e. also among those who had been the landless workers in traditional Tibetan society. Piekke, writing on his field experiences in China, has recognised serendipity as having a ‘decisive impact on the selection of research topics’ in anthropology, as with most social scientific disciplines (2000:130). I agree with Piekke’s point about the serendipitous nature of the research process and hold that unexpected discoveries made are not necessarily random but preconditioned by already established knowledge. Serendipity is indeed a central element of all cultural processes. As such, the unexpected turn to polyandrous marriages in this thesis was a serendipitous one; however, it was founded in an informed context.

Beyond the methodological implications of time restrictions leading to a change in project design, shorter periods of fieldwork limit the broadness of the material. In the case of this thesis, the lack of access to life cycle rituals represents, I believe, the most unfortunate implication of being able to spend only shorter periods in the village. To my frustration, no weddings were arranged during my time in Sharlung. Such occasional happenings are obviously impossible to plan, and although I had made arrangements to travel to Sharlung in the first months of the New Year when weddings (as well as the building of houses) are usually conducted, this proved impossible. Hence, I have had to rely on informants’ descriptions of these events, as well as literature from other Tibetan communities. Due to this limitation, I have not given ritual practices a central role in the overarching arguments in the thesis. Further, because time was limited, I chose not to
spend it gathering local statistics and local history documents from the township and county, although I believe that these might have been possible to access. I am aware of the potentials of such documents, particularly for analysis of economic development and, in that, social mobility. However, the official information presented is provided by interviews with the township leaders, as well as Ben Jiao’s findings from the same township (2001).

The technicalities of producing ethnography in Sharlung

Focusing on marriage in particular and social organization in general, I defined informal and formal interviews, a household survey and observation as useful research methods. In short, I chose to combine observation of, and participation in, daily life activities amongst two categories of people: farmers of yokpo (landless labourers) and trelpa (landholders) background in Sharlung, on one side, and farmers and non-farmers of menrig (hereditary low ranked) background in Sachung, on the other side. As it turned out, these categories of people included all households in Sharlung and twelve households in Sachung. The in-depth material on daily life primarily gained from staying with my host family was very important, as shall become apparent in the following. I found the information gathered in the Tagrab House to be particularly valuable because my relation to those living there became close, and my knowledge of the information context broader. Further, central material is produced from a survey that included all households in Sharlung, open interviews with residents of all the households in the village and extended and repeated talks with residents of fifteen particular households. Of these I put emphasis on six key informants in addition to the eight people in my host household. These six people were: one nama (in-married wife) with young children; one older unmarried woman residing with her brother’s family; one young polyandrously married man with a newly established household; one monogamously married man with adult children; and one younger nun of the local nunnery. Further, I spent time in the local nunnery, interviewed the township leaders, village leaders and deputy leaders in Sharlung, and leaders of the two closest villages and monks in Daching monastery. I also visited and spent
considerable time in all the households of menrig status in Sachung village, repeating my visits on several occasions to one particular blacksmith household there. Further, I visited and interviewed two ngagpa, one in Sachung and one in Gangkar, both being responsible for hail protection in the area, as well as the Sharlung moba (diviner), and the lhaba (medium) in the northern valley. Hence I consider my informants to illustrate varied life phases and concerns in Sharlung and beyond.

Our days in the field consisted of more or less the same activities. In the morning we ate breakfast together in my room, making tea and tsampa porridge and pag (tsampa dough). At this point the grandmother in the house would already be sitting with us chatting about all and nothing. We always inquired from her about the happenings of the day in the house and around the village, and she always asked us whom we were going to visit. Samdrup and I would then walk to one house in the morning, usually coming home for lunch, and visiting another house in the afternoon, heading back at around six or seven in the evening. While Pema (our nanny) was preparing the dinner, I would write my fieldnotes and transcribe narratives together with Samdrup. If at home during the day, I would often sit with some of the women in the house, and, together with Pema, we would discuss issues that should not be mentioned in the presence of males (relatives in particular), such as women’s work, pregnancy, and sexuality. Often in the late evenings we would all sit around the stove in the main kitchen/living room (tabtshang) of the house. These hours proved to be of value not only as a forum for discussing relevant issues with the family, but also access to other villagers’ concerns. Tashi-la, being the highly respected village leader, was involved in most conflicts in the village as a mediator, and often people came during the evenings to consult him. On many of these occasions I was present and able to observe their debates. As there is little concern about the privacy of problems and conflicts, the whole family was involved discussing the details of these conflicts, both in the presence of the involved parties and after their departure.

Tashi-la was quick to understand my interests in cultural and social activities, and often he would inform me of events in the village that he thought would be useful for my
project. These were often connected to religious practices, and included household rituals of neighbouring families, special offerings to *yul lha* or other protectors, trips to the spiritual medium (*lhaba*), or rituals in the nunnery. Just before our departure from Sharlung in 2002, he even changed the schedule of the performance of the ritual for cleansing the house so that I would be able to observe it before departure (see Chapter Eight).

In addition to the general participant observation, my main methodical principle during fieldwork was the idea of *following*, in the sense of follow, and follow-up (cf. Hilden 2003). This includes to follow the issues and information provided by villagers in our talks, follow peoples’ concerns and doings, follow the events in the village, be it village meetings, public work or household rituals, or travels to neighbouring places. Further, it includes to follow-up hints of information given by asking additional questions, conducting additional visits, or by pursuing conflicts and disagreements. Due to time shortage, I could not act upon this principle at all times; however, I believe that I found a combination of defining the context for the flow of information myself, and merely following the villagers’ streams of association.

My co-operation with a local scholar has been of crucial importance to the effectiveness of these fieldworks. All foreign students, researchers and professors working in Tibet are obliged to travel with a co-researcher, who works as a field assistant, an interpreter, a controller, or simply a companion for the trip. As an individual representative for the governmental institution providing the invitation and permits for the foreign visitor, he or she is personally responsible for the acts of the researcher. During the first four months in Sharlung, I was accompanied by Samdrup, a then thirty-three year old teacher of Buddhist philosophy and history at Tibet University. His knowledge about Tibetan culture and society is impressively thorough. The son of a village leader, Samdrup grew up in a farming village in Lhoka and is in all ways accustomed to village life. He has studied the history of anthropology at the University in Chengdu, and had already developed an interest for local cultural practices. Although his
main field is Buddhism, during our stay he became increasingly interested in both social organization and local ritual practices.

With few exceptions, we visited people in the village together. This, I believe, was the most effective, not only because of Samdrup’s ability to contextualise information along the way, but also because I often needed translation assistance during the interviews. According to Tibetans Tsang-ke is ‘quite similar’ to Lhasa-ke; however, the slightly different pronunciation and the occasional use of completely different vocabulary complicated my comprehension. While I in Lhasa can conduct simple interviews in Tibetan on my, I found this to be difficult in Panam. Further, my understanding of Tibetan language is still fundamentally contextual in the sense that I have varying competence depending upon themes. While I handle conversations on family matters, I depend upon interpreters when talking village organization, Buddhism and to a certain extent Tibetan history. Especially older people were difficult for me to understand, and Samdrup and I developed an interpretation technique based upon a variation of hinting in the cases where I could follow, to full translation with people that it proved impossible for me to properly comprehend. These dynamics worked well and enabled me to establish rapport and in most cases control the interview situation in terms of asking the fundamental follow-up-questions, while at the same time registering the nuances in peoples’ expressions. In conversations between only women, I often asked Pema to assist in translating from rural Tsang ke to a, for me comprehensible, simple Lhasa ke.

The longer narratives included in the disseration are for the most translated by Samdrup. During our conversations and interviews with villagers in Sharlung, I found it difficult to use a tape recorder as people tended to present formal, and short, answers. Taking notes on the other hand, did not have apparent negative effect on the flow of information and this became my prime method of registration. Shortly after the completion of an interview, Samdrup and I worked further on the translations of the narratives and personal stories told, writing them down the same day. Hence, the stories here presented are registered by notes and moreover translated and should therefore not
be seen as identical to the original utterance. However, we have made every effort to register the stories as close to how they were told as possible, and I have included only those personal stories that I believe is fairly represented.

Due to sudden restructuring of Samdrup’s teaching obligations at Tibet University, he was not able to leave Lhasa and travel with me to Panam for the last fieldtrip in July 2004. For this one month I was accompanied by Drolma, a Bai-Tibetan woman also teaching at the Tibet University. For the most, we travelled together, and although her participation in the project is characterized by less intensity than Samdrup’s, her knowledge of minorities in China proved valuable for comparison.

Much time in Sharlung was spent comparing notions and practices found in Sharlung with Samdrup’s experiences from Lhoka, Pema’s experiences from Dulong, and Drolma’s experiences from Gyalthang in Kham. This, I believed, was not only an efficient method for talking with informants, but also for developing a more complex understanding of our findings.

**The question of ethics**

As part of the fundamental ethics of anthropology, each villager has the right to privacy and anonymity (cf. Ellen 1984: 136-139). Anonymity is of particular significance in the cases of political conflicts and elaborate state control of the individual, as found in some places in some periods in TAR. The problematic task of anonymity is indeed one reason some Tibetologists do conduct empirical work inside the TAR. Moreover, a strict anonymization provides a security to the individuals involved but also reduces the possibilities for others to test the findings on a later stage. These considerations done, I have chosen to replace all names from county level and down with pseudonyms, hence, while located in Panam, the township name is not Kyiling, and the village is not called Sharlung. This includes an anonymization of all house names and personal names.

Still, I have no naïve perceptions of the possibilities of absolute anonymity in the context of a Tibetan village, as the relevant political units in Lhasa had authorized my
stays there. Both while being in the field and while writing-up I have consciously avoided sensitive questions that concern explicit political activities.

In the Tibetan context the classification of sensitive issues is not self-evident, something that also became clear to me upon my departure from Sharlung in 2004. This departure was accelerated by an encounter with the Shigatse prefecture police. I describe this incident as it revealed to me once again the power and control of the government institutions, but it also provided unintended insight into the classification of sensitive issues within this rural Tibetan context. Four days before our intended departure from Sharlung, a police car had, to everybody’s surprise, arrived in the village. As I entered the living room to ask Tashi-la about a neighbour’s return from a longer trip, he calmly explained to me that I should join him talking to these visitors, while pointing to two formal looking men sitting in the corner. Not yet having seen the police car outside, it took me some time to realise that one of them was a uniformed policeman. The other was the Panam County leader. Tashi-la told me that the Tibet University had reported my assistant Drolma and me missing, and they had come to search for us. I found this to be very unlikely, as we had thoroughly arranged with all the necessary permits beforehand. However, it turned out that Drolma’s boyfriend in Lhasa had been so worried about not being able to call her in the village that he had asked somebody working in Tibet University to help trace us. Instead of calling the Foreign Affairs at the university or in Lhasa (who had authorized our stay in Sharlung), he chose to call the prefecture police in Shigatse. This resulted in that they called all county leaders in the prefecture to ask about our whereabouts. Finally, they manage to locate us in Sharlung. By the time they came to the village, the police were upset and embarrassed about not having been able to locate us immediately. They claimed that we should have reported to their office in Shigatse upon arrival. I shall not go into the details of the following days, other than to mention that we had to leave four days too early and that we got a lift to the police station in Shigatse.

Although all my permits were valid and legitimate, our stay in a local household was noticed and recognised as problematic. After giving a presentation of the issues of my research, I had to sign a paper stating that I would not publish anything
journalistically concerning 1. (lack of) education; 2. the degree of physical dirt; 3. the presence of physically disabled; or 4. religious practices in the village. After signing the statement, I was given the message that if I were to disobey this statement, both my field assistant and the county leader would most likely lose their jobs. These four identified issues do not form essential parts of this thesis, simply because they fall outside the research design. However, this episode has brought additional attention to the ethical implications of writing ethnography from Tibet. Before leaving Sharlung for the last time, I repeated the potential implications of being portrayed in this thesis and pointed to the personal nature of information presented. However, no one asked to be left out.

Chinese Marriage Law prohibits polyandry and all other forms of polygamy. However, the local government in Panam makes no attempts to alter or conceal these practices. Also, the villagers do not consider the Chinese Marriage Law to be relevant to their arrangement of marriage. It is my clear contention that the continued practice of polyandry today is not a contested issue between officials and villagers in Panam. This is also confirmed by the fact that the Tibetan scholar, Ben Jiao, working in a central research institution in Lhasa has made polyandry the topic of his PhD thesis produced in 2001. On these grounds, I believe that I put no persons at risk by writing about recent polyandrous practices.

Next chapter continues the focus on political context and describes the various phases of reforms and structural changes implemented in Tibet since the Chinese invasion. These structural changes have influenced the people of Sharlung in most aspects of life, and it is my intention to take these various reform periods as the vantage point for the following discussions on local marital practices and preferences.

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24 The latter was added at a later stage, and referred particularly to the photographic presence of non-official Panchen Rinpoche and Dalai Lama.
1. The yul lha overlooking the Sharlung village.

2. Shamshar House is the owner of the yul lha.

3. Harrowing the fields

4. Scars from the Cultural Revolution
CHAPTER TWO

THE LAND REFORMS AND SOCIAL DIVISIONS –
from private, to collective, to household-based

‘The Chinese never look back
- they only look ahead’.
(Dawa, a young Tibetan man in Sachung,
talking about the implementation of land reforms)

‘I would rather rest here, than travel all the way to socialism’
(humorous saying referring to the Communist metaphor
of travelling along a path, Shakya: 1999:309)

Tibetan communities, in both urban and rural areas, have undergone dramatic structural,
social, cultural and economic changes during the last five decades of Chinese presence in
Tibet. To treat these alterations properly, one would need several thesiss. While there is a
growing body of literature that analyses recent Chinese influence on Tibetan society, a
thorough description of these cannot be undertaken here. However, in order to analyse
the ongoing processes of marriage and relatedness, as well as social organization more
generally, it remains crucial to describe the changes in access to arable land that the
people of Sharlung have experienced throughout the last fifty years and more. I shall

25 On economic development in TAR (Fisher 2005); development and environment in pastoral areas of
Tibet (Clarke 1998), Amdo (Huber 2002), Kham (Epstein 2002); religious practices in contemporary Tibet
(Goldstein and Kapstein 1998); changing medical practices (TIN 2004a, 2004b).
argue that the ongoing changes in marital practices, manifested in the increase in polyandrous marriages, is a process of social mobility founded in established Tibetan cultural concepts and practices, and made possible by Chinese social reforms based on socialist ideology. However, as shall be apparent throughout this thesis, we should not see these changes of marriage preference and practices as a simple bottom-up process where the lower ranked farmers struggle to rise in esteem at the expense of the higher-ranked. Rather, we need to see this also as a process of cultural incorporation in which the practices of the elite remain to be acknowledged by all as the preferred ways, and we must recognise the importance of economy for people’s lives. By social mobility I mean the process by which formerly landless farmers (yokpo) incorporate former landholders’ (trelpa) cultural practices, and by doing so, increase their social standing in the village. I return to the different family systems of the yokpo and trelpa in Chapter Four, here it is sufficient to say that while the yokpo traditionally organized themselves in nuclear families, the trelpa established named estates with strong corporate character.

This chapter describes the history of reforms made by the Chinese government in Tibet, emphasising the ramifications that these have had on a small village such as Sharlung. The implementation of the various reforms has had a direct influence on marital practices and the organization of family life. The chapter points to the varying experiences people have had depending on their family background and emphasize the alternating waves of positive and negative receptions the reforms have been met with in the village. Further, it describes in some detail the traditional significance of family background (rig) in Tibetan societies in general and provides a background for the social differentiation in Sharlung today. The chapter ends in a discussion of the renewed emphasis on the household as the basic social unit in rural Tibet.

An underlying argument in this thesis is that access to land should be included as a necessary, but not sufficient, part of the analysis of the spread of fraternal polyandry documented today. While the following chapters deal with the organization of marriage and kinship more particularly, the present chapter concerns the organization of access to land among the villagers in Sharlung, emphasising the shift from individual- to
household-based agricultural production. By doing so, I shall lay the foundation for the further analysis of the resurgence and spread of fraternal polyandry in contemporary Panam.

Before I turn to the history of reforms, a brief description of the relations between China and Tibet is needed in order to understand the political framework within which the reforms were introduced.

A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF TIBET IN PRC

On coming to power, the Chinese Communists made it clear that the crowning victorious task of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) should be the liberation of Tibet. When Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China on 1 October 1949, Tibet had, in his mind, already been included as a part of the new republic. In late May 1950, the first clashes between PLA soldiers and Tibetan troops took place. This happened far away from Panam, near Chamdo, some 600 km east of Lhasa, and on 19 October 1950 the Tibetan governor of Kham surrendered to the PLA. Among the government in Lhasa the fear of Chinese military attack on Central Tibet grew, and on 20 October 1951 - and after difficult negotiations in Beijing - the Tibetan government accepted a 17-point agreement that gave China sovereignty over Tibetan territory. The agreement was intended to safeguard the social and cultural independence of Tibet, i.e. not to alter the traditional social system and to maintain religious freedom (Shakya 1999: 1–89).

The first decade of Chinese occupation did not bring notable social changes to Central Tibet, although it was marked by an uneasy co-existence of Chinese and Tibetan rule. The Chinese authorities initiated a strategy of co-operation with the Tibetan government, not altering the power structures, but seeking support from a loyal political elite. However, scepticism grew within the Tibetan government, as the Chinese came to

26 The following subchapter is based on an earlier publication (Fjeld 2005:9-12).
27 In Amdo and Kham, however, the Chinese invasion was much more dramatic during the 1950s.Democratic Reforms (redistribution of land and property) and attacks on monasteries were started in the mid-1950s, resulting in fierce resistance among the local people. This manifested in the establishment of a Khampa guerrilla movement, supported by the CIA (Peissel 1972; Shakya 1999; McGranahan 2006).
dominate more and more of the political arena. In 1954, the Dalai Lama went to Beijing to meet with Chairman Mao; he was at first impressed by the thoughts of Marxism (Dalai Lama 1994 [1990]: 98), but by the end of the meeting, he realized that, as he puts it, Mao was ‘the destroyer of Dharma\(^\text{28}\) after all’ (ibid.:108). Tensions continued to grow between the Tibetan government and the Chinese leaders, and the co-existence of the Tibetan and Chinese leaders in Lhasa came to an abrupt end on 10 March 1959, when a huge number of Tibetans demonstrated.\(^\text{29}\) The demonstration continued for a week without interference from the Chinese. The general situation deteriorated, and on 17 March, the Dalai Lama and his entourage escaped from Lhasa, heading for India. Upon entering India the Dalai Lama was given asylum by President Nehru and later, when they were given land, the exile government was established in Dharamsala, in the hills of Himachal Pradesh.

Three days after Dalai Lama’s escape, the PLA in Lhasa was ordered to re-take control of the city, which resulted in violent attacks and bloodshed in which thousands of Tibetans were killed or arrested, while eventually as many as 100,000 Tibetans fled the country. This marked the end of a ‘liberal’ Chinese presence in Tibet and the start of long-term Tibetan resistance against Chinese rule, which has remained up until the present day.

In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was established, although actual autonomy was never implemented. Serious problems started with the introduction of communes and collectivization in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing famine to Tibet (see below). Secondly, the Cultural Revolution had enormous impact on Tibetan society, in terms of destruction of important cultural institutions and prohibition of much of what Tibetans perceive as valuable cultural practices, but also in terms of infusing fear and distrust into social relations. I shall return to the period of collectivization and Cultural Revolution below.

\(^{28}\) Dharma (Sanskrit) translates in Tibetan Buddhism as religious law, i.e. religion.

\(^{29}\) There were rumours that the Chinese planned to kidnap the Dalai Lama during a theatre show that same evening, and these rumours brought more and more Tibetans out on the streets to protect him.
When a more liberal policy was developed for Tibet in the early 1980s, the much-hated communes were abolished, and Tibetans were encouraged to participate more in the political administration. However, implementation of the reform policies proved difficult, as the leaders in Tibet belonged to the ‘leftist’ faction of the Communist Party and did not agree with these new ideas of the leaders in Beijing. Although the period from 1980 to 1986 brought positive changes for Tibetans – greater religious freedom, rebuilding of monasteries, some use of Tibetan language in the schools, less control of trade and the return of property – mistrust grew among the Tibetan people, and in 1987 the first in a series of demonstrations erupted in the Barkhor area of Lhasa. The demonstrations were initiated and led by monks and nuns from the monasteries and nunneries around Lhasa, but lay Tibetans also participated (Schwartz 1994). Common to the demonstrations was the demand for Tibetan independence. The demonstrations were violently stopped by the Security Police and the PLA, and many Tibetans were arrested and tortured or killed, and in March 1989 martial law was implemented in Lhasa. These years were to be the most active anti-Chinese period after Dalai Lama’s escape into exile. During the 1990s, only a few demonstrations have been staged in Lhasa. Due to the ubiquitous presence of both uniformed and plain-clothes police, the recent demonstrations have been very brief, and mostly staged by political prisoners.

Today, the policy of the Chinese leadership could be characterized as a one based on action, as opposed to reaction. This implies surveillance of individuals and groupings, and seeks to curb any political activities before they manifest in an organised form. The tanks, soldiers and police with machine guns that were a part of the city picture in Lhasa of the late 1980s have now been replaced with large numbers of plain-clothes police. The consequence of this is a system based on the widespread use of informants, often called amchok (ears).

While the years 1980–86 was a period of liberalization, the following period has been characterized by strict control and surveillance, on the one hand, and economic development, on the other. The general focus on economic development in China has led to new attacks on Tibetan culture and religion, and in 1996 a new campaign against
religion (‘Strike Hard’) was launched, focusing on what the Chinese claimed to be hindrances to development (the ‘backwardness’ of Tibetan traditions, religion and history). Economic development and tightening of political control seem to be the continued formula for Chinese policies in Tibet. This is also reflected in the most recent Five-year plan (2001 – 2006) (Human Rights Watch 2004).

In the rural areas (particularly on village and township levels), however, there is little presence of police, and control of the individual is much less severe. The Chinese government is represented in each village by a village leader and one or two deputy leaders, who may or may not be Party members. The township (xiang) leaders, who are also from the region, are seen to be representing the Chinese government to a much higher degree. This is largely due to their responsibilities: to inform villagers on Party policies, implement these (issuing fines for to those who do not obey) and to provide economic assistance to the poor households (see below on the structure of leadership in general).

Ever since the Chinese invasion in 1950, and in particular since the Lhasa uprising of 1959 that resulted in the Dalai Lama’s flight into exile, Tibetan resistance towards Chinese presence has been continuous, albeit sporadic and in periods more or less publically invisible. Further, there has been a continuous flow of Tibetans escaping over the mountains into Nepal and India, and the numbers have increased from the 1990s. Whereas in China a greater level of individual freedom has developed since 1980, this is only to a limited degree the case in Tibet. The Chinese government has not been able to win the support of the Tibetan people, and resistance has remained strong throughout the five decades of Chinese presence. This has many reasons, but the loss of the Dalai Lama is of major importance. His significance for Tibetans must not be underestimated. To the Chinese authorities, the Dalai Lama is their main political opponent and Tibetans have realized that any show of interest in him can be extremely risky. However, he is still the symbolic representation of an independent Tibet.30

30 During the later years, Dalai Lama and the exile government have changed political strategy from seeking independence from China to opting for real autonomy within the PRC. There is a sporadic dialogue between the two parties, but it seems that Dalai Lama’s public acknowledgement of the fact that Tibet is
Another significant political and religious figure in Tibet is the Panchen Rinpoche. He is ranked second in the religious hierarchy of the Gelugpa school and has been an influential person both in Tibet before 1959 and, later, in Tibetan politics under China (see Goldstein 1989; TIN 1997 for details). While the Dalai Lama has become a pan-Tibetan symbol of an independent Tibet, the Panchen Rinpoche’s role had a more local starting point. Traditionally, the Panchen Rinpoche resided in Tashilunpo monastery in Shigatse and represented the political power of the Tsang region. As opposed to the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Rinpoche chose to remain in Tibet after the uprising in 1959, and he co-operated closely with the Chinese authorities. He was the acting chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet from 1959 to 1962, but shortly after he was arrested and put in detention by the Chinese for voicing criticism against the Party and Chairman Mao. He remained in detention until 1978. Panchen Rinpoche died suddenly in 1989, allegedly of a heart attack. Reactions to his death once again confirmed the contested nature of the Panchen Rinpoche’s role in Tibet under China. Despite his co-operation with the Chinese he is a highly respected person to most Tibetans today.31

In Sharlung today, villagers still emphasize the Panchen Rinpoche’s particular ties to the Tsang region, and these historical ties legitimize their devotion. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the current dispute about the reincarnation of the Panchen Rinpoche; however, it should be noted that details of the dispute and the disappearance of Chökyi Nyima, the candidate recognised by the Dalai Lama, are well known to local people. The almost ten year long disappearance of Chökyi Nyima has brought hostile feelings towards the Chinese authority from the local people in Tsang

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31 The biography of the late Panchen Lama is contested and highly politicized by both Tibetans in exile and by the Chinese government, and his motivations and loyalties are contested. For details on the Panchen Rinpoche’s political involvements and life, see Shakya (1999); and for the ongoing dispute about the current reincarnation of Panchen Rinpoche, see Hilton (1999).
and elsewhere in Tibet. Today, many people carefully guard their photos of both the Dalai Lama and Chökyi Nyima despite this being prohibited.

Despite these serious religious and political conflicts between Tibetans and the Chinese authorities, some implications of the Chinese takeover have been more positively received among the local Tibetan population; particularly the land reforms introduced in various periods after 1959. As will be clear below, the first and the last land reform brought new opportunities to the poorest farmers. At the same time, the last reform has established a new social stratum of poor households with only very limited opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency. These new social divisions have, on the one side, an arbitrary origin and, on the other hand, reconfirm traditional notions of hereditary social status. In the following, I shall describe the social categories of belonging in traditional Tibet, focusing on family background (rig) as this is related to socio-economic position.

THE SOCIALITY OF LAND

Today, Sharlung villagers describe themselves as ‘just farmers,’ pointing to the relative distribution of wealth after the de-collectivization. At the same time, inequalities are readily observable, both in terms of social and ritual status. Hereditary social background (rig) socially defined an individual before the Chinese takeover, and today these social categories are made relevant to varying degrees (see Fjeld 2005 for an analysis of the contextual relevance of rig in contemporary Lhasa). Due to the relatively simple social distribution in Sharlung before 1950, there are two main categories of continuous social groups that influence village relations today. These are the two former genbo households (that is, the landholders representing the local government in the village and responsible for extracting taxes from the villagers), on the one side, and the lineages and households classified as being of ‘inferior kind’ (menrig), on the other.

Historical relations of exploitation, as manifested between families of landowners and labourers, continue to influence present participation in village communal life. They are based not only on hereditary status, but also on the socio-economic position of the
particular landowner and, thus, to what extent he, or his corporation, hired labourers. While the aristocratic families of Lhasa constituted an elite social group founded on hereditary high rank that dominated many parts of Central Tibet, including Tsang, before 1959, these families did not have estates in Sharlung or its immediate neighbourhood. Several landholding families were located in Sharlung; however, these varied greatly in socio-economic position and political influence. In the social construction of local history today, it seems that there were only two families that hired labourers and serfs. These two were the genbo who were also responsible for extracting taxes from the other landholding families (trelpa) to the dzong (local government).

Throughout this thesis, the relation between various forms of status and rank is an underlying concern that will be dealt with more explicitly in Chapter Nine. Before describing in greater detail the distribution of social statuses today, I shall go back in history, by first looking at the land tenure of various social groups and categories operative in Tibet before 1959, and second, by describing the land reforms following the Chinese take-over.

**Traditional land tenure system in rural Tibet**

The people of Tibet had various livelihoods. The majority worked in agriculture; many were nomadic pastoralists; some were traders (trading salt for tea, among other things) and others were officials and bureaucrats. Chinese accounts from 1959 estimate that 20 percent were nomads and 60 percent farmers, while 5 percent were officials and 15 percent were monks and nuns (Grunfeld 1996[1984]:14). Land was the most important means of production, and the land tenure system reveals the foundations of the social system (Carrasco 1959). Arable land was administered by the noble families or monasteries (labrang or monasteries proper) or by the government directly. According to Chinese accounts, monastic estates held 37 percent of the arable land, while aristocratic estates constituted 25 percent (Epstein in Goldstein 1989:3). The remaining

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32 Each incarnation lama (tulku) had a labrang, a household corporation consisting of all the past property of that line of incarnations, as well as all new wealth acquired by the current incarnation.
38 percent of the land was not defined as manorial estates, but was held directly by the ‘taxpaying’ farmers. Surkhang, a minister in the former Tibetan government, estimated that monastic and lay estates accounted for slightly more than half of all arable land (Goldstein 1989), which would indicate that land held directly by farmers represented about 45 percent of the total arable land. While these figures remain unclear, the main point is that farmers held a significant portion of the arable land, because, although the government administered this land, they held the deeds to the agricultural produce.

Land tenure in the area around Sharlung followed the same general structure as described above, that is, dividing the land between different categories of administrators. An influential aristocratic family administered the areas to the west of Sharlung, while Daching monastery held and controlled the areas to the east. Sharlung and its neighbours to the west were villages of government serfs (zhung gyupa), that is, the fields belonged to the government, and not the monastic or aristocratic estates, and were administered by the taxpayers (telpa) themselves. Hence, the Sharlung village land should be classified as part of the 38 or 45 percent land held by taxpaying farmers. In Sharlung, families of two categories administered the village land: one was the regular taxpaying farmers called telpa, the other was that of telpas with official responsibilities, such as collecting taxes from others, called genbo. I return to this distinction below.

The Tibetan government was financed by taxes of various kinds – rendered in money, goods, animals, and in work. Estate holders, farmers and nomads paid taxes. The amount to be paid was determined by the government, but many estate holders possessed ancient documents that gave them special concessions (see Goldstein 1971c for a detailed description of tax obligations). Government revenue was low, and most of it was earmarked for religious affairs and festivals (or ended up in the pockets of local governors). Landlords had jurisdictional authority over their estates, as they administered the land in the name of the government. Disagreements and conflicts among the farmers and nomads were seldom taken to the central government in Lhasa, but were generally solved directly by the estate holder (cf. Dawa Norbu 1987 [1974]:75–88; Goldstein 1971b). Hence, the landlords held great power over the labourers, both in terms of
defining work, distributing salary (usually in the form of food) and housing, as well as in settling conflicts and punishing individuals.

Villagers of Sharlung today express little interest in the former monastic and aristocratic estates of the area. This might be seen as an indication of the limited interaction between labourers from Sharlung and those estate holders, as well as the institutional, as opposed to individual, aspects of both the monastery and the noble estate administered by proxy. Much more relevant to local people today are the former relations in Sharlung between the genbo and trelpa, on the one side, and labourers, on the other. These relations have varied greatly in terms of power and exploitation, and still today some of the labourers have an uneasy contact with representatives of the genbo Houses.

**Social groups and categories in traditional Tibetan societies**

In traditional Tibet, family background (rig) was the basic principle for categorizing lay people into social hierarchies. Rig translates as ‘kind, category’ as well as ‘race, ethnic group, nationality, lineage’ (Goldstein 2001: 1037), and is used here to denote hereditary social divisions, that is, social groups into which individuals are ascribed membership by birth (see Fjeld 2005:3-5 for detailed discussions on related terms). Following the vocabulary used by Ugen Gombo (1983), three main social levels can be delineated: nobility (kudrak), commoners (miser) and ‘low families’ (menrig), all with a number of subdivisions.

Both Carrasco and Goldstein assume that social position in Tibet was based on relations to land and (control of) political power (Carrasco 1959; Goldstein 1968). However, it seems unlikely that economy and politics were the sole criteria for rank, as there were families whose wealth did not correspond to the rank of their social group. Some noble families of the gerpa category were relatively impoverished (Goldstein 1973), even poor when compared to some of the commoners (miser). On the other hand, there were also wealthy families of low rank, in particular the corpse-cutters for the ‘sky burial’ (tomden), who remained on the fringes of society. Ugen Gombo, a Tibetan scholar who bases his work on what he calls ‘memory ethnographies,’ holds that in the village
where he grew up in Tibet, both socio-economic factors as well as ritual purity and morality were relevant to a person’s rank in the local hierarchy. However, he argues that the dominant criterion was socio-economic relation to land. It is not the task here to determine the underlying criteria of the former Tibetan social system; most probably, both socio-economic status and ritual purity were contextually important.\footnote{There seem to have been two different, coexisting norm systems defining the social categories and the subdivisions within each: one based on economic and political standards, and another based on purity, morality and religion. The latter, based on both clerical and lay religious ideas (including morality and purity), defines the main social groups or categories in Tibet, while the former, based on profane criteria, defines the subdivisions of the main groups. This division seems to correspond to Dumont’s distinction between ‘artha (actions conforming to) selfish interest’ and the distribution of power on the one hand, and ‘dharma (actions conforming to) universal order’ and the scale of (religious) statuses called hierarchy on the other hand (Dumont 1970: 259). Dumont’s main point is that artha is subordinate to and encompassed by dharma.}

The categories of farmers\footnote{The description of the categories of farmers is based on Bell (1928), Goldstein (1968, 1971b, 1986); Carrasco (1959); Aziz (1978a), as well as Social History of Tibet (Xizang Renmin Chubanshe 1987). The latter is a Chinese publication, and I thank Tashi Nyima in Oslo for kind translation.}

The main categories of farmers were trelpa \textit{(khral meaning tax, thus taxpayer)} and the düchung \textit{(dud chung, often translated as ‘small households’, lit. ‘small smoke’). Trelpa were taxpaying farmers that held hereditary contracts to land. The contracts could be held by both men and women in the family, and, in return for the right to the land, they had tax obligations. There were two structural types of trelpa: those who cultivated land directly administered by the government and, thus, were not a part of a manorial estate; and those who held contracts to land administered by noble or religious estates and, thus, had tax obligations to the estate holders. The former held the right to their own land and were not obliged to work on demesne fields. By contrast, although holding the title deeds to their land, they had to provide labour to the landlords and were thus obliged to remain on the estate.}

The trelpa was superior to the other family categories of miser background, in terms of prestige, rights, basic economic resources and, generally, in wealth (Goldstein 1971a). Moreover, as Aziz notes from her study of Dingri village organisation, the trelpa
‘seem to exhibit the greatest sense of group consciousness among all social classes’ (Aziz 1978a:69).

However, there was a significant difference in terms of distribution of wealth and prestige. Before the introduction of Chinese reforms, two trelpa were by far the most influential landholders in Sharlung. These were the genbo. Genbo translates as the ‘eldest ones,’ and these were officials formally elected as representatives of the trelpa group (Goldstein 1971c). Although this might have been an ideal in Sharlung as well, my informants claim that the leadership of the two genbo was never challenged, and that there were no indications of the genbos representing others than themselves.

The local genbo were Dagpo and Lungko; high-ranked Houses with much land that asked for large-scale employment of local labourers. According to Lungko members today, the two estates constituted some 70 percent of the arable land and the greater part of the livestock in the area. The Dagpo and Lungko in Sharlung correspond to those Aziz describes as the ‘Upper dr’ong-pa’ who ‘constitute a kind of elite within the villages’ (Aziz 1978a:70). The other nine trelpa in Sharlung held a limited number of fields.

Common to these trelpa was that they had enough people in the household to manage their own fields and to fulfil their tax obligations. This point was of great importance during the later socialist reforms in which the landholders were defined and punished as ‘enemies’ (drawo) of the state; all the more so if they were accused of being ‘serf owners’ as well.

Ranked lower than the trelpa, düchung were persons with individual leasing contracts to plots of land. These contracts could be lifelong, and, like the trelpa, they were entitled to the products of the land they cultivated and paid taxes to the owner they leased the land from. Importantly, these contracts were not inherited, but individually obtained. Some düchung, called mibog (‘human lease’) did not have leasing contracts and were instead engaged in short and long-term work for various landholders. Mibog appear to have had freedom of mobility (Goldstein 1971a), because they were not bound by contract. At the same time, they were poor, without access to land.
A third category is that of the serfs. These were persons without contracts to cultivate their own land, i.e. those who worked on demesne fields or performed other types of work for estate holders and landlords. In return they received food and shelter. The serfs enjoyed very little freedom, were often very poor and belonged to a lord through same-sex filiation (i.e. a son would belong to the same lord or estate as his father, and a daughter to the same as her mother). There were several subdivisions of this category, one being tsheyog – life-bound serfs who were totally dependent on their landlord.

It is difficult to ascertain the relative numbers of the various trelpa, düchung and serfs. Ugen Gombo indicates that around 40 percent belonged to the trelpa, while 50 percent belonged to the düchung category. This estimate is based on figures from Goldstein, Carrasco and Aziz, as well as his own ‘estimate of members of all strata in the area surrounding my village’ (Gombo 1983:68). However, there were sizeable variations in all villages and areas, and no population census has been conducted in terms of rig, which makes it difficult to generalize from the available accounts.

According to my older informants, Sharlung village was a particularly poor place, where only a small minority held hereditary contracts to land and the rest of the population worked as serfs (yokpo) paid by food and shelter. Goldstein notes that there seem to have been a high percentage of landless farmers in government estates (zhung gyuba) compared to the monastic and aristocratic estates, and this was seemingly the case in Sharlung as well. The many former landless farmers in Sharlung are today referred to as yokpo, rather than the term düchung which is commonly used around Lhasa. Indeed, in the narratives that people tell from the times before the Chinese take-over, yokpo denotes all those who were not trelpa. My informants also hold that the yokpos were not tsheyog in the sense of being tied to a lord for life. As one old woman says: ‘It doesn’t matter if you call it tsheyog or yokpo; we had to work as much as we could our whole life – just to be able to eat something. We could not choose to not work.’

All the elders I talked to described the period before 1959 as a period of three different categories of farmers; the yokpo, the trelpa and the genbo. These categories
have been reflected in the various reforms throughout recent history, as the criterion for both access to land and shelter and punishment for exploitation. In addition to these various farmers, Sharlung villagers describe that there were local skilled workers responsible for essential activities such as slaughtering, making iron agricultural equipment (sonam lakcha), and burying dead bodies. These were called rig tsokpa (‘dirty kind’) or menrig (‘inferior kind’), and common to these was their polluted (drib) nature.

The inferior kind
Writing at the beginning of the century, Kawaguchi divided the common people into two groups, tong ba and tong du. The former were superior – those who possessed some means and did not live in poverty. The latter, tong du, is explained as being those ‘engaged in menial service’ (Kawaguchi 1995[1909]:439). Further, Kawaguchi wrote that the rank of the members of the tong du was independent of their financial situation. No ‘ordinary people’ would eat with them, nor did they intermarry with them (ibid.). In the literature on the Tibetan social system, little attention has been paid to this group of people with whom others did not want to dine. Kawaguchi, travelling in Tibet more than a hundred years ago, did not recognize these people as a distinct social group, outside the group of commoners. The description of the taboos concerning food (mixing of mouths) and marriage (sexual contact) indicates that the tong du he writes about are identical to tomden, the corpse-cutters, mentioned by Carrasco. Carrasco briefly notes that ‘at the bottom of the social scale there are outcast groups, craft specialists, who have little connection with land’ (Carrasco 1959:214). These outcasts in Central Tibet are, according to him, fishermen, butchers, smiths and corpse-cutters. He goes on to say: ‘These castes are endogamous, may only eat with caste-fellows, and are barred from entering the church’ (Carrasco 1959:241). Similar characteristics are given in the Chinese survey Social History of Tibet (Xizang Renmin Chubanshe 1987). Here the third category is termed ‘inferior kind’ (menrig). In addition to the restrictions mentioned by Carrasco, it is noted that menrig and others cannot sit at the same level; furthermore, while the
outcastes might financially become like the *trelpa* (taxpayers), this would not influence their rank as *menrig*.

According to the elderly people I talked with, both in Lhasa and in Panam, contact with low families was not strictly avoided in the traditional Tibetan society. They confirmed that the taboos and restrictions were mostly related to eating and drinking, as well as sexual liaisons. While scholars have termed these low-ranked Tibetan groups as low ‘castes’ (Carrasco 1959; Kawaguchi 1995 [1909]; Gombo 1983), I choose otherwise. The concept of caste implies a relational organization, i.e. the must be more than one group of people to be termed a caste. In Tibet, the lowest ranked share fundamental characteristics with the low castes in India, such as ritual pollution leading to restrictions on the sharing of substance; however, we do not find higher ranked grouping that could be termed as castes. The nobility, for instance, shares a particular political and economic character, but they are not higher ranked in terms of ritual purity. Henceforth, I use the Tibetan term *rig* to describe the criterion for Tibetan traditional group formation in general, and low-ranked people, in particular.

Trying to define which occupations were seen as ‘unclean’ (*tsokpa*) can be difficult. The occupations mentioned by Carrasco seem to be commonly considered unclean, in particular the smiths (blacksmiths (*cag zoba* or *gara*), silversmiths, goldsmiths, the butchers (*shemba*), the fishermen and the corpse-cutters (*tomden*)). These occupations are identified as wrongdoings in terms of Buddhist doctrine of refraining from killing and not disturbing the spirits of the elements. In Lhasa, there were other, more peripheral groups considered to be unclean as well. These were carpenters, begging musicians and beggars (*longkhen*), and horse dealers. There is a clear internal hierarchy among the *menrig* found in Lhasa; the smiths are the highest ranked, followed by the corpse-cutters and the fishermen, and, lastly, the butchers who were, and still are, considered as the lowest.

In Panam, on the other hand, fewer occupations were classified as unclean. These were the blacksmiths, butchers, corpse-cutters (locally called *baru*) and begging musicians (*longkhen*). Interestingly, the internal hierarchy is different, and opposite, from
that found in Lhasa. In Panam, the butchers were, and still are, considered to be the less defiled ones, ranked above first, the corpse-cutters, and second, the blacksmiths. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the begging musicians, who constitute a distinct social category of their own. While villagers interacted socially with butchers, blacksmiths and baru, they avoided the begging musicians. I shall return to the internal differentiation among menrig as related to marital practices and participation in village life in Chapter Nine.

The rationale behind the uncleanness connected to these occupations is not clear. Most of my informants expressed the view that the concept of pollution (drib [grib]) that defines menrig might have originated in India and been brought to Tibet along with the introduction of Buddhism. While Tibetans in Lhasa often indicate that the concept of drib might be a cultural import, rather than a religious one, from India, my informants in Panam maintained that there was a clear connection between Buddhism and drib, and found no contradictions between a Buddhist worldview and notions of inherent pollution.

In the traditional society in Panam, menrig had access to land in various ways, although not on a permanent and hereditary basis. As they were artisans, some, and especially the blacksmiths, worked for particular landowners over a long period of time and were paid by access to small plots of land. Other blacksmiths without such chindak (patron) relations exchanged their iron produce for barley and other necessities. Butchers and baru bartered their services in exchange for food much in the same way.

Nobility

At the other end of the social hierarchy in traditional Tibet, we find the nobility. The noble families were the lay elite of the Tibetan political and social system; they comprised a small number in people of some 150 to 200 families and were subdivided into various categories (yabshi, depön, midrag, and gerpa (Petech 1973; Yuthok 1990)). Some twenty of these lived in the Shigatse and Gyantse areas. The sources of income of

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35 Goldstein suggests 150 noble families (Goldstein 1989); Yuthok lists some 188 families (Yuthok 1990); Chinese sources suggest 197 noble families (White paper), while Prince Peter lists 205 families (Prince Peter 1954).
the nobility varied. Most noble families managed land and collected taxes from the farmers or nomads on their estates. Nobles employed in political positions in Lhasa who held many estates (yabshi, depön and midrag) had stewards who administered their land. The officials received a small salary for their work in the political administration, but received the main part of their income from their estates. The remaining noble families, mostly of the gerpa category, administered their estates themselves and lived on the tax and the products of the demesne land of the estate.

The only noble family represented around Sharlung was, as mentioned, the estate located to the west. This family was a wealthy and powerful midrag House in Lhasa, and stewards administered their estate in this part of the Panam valley by proxy. The House members themselves lived in their mansion in Lhasa, and had no contact with the local villagers in Panam.

All this would change during the late 1950s, as traditional land tenure was among the first concerns of the Communist Party after the revolution in China. Not only did the land reforms redistribute the land and livestock in the villages, but political reforms also included a redefinition of power and influence, emphasising the needs of the landless workers and persecuting the landowners, leading to massive changes in Sharlung, as in all other communities in Tibet under China.

THE REVOLUTION AND LIBERATION (The 1950s)
As described above, the first decade of Chinese presence in Tibet was characterised by a co-existence, however unstable, of the Chinese and the Tibetan government. Thus, the implications of the Chinese take-over manifested themselves in Lhasa (as well as in Kham and Amdo), rather than in rural areas of Central Tibet. There were some political activities in the countryside, but these did not influence the general population in dramatic ways. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) entered Gyantse towards the end of 1951, and an office and an administration were established shortly after. In this initial period of Chinese rule, the local elite and government representatives were included into the new administration, changing the titles and terms for the units and positions. Thus, for
common people the power transfer did not represent drastic changes. Upon the
establishment of Panam Communist Party Committee in 1956, the new political initiative
involved solely Chinese officials. A year later, when a local branch of Tibet gongwei (an
administrative unit established by the PLA and the CPP in Tibet) was established, the
first Tibetan officials (an aristocrat from Panam) became part of the new Chinese
administration (Ben Jiao 2001:35). By employing traditional leaders in the new
administration, the new government emphasised continuity rather than revolution, an
impression my informants also said they had during those first years. Little seemed to be
altered in the villages, and people went about their daily activities in the same manner as
before. Most importantly, no economic or social reforms were introduced in Panam
during the first decade of occupation.

By the mid-1950s, vast social and economic reforms were implemented in China
(such as the Great Leap Forward and Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom). Due to the
problems of legitimization and logistics, the Chinese government in Tibet focused
primarily on establishing good relations with the ruling elite during the first decade. This
strategy involved a continuity of the land tenure system, as the political elite constituted
also the economic elite. Thus, throughout the 1950s Tibetans outside the upper classes, of
aristocrats, monks and wealthy traders who made their living from supplying Chinese
needs, were affected economically in a very limited way (Shakya 1999:244). Many
farmers and pastoralists in Panam, as elsewhere in rural Central Tibet,36 have positive
memories of their first meetings with PLA soldiers in the 1950s (see also Yeh 2003;
Shakya 1999), and these optimistic attitudes were found particularly among the poorest
farmers and were confirmed with the introduction of the Democratic Reforms.

THE DEMOCRATIC REFORMS (1960)

It was not until the implementation of the so-called Democratic Reforms (mangchö
chögyur) that the villagers of the inner parts of Panam valley recognised the power shift

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36 In Kham, on the other side, the local population was very hostile towards to PLA, and from the first
contact during the Long March in 1935 Khampas have fought the Chinese soldiers (Shakya 1999).
in the Lhasa government. The Democratic Reforms were initiated in 1959 and, as one old man described, ‘took property from the rich and gave to the poor,’ a description which was accurate. The process of seizing land from the estates and dividing it among the peasantry characterized a period described by Tsering Shakya as the ‘second phase;’ the Chinese government no longer wooed the aristocracy and the ruling elite of Lhasa, but rather emphasised the need to win over the masses, not only in the urban but particularly in the rural areas (1999:240).

In Sharlung, the land and property of two genbo households, the Dagpo and the Lungko, was divided among the workers. For many yokpos, this was their first opportunity to live in a proper house and control the cultivation and the produce of their work. The Democratic Reforms were very well received among the peasants in Sharlung, who had not owned land but earned their living from working on the land of others. Thus, the positive impression many people had of the PLA soldiers was supported by introduction of these economic reforms and, although people noted that the former landholders were treated badly by the Chinese government, it seems that this did not influence their positive impression.

Jampa, a former yokpo of the Lungko House in Sharlung who is now in his 80s, is one of the villagers who praise the early days of the Chinese presence. He explains:37

I worked for Lungko for many years - from I was just old enough to be able to carry out farm work, maybe eight years old, until I was forty. My father and his sister worked for them their whole life. We were many people working for them, and it was a very hard life. They were not good people - actually the Lungko master was the worst. He, and the Sharlung master. They were both monks. That was very usual. The problem was not that the work burden was heavy, because I can work hard; it is not a problem for me. But what made it so difficult was that we did not get enough food from them. We had no salary like people get today, but in return for labour we received a place to stay and

37 Jampa told parts of this story on several occasions, and what is presented in this chapter is compiled by Samdrup and myself.
food. Even though Lungko had much land that we cultivated, they did not want to give us proper food, only the leftovers from their own meal, and never enough for all of us. I was always hungry, and weak. Also, they did not give us clothes. I had one cow, and from the butter she produced, I got some money to buy clothes. But then I could not get any other things, like cooking oil. So when the Chinese came and took their land and houses and gave it to us, I was so happy. I think it was a good thing to do, because it should not be unfair like that. We received a small house that used to belong to Lungko, and then we had fields where we could cultivate our own barley and wheat, and labu (turnip) as well. I was so pleased with the new changes, and I became a member of the neighbourhood committee and later I became a leader in the village.

Most of the older villagers of yokpo background describe the Democratic Reforms in similar terms of praise. However, the memory of these first reforms does not reflect attitudes towards the Chinese invasion as such. These attitudes are characterized by disappointment concerning the later developments in the villages, in particular the hardship experienced during the following twenty years of collective production after the Democratic Reforms. In many conversations with elderly men and women who experienced the introduction of Chinese rule over Tibet, they said that for a few years in the beginning they really believed that they had been liberated and were part of a revolution of the peasants. These optimistic feelings were strongly connected to the Democratic Reforms. Then the villagers went on to tell about the rapid change of policy, and the sad return of their newly gained land to collective rule.

The Democratic Reforms are seen in Sharlung to have been a soft transition from Tibetan to Chinese rule, a land reform reflecting the needs of the local population but not the ideology of the government. Villagers give ideology as the most likely rationale for the rapid change of policy to collectivity. According to them, the fact that these popular reforms were abolished after only one year reflects the new government’s lack of interest in the wishes and needs of the local population, which again initiated the negative feelings of being under foreign rule. Central to the disappointment of the local people
towards the new government was, therefore, not only the fact that they represented a foreign power but, more importantly, that a turn in policy occurred in 1959/60, concurrent with the Dalai Lama’s flight to India and the introduction of drastic reforms.

**COLLECTIVIZATION AND COMMUNES (1960 – 1980)**

The end of the Democratic Reforms marked the beginning of the drastic socialist transformation of Tibet and China in general. While the collective production units were introduced in China during the ‘Great Leap Forward’ campaign in 1958 (Judd 1994), Tibet was not affected by this reform until the beginning of 1960. The reform involved three levels of a collective system - production teams, production brigades and people’s communes - into which all individuals in China were organised. The distribution of rights and duties of the individual was operated through the lowest level of units, i.e. the production teams. Within the team, each person gained work-points by participation in the agricultural production, and the team, or often brigade leaders, calculated these points, leading to a significant variation, both locally and individually, depending on the particular leadership’s ideas (Judd 1994:7). In this system, the relation between the work-points and (its contribution to) the actual produce is of vital importance for a person’s access to food and other goods.

When the collective system was introduced to Panam, it was first implemented as a means for co-operation between households still owning their own land. The first period, from 1960 to 1965 according to my informants (see also Ben Jiao 2001), was referred to as the ‘mutual aid group system’ (*rogre tsogchung*) or ‘annual small groups’ (*lori tsogchung*). The same system seems to have been introduced into the whole of Tibet, and by 1963, China announced that more than 80 percent of all Tibetan households were organised into these mutual aid groups (Shakya 1999:287). In Sharlung three to six households were organised into one group, working together on common fields. Bigger households were permitted to work alone and then had to pay taxes, i.e. public grain (*chi trug*), to the government. Because the mutual aid groups were established in order to secure co-operation, the households could also co-operate to a large extent with regards
to the agricultural produce. The mutual aid groups system did not involve the calculation of work-points, according to Sharlung villagers, an aspect of great significance to the further study of marriage and kinship. The period of the mutual aid group system seems to have secured food and housing for most farmers, with the clear exception of the former genbo household leaders (see below).

In 1965 the first full-scale communes (mimang kungshe (kungshe being phonetically transcribed from renmin gongshe ‘people’s communes’ in Chinese)), or teams (rukhag), were introduced (Ben Jiao 2001:36). The memory of the first five years of the mutual aid system appears to be weak among my informants, and discussions about degrees of collective production tend to end in a focus on the latter period of rukhag and its systematic organization and harsh conditions. Jampa, a sworn Party member and a leader at that time, continues this way:

*Shortly after the land division we had to start to work together. This was not so difficult, because we were still happy to have land, and we were still working for ourselves, not for somebody else. At this time, Lungko had been punished, and we were happy about that. We had enough food, and we could trade with a little surplus in the group. I was leader of a group, and we had good co-operation. I remember hearing that other groups were always arguing, but I don’t know myself. But when they [the government] changed again and we had to give up the land, I was very upset. We had leaders that decided and told us what to do, and it did not matter if we worked hard or not, we still just got the same little amount of grain. People were very angry towards the communes, and it was a very bad time, when people again became very poor.*

The communes were organised as collective work units with a strong leadership, and membership gave access to the use of land for agriculture and housing, as well as resources and benefits. The leader of the unit would divide the tasks among the individual members, and labour contributions were recorded as work-points. The relation of these work-points to the perceived value of production to the collective determined the
individual member’s remuneration. Generally in both China and Tibet, there were significant differences within communes, depending upon the amount and quality of land, size of population, ownership of machinery and draft animals as well as quality of management, and in the well-managed communes in the better endowed localities, the collective system provided a minimal safety net for the individual farmer (Judd 1994:6). In Sharlung, however, although the income level varied somewhat from household to household according to differences in the ratio of workers to dependents, most people were very poor during the collective period. This can be explained in terms of the scarcity of land and the organization of the excess produce, but also in terms of limited effort put into the labour. Drakyi Pola explains:

We had to work for many hours every day. The most important was to be able to say how many hours of labour one person had performed. Every person who worked received 300 jin [150 kg] of barley per year, and the only difference made was that men gained more than women and children, no matter what they did. Many people became lazy during this period. The work-points were already calculated, and there was no way to get more food and things than what was already decided.

After the distribution of the 300 yin, the excess produce was confiscated by the local government who distributed it to other regions and markets.

While in China a three-stage model had been used to introduce communes, i.e. via an intervening stage of agricultural co-operatives, this was not the case in Tibet (Shakya 1999:307). Thus, for the peasants the shift was dramatic and unexpected. Because of the high stakes involved in introducing the communes in Tibet, they were accompanied by ideological re-education, which was met with intense dislike by many villagers due to the repetitive nature of such meetings.

The farmers had only very limited influence on the production methods or the produce itself. According to Shakya, the communes were more like state farms (ibid.:310), in the sense that the farmers were taking orders from a central authority rather
than collectively making decisions on the shared production. The communes led to the impoverishing of Tibetan farmers (and pastoralists). The local farmers knew that due to the harsh climate on the Tibetan plateau only limited crops (mainly barley) could be grown successfully there. However, the Chinese cadres, who disliked barley, insisted that wheat should be cultivated in the majority of the fields. Obviously the wheat crops failed, leading to a shortage of food for the villagers. Despite the strict control and surveillance of the communes, the Central administration did not realize the limited economic success of the communes in Tibet for several years. The main reason for this seemed to have been the false reports provided by the local commune leaders to the central authorities, as they did not want to admit to low production in a competitive situation (ibid.:312).

The communes were strongly disliked by, it seems, most villagers in Sharlung, and today people still get upset when they talk about this period. The disappointment of loosing the newly gained land, the economic failure of the communes, as well as the more general political environment in which the discrepancies between lived life and political praise all contributed to this discontent.

**Persecution of the local landowners**

Punishment of villagers started immediately after the suppression of the Tibetan uprising in 1959 and continued throughout the 1960s, albeit on different grounds. In Sharlung, the first phase of persecution concerned active political resistance against the Chinese government. While some villagers, such as Jampa cited above, claim that landowners were punished for exploitation, it seems that the most severe cases of persecution involved landowners (*trelpa*) defined as ‘middle farmer’ (i.e. those employing hired work and thus exploiting their labour), who were also active in the resistance movement in the Dujong dzong.\(^{38}\) Leaders of at least four households from Sharlung were arrested and sent to labour camps or prison; two of these were from the influential and wealthy *genbo*

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\(^{38}\) According to some of the villagers, most people participating in the uprising were not punished. The local government did not want to persecute people of little influence, and therefore they arrested only political household leaders. As these issues are highly sensitive, I did not inquire more about these processes.
Houses, Dagpo and Lungko, while two had only limited land and very limited political influence. After the arrests, the four were sent either to the newly established prison in Daching monastery, or to another prison called Emekhang. Later, some were transported to the notorious Drapshi prison in Lhasa, while others were sent to labour camps in Kongpo, where they stayed for six to ten years. According to their children, these men all returned with serious illnesses and died shortly after their arrival in the village.

The next phase of persecution in Sharlung started towards the end of 1960, in a process where those defined as reactionaries, serf owners and agents of serf owners, were treated as ‘enemies of the state’ (dra沃) and punished (see Paljor 1977). The collectivization of the early 1960s left the ‘bad’ classes in a difficult economic situation because their land and houses had been confiscated and redistributed to the lowest classes. Because the members of the high classes were not allowed to join a commune, their financial situation was even worse than that of the rest of the population, and many died (Goldstein 1994). During the first period of collectivization (rogre tsochung) in Sharlung, the former landowners were restricted from participating in the work groups, and some were punished by enforced participation in a ‘reform through labour’ (nyetsol gyurku) programme in the village. For instance, members of Lungko, the former genbo House with many fields and yokpos, were all punished for being enemies (dra沃), and had to work on government land without payment. They were given a small field, which they could cultivate for their own needs, but this was not sufficient, and they had to depend upon help from other villagers. At the same time the socializing with co-villagers was restricted by the local leaders. This situation lasted from 1960 to 1965 or 1966, i.e. around the period when the full-scale communes were introduced.

With the onset of the ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ (1966–76), the situation of the high classes (the reactionaries, the serf-owners and the agents of serf-owners) became even more difficult. In China proper, the Cultural Revolution ended in 1969, but in Tibet only the death of Mao in 1976 put a stop to the activities of the Red Guards. These ten years were a cultural and social disaster for Tibet. At the centre of the Cultural Revolution was the attack on the ‘Four Olds’: old ideas, old culture, old
customs, and old habits, and monasteries, temples, private altars, prayer walls, religious
texts and objects were desecrated or destroyed. Because Tibetan national and cultural
identity is so closely associated with Buddhism, Tibetans perceived this destruction of
religious structures as a traumatic shock that resulted in the hatred towards the Chinese
government that still persists to this day (Goldstein 1994:10). The Red Guards also
entered even small villages such as Sharlung, searching for private religious objects and
destroying local monasteries. Some locals participated in the destructive activities here,
as elsewhere in Tibet, and their participation is problematic in the social memory of the
village. However, for most villagers the Cultural Revolution marked the dramatic low
point of the Chinese presence in Tibet. Jampa illustrates the change of attitudes, and the
moral limits of many former revolutionary Tibetans. He explains his role within the Red
Guards (mar shungma):

*When the mar shungma came, the vice-leader joined them to Daching gompa. The
gompa was then used to store the government grain, and it was not destroyed. It
was a very beautiful gompa. When the vice leader asked me to come with them to
Daching in order to smash the big Tsongkhapa [statue of the founder of the
Gelugpa school] there, I refused. I did not want to do that. In this period the
leaders had no respect for our customs. Now the government say that this was a
mistake and many people got very angry. Later, the vice leader [who participated
in the destruction of the Tsongkhapa statue] and his son died in an accident. They
were digging a hole in the ground and suddenly a big stone fell and hit their
heads. Such accidents happened to many Tibetan Red Guards.*

The activities of the Red Guards, and particularly the participation of some local leaders
in the demolitions of meaningful and significant places, marked a new phase in village
life. In addition to the attacks on religious institutions and practices, the Cultural
Revolution embittered the relations between villagers, not only between those who
participated in the demolitions and their co-villagers, but also between the villagers of
*trelpa* and *yokpo* background. While antipathies towards the former were of a non-expressive character, the latter conflict was highly explicit and public as well as being encouraged by the local government. Having the correct political attitude and belonging to the correct class were major concerns, and the former landowners remained on the periphery of the communities. Shakya notes that struggle sessions were organised in almost all Tibetan villages (1999:301). Goldstein argues that in nomadic areas in Central Tibet, class-struggle sessions or self-criticism meetings were restricted to those who had supported the uprising (in 1959) and the Dalai Lama, or those who had administered their estates particularly brutally (1994:93). Similarly, self-criticism meetings in Sharlung did not include all *trelpa* family members, but rather those named by local complainers, or those who had participated in the local uprising against the Chinese. As one of the sons of Nyikar House explains:

> Both phala and achok [the eldest and the second eldest fathers] had problems with the government, and phala was sent to prison. Later, my mother and achung [the youngest father] also had problems. Somebody complained to the leaders about my parents, saying that they were enemies (drawo) because of our genbo background. It was somebody who had worked for my father before, and who had gained power in the new society. The same happened to Dagpo and Lungko, because they were leaders in the old society. My mother was paraded around the village and around the area, and she had to attend *tamdzing*. They also took all her pechas (religious texts). Achung’s hearing was so bad at the time, so they did not make him go around.

Following the *thamdzing* the relations between former landowners and workers worsened, and some villagers started to physically attack the former. Nyikar *phala* continues:

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39 There were three levels of *tamdzing*; the third and most serious level could end with the on-the-spot execution of the accused.
We had no protection then. My mother had many problems after the thamdzing because some people thought they could beat her, as she was a drawo. Towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, I was also beaten many times. I was sixteen years old then. Once somebody came and said that I was a drawo, and they accused me of helping Gyewa Rinpoche [Dalai Lama], so they beat me with sticks. For many years I had much pain in my body; now the legs are no longer hurting, but my back and right arm are still painful [showing his deep scars, see photo 3].

Members of the biggest landowner Houses in Sharlung were punished in varying degrees and ways, mostly by being forced to attend thamdzing and occasionally by beatings. While the leaders of the powerful Houses had already been attacked, arrested and sent away because of their participation in the local uprising, other members were able to stay in the village, however with restricted rights of participation the village life. Because class background was of utmost importance during the Cultural Revolution, any member of a former trelpa House could legitimately be attacked. In this period, the trelpa children were stigmatized and excluded from social activities in the village, and many of these children recall this period as frightening. Members of the two genbo Houses were most severely punished, but other trelpas also experienced difficult times after the first reforms.

Towards the middle of the 1970s, the former trelpa were slowly normalizing their relations to their co-villagers. They worked together in the collective teams, and throughout the collective period those classified as ‘middle farmer’ received less food per work-points than the other farmers. Hence, they had to depend upon others for help. Despite the bad relations between some former yokpos and the trelpas, many former yokpos provided help and continued a friendship with the co-villagers of bad class background.
Towards the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, political uncertainty characterized the Chinese leadership in Beijing. At the end of 1978, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party introduced the beginning of a new reform era (Judd 1994:7). These reforms, called the Household Responsibility System, were implemented progressively from the end of the 1970s in rural China and later in Tibet, and the main change was the de-collectivization of agricultural production, defining the household as the unit responsible for production, allowing private ownership of excess production and profit (ibid.:8). This political shift was very well received in Tibet, not only among farmers, but also pastoralists and urban dwellers. De-collectivization was introduced together with a more general political change in terms of relations between the Chinese government and Tibet as an autonomous region in China. Much of the optimism found in Tibet in the beginning of the 1980s is linked with the visit Hu Yaobang, by many Tibetans considered to be the Chinese official most friendly towards Tibet.40

On 22 May 1980,41 the Chinese Party Secretary Hu Yaobang and Vice-Premier Wan Li landed at Gonggar airport in Tibet for a historical visit that set its mark on Tibet for years to come. Hu was highly critical of the Party’s policies in Tibet, and particularly the dominance of the Chinese cadres in the region. In a speech held in late May he said:

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40 The background for the change of policy in Tibet remains unclear, but Goldstein refers to an informed interpretation where the exile government’s fact-finding mission in 1979 played an important role. The Dalai Lama’s older brother, Lobsang Samten, led the delegation. They visited a number of areas in Tibet, and everywhere Tibetans welcomed them with overwhelming support. This surprised the Chinese officials reflecting the Communist Party’s complete ignorance of the Tibetan people’s sentiments at the time. This was particularly evident by the Party’s organisation of neighbourhood meetings before the delegation’s arrival in Lhasa, where Tibetans were told not to let their hatred towards the ‘Old society’ induce them to throw stones or spit at the delegation members. When the delegation arrived in Lhasa thousands upon thousands of people came to welcome it, and with tears in their eyes they prostrated in front of the members, offering kathags, and expressing their support for the Dalai Lama. Some even fought physically to be able touch the Dalai Lama’s brother. The Beijing officials accompanying the delegation saw the massive pro-Dalai Lama feelings, and the local officials in Lhasa could no longer ignore these sentiments. After the return to Beijing, the officials decided to send their own fact-finding mission, which was led by Hu Yaobang (Goldstein 1994).

41 Hu’s visit started the day before the anniversary of the signing of the 17-point agreement.
We feel that our party has let the Tibetan people down. We feel bad! The sole purpose of our Communist Party is to work for the happiness of the people, to do good things for them. We have worked nearly thirty years, but the lives of the Tibetan people have not notably improved. Are we [the Party] not to blame? (Hu Yaobang, quoted in Shakya 1999: 381)

Hu’s visit gave Tibetans hope for a new period of freedom and real autonomy. One of his main points was to recruit more Tibetan cadres, so as to develop a greater degree of participation from the Tibetan population. For various reasons, this was not easy to carry out.\(^4\) And with the failure to Tibetanize the cadres came a new emphasis on the position of the traditional elite (nobles and the clergy). Tibet’s traditional elite still held the respect of the common people; now, instead of being attacked by the new elite, they were offered prominent positions within the political administration (Shakya 1999). By 1982 the Party claimed that over 600 former Tibetan officials held leading posts in the government and the Party (ibid.:39).

\(^4\) There was deep disagreement between the central government in Beijing and the Chinese and Tibetan cadres in Tibet regarding the new policies promoted by Hu Yaobang. The local cadres were mostly leftists who had risen to power during the Cultural Revolution (both Chinese and Tibetans) or who had been promoted to high positions because of their class and family background (Tibetans). For an analysis of Hu Yaobang’s visit to Tibet and local resistance to his policies, see Shakya (1999: 380–398).

In the lower levels of the administration, the leaders were often former *yokpos*. In Kyiling for instance, the leadership of the former *yokpos* had already been established through the previous three decades of political changes, leaving no openings for representatives of the former elite. This process is well illustrated in Sharlung, where the two leading figures in the pre-1959 period, Dagpo and Lungko, had been removed from the village, placed in a labour camp and reduced to old men with poor health upon their return. Their children were not included in the new leadership (see below) however; they were also no longer persecuted by the new leaders.
Household Responsibility System

As in the rest of Tibet, de-collectivization was well received in Sharlung. The economy of the collective period had been unsuccessful, and many villagers complained that working for the commune was ‘just like working for the landowners in the “Old society”’. As an old former yokpo woman said:

There was not enough food for each person. I worked hard to gain my work-points, but they gave me little in return. Once I asked for a blanket, but they said that I did not need it. It was the same when I worked for Lungko: I asked for something important, but they said it was unnecessary. When they had decided that I did not need something, there was nothing I could do.

When the township leaders introduced the Household Responsibility System, it was, according to my informants, with the support from all the villagers in Sharlung. Although Yeh argues (2004) that in Tibet, as opposed to China, the impetus of the reforms came entirely from the government and not from the farmers, villagers had wished for a de-collectivization but were afraid of voicing their opinions.43 Nevertheless, many villagers remained sceptical towards the new reforms, as one older woman said: ‘We had experienced so many changes; we feared that this would not last.’

In Tibet as in China, the process of de-collectivisation started in 1978, when the government increased the scale of household usufruct plots and encouraged households to engage in sideline activities (Yeh 2004). However, it was not until 1980 and 1981 that the Household Responsibility System (gentshang lamlug) was implemented in Panam and elsewhere in rural Tibet. Reflecting its name, the reform dissolved the communes and re-established the household as the unit responsible for production. In agricultural areas, the village land was divided per capita and organised within the household, providing

43 In general there are significant differences between the voicing of criticism from farmers in China and farmers in Tibet; while, especially in recent years, Chinese farmers engage in demonstrations and protests against government policies, this does not seem to have occurred in Tibet. This must be understood as one of the ramifications of colonial power in Tibet.
land to every person above a certain age. The reform did not provide ownership to the land, but it gave the farmers long-term usufruct rights, i.e. the land cannot be sold, but it can be leased out. Further, the animals of the communes were divided according to the same principle, and the agricultural implements were divided or sold to the villagers.

There were different versions of the Household Responsibility System, but in Tibet most of the villages initially implemented what was called *baogan daohu* in Chinese; i.e. all tasks were contracted to individual households that were required to meet specific quotas but allowed to keep the surplus (Yeh 2004). Hence, the farmers were obliged to sell quotas of yield to the government at lower prices than in the market as well as to pay taxes, also in agricultural produce. Later, however, as a result of the conclusions of Hu Yaobang’s fact-finding mission, Tibetans were exempted from government quotas, so that each individual household kept all excess produce (Goldstein 1994).\(^{44}\) Depending upon the local leadership, the location and the fertility and production of an area, the reforms have been implemented with great variations.

**Dividing the land in Sharlung**

Towards the end of 1980, the Panam County government began the implementation of the new policies. The transition from collective to private production was to take place gradually, and the first phase involved increasing the amount of private land (for vegetable gardens) from 2,039 in 1979 to 5,141 *mu* in 1980. For the households, the amount of private land increased from 0.4 to 1.0 *mu*, a significant increase for vegetable production. The ownership of land and animals remained with the production teams.

With time, households and groups of (three to ten) households were organised into work groups that were given contracts to land, as well as farming implements and draft animals, and these were responsible for the day-to-day production. Gradually, these work groups were given access to higher percentages of the excess produce, as well as rising

\(^{44}\) For details on grain procurement policies in Tibet, see Schwartz (1998). Schwartz describes the various phases in which Tibetan farmers have sold and resold barley to the state, pointing to the variation of practices and the lack of excess grain for many of the poorer areas, as well as a preference for barter found among the self-sufficiency farmers.
penalties for any shortage in production, and by 1981 farmers were allowed to keep 100 percent of the excess and were obliged to pay 50 percent of the shortage amount. These changes represented an improvement of labour incentive, as they established a direct connection between work and reward. However, in this initial phase the collective leadership still controlled agricultural production, such as making the decisions regarding planting and harvesting, the amount of fields to be cultivated, the use of fertilizers and insecticides, and the rewards and penalties to be given, thus limiting the villagers’ enthusiasm for production (Ben Jiao 2001:68-74).

The TAR government had made decisions to transfer collectively owned animals to the households in order to improve the incentive for animal husbandry. However, in Panam the leadership decided not to transfer animals but rather remove the limits for private ownership of animals and encourage individuals to raise more animals. Further, the trees in the village were returned to those who planted them, and older trees held by the commune were returned to those who owned them before the collectivisation, providing the new owners with full control of the production from these trees.

Importantly, the farmers were encouraged to seek additional incomes, such as handicraft production, construction work in urban centres, and barter with agricultural produce (particularly with the pastoralists of the upper valley). According to Ben Jiao, 450 people in the entire Panam County were involved in such activities by the end of 1980. Side-line activities were promoted by the local government, which in January 1981 arranged a large market fair near the county seat, where farmers could barter, buy and sell their products and handicrafts. All these activities contributed to the gradual transition of micro-economy from the collectives to the households.

Throughout 1981, the villagers in Panam remained sceptical towards the new reforms. This was mainly due to the unclear time aspect of the reforms, and the perceived risk of being engaged in a short-term reform (Ben Jiao 2001; see Yeh 2004). The local government in Panam initially claimed that the new reforms were planned as an experiment to last for three years only, which created a particularly negative reception. Hence, the farmers were reluctant to involve themselves in what the government termed
an experiment, fearing punishment at a later stage. It was not until the end of 1981 when
the full reform was implemented that local farmers embraced the new policies and
actively engaged in the new opportunities.

As an attempt to counter the negative reception of the initial transitions of
economic organization, the township leaders in Kyiling introduced the last reform
program to the villages at the end of 1981. This reform divided all land, animals, and
farm implements amongst the members of production teams or households in a particular
village, regardless of age, sex, and social background. The villages in Kyiling had various
amounts of mu and animals to distribute, depending on the geography of the area. While
the villages located in the wider lower parts of the township, such as Bargang, distributed
close to three mu per person, the poorer upper villages allocated just over one mu per
person, while also distributing large numbers of animals, facilitating a semi-pastoral
economy. In Sharlung, each individual received 2,4 mu of land, which is close to the
average numbers of the farming areas in the township (2,48 mu). As elsewhere in China,
the plots of land ascribed to a person were to be administered by the household of
registration rather than by the individual; hence, a person was not necessarily entitled to
land upon change of residence (household). This had important implications in Sharlung.

According to Ösel, the young deputy-leader of the village, the land division in
Sharlung was successful, not only because of the principle of equality but also because of
the fairness of the implementation process in which the village and township leaders
based the actual division on village democracy. In 1981, Sharlung consisted of 272
persons who were divided by the leaders into eight groups, with thirty-four people in
each group. Each group consisted of persons from various households, and among the
thirty-four, one representative was chosen. The eight representatives of the initial groups
then joined the village leader in the committee for distribution. These nine people
conducted the actual division of land and animals into eight main units. Each
representative thereafter divided the fields among the members of his group. The fields
were classified into three main categories depending on their quality: best, good and fair,
and every individual within a group received fields of all three categories. During the
internal distribution process of these groups, the farmers often resorted to a lottery in order to settle the distribution of all fields, a system accepted by most of the villagers.

In addition to land, each person was given animals, i.e. *ralug* (goats and sheep). At the time of the division the village owned around 1500 sheep. After the division each person in the village brought 5.5 *ralug* into a household. The grasslands of the mountain slopes were also distributed. This land was not distributed individually, but to groups of 500 sheep, leaving a reminder of the collective period, as people needed to form co-operatives for herding and caring for the *ralug*. The grasslands of the mountain slopes do not provide enough pasture for all the sheep and goats; thus people tend to bring them back inside their courtyards and feed them grass and hay. The draft animals, such as cows and *dzo*, on the other hand, were not classified as government property and were thus not distributed. These could be bought for money or grain; however, this happened only to a limited degree, as people had little money to spend.

More than twenty years after the implementation of the Household Responsibility System, many farmers of Sharlung continue to be content with the ramifications of the original distribution of the land. While other areas of Tibet have had much redistribution of village land since 1980, this has not been the case in Sharlung. Rather, traditional inheritance values have gained renewed legitimacy, and no land has been returned to the village upon death, divorce or other demographic changes (cf. Yeh 2004). However, changes in household composition have led to frustrations among some villagers, particularly members of households with a significant increase in numbers of people after 1981. Interestingly, the discourse of fairness and equality is a legacy from the collective period and is now an internalised conception of land distribution in rural Tibet.

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45 *Dzo* are a crossbreed of cow and yak and are preferred as draft animals, as they are very strong as well as easy to handle. *Dzomo* milk is also considered some of the best basis for butter.

46 Reports from nomadic areas in Tibet indicate a much stronger and more outspoken frustration concerning the static form of the Household Responsibility System (Pirie 2005). A higher level of frustration might be connected to the different quality of grassland distribution.

47 Yeh (2004) describes ongoing processes of re-collectivisation in Central Tibet. These are found particularly in peri-urban townships around Lhasa, where the government is experimenting with strongly organised agricultural co-operation in a policy termed ‘the eight unifies and the two separates.’ Such processes are unknown in Sharlung.
Since 1981, the local government has been promoting economic development in the villages, for instance by introducing new farming projects, such as greenhouse production. Participation in these new farming projects is mandatory, and classified as *chile* (public work). Locally, economic development is measured by the ability to produce grain on a subsistence level, hence without government assistance, and on the cash income level of a household. Below, I shall turn to the social distribution in Sharlung village, after the Household Responsibility System. I shall argue that while we see a stratum of economically independent farmers, we also find that a new social stratum of poor farmers has been established. Further, it appears that the stigmatization of the lowest ranked has been strengthened after the reform.

**Social divisions in Sharlung after the reform**

Starting with the Household Responsibility System, Tibetans of all backgrounds were officially established as being of equal rank. Previously, various criteria for the formation of social hierarchies had been applied: *rig* in the ‘Old society,’ and class in the various periods of Mao-policies. By the end of the communes, children of landowners were no longer targeted as enemies of the people, and during the reform all households in the village were given land on equal terms. Hence, by the end of 1981, the people in Sharlung were all farmers with identical relations to land, albeit with varying quantities, and this access was independent of social background (due to the character of the land distribution of the reform).

One implication of the Chinese reforms since 1960, including the Household Responsibility System, has been the transformation of the traditional skilled workers (*menrig*) into farmers. As described above, Tibetans consider certain lineages and households to be polluted, and these have traditionally been engaged in, and thereby classified by, skilled work. Hence they were not farmers, but offered their services and were paid in kind. While most *menrig* participate in village life with only certain exceptions today (see Chapter Nine for details), the begging musicians remain on the
outside of village life. Such stigmatization has, I believe, been strengthened by the events following the implementation of the Household Responsibility System.

In the three neighbouring villages to Sharlung, there are not only blacksmiths (cag soba) but also corpse-cutters, called baru, as well as an unusually large number of butcher (shemba) households. The blacksmith and baru households are located in Sachung, and make up some ten percent of the households there. Some of the blacksmiths are related to the baru by agnatic descent and started iron production three generations back, being categorized as cag soba since then. The butchers live in the neighbouring village of Bargang, constituting some fifteen percent of the households there. The blacksmiths, the baru and the butchers live close to the other households, and there are no visible signs of difference in terms of architecture or symbolic representation of their houses. In Gangkar, there are some ten percent beggars (longkhen). Contrary to the other menrig households, beggars live on the outskirts of the village, and their houses are considerably poorer than those of the neighbours. In Panam, surprisingly, the menrig households where people engage in their traditional work as well as farming are perceived by the villagers to be of higher rank than those who are merely farmers.

It is worth pointing out that the lower ranked people do not in any way operate as a corporate unit and should, therefore, not be treated as a social group. Rather, they should be seen as a social category, as they share some socially relevant features, but they are not internally organised with several interconnected roles. Blacksmiths, baru and butchers do not define themselves as a group, nor do they operate with common goals or intentions. Further, there is no common political movement to improve social mobility among these households. Rather, there seems to be a strong disagreement between people of different backgrounds regarding the social hierarchy that they are part of; i.e. representatives of all categories tend to rank themselves highest. Thus, a blacksmith will not marry a butcher, and the other way around. Also, they will not share cups with each other, which indicates that the notion of pollution found among commoners is also shared by the people perceived as polluted, although they do tend to make an exception for their own traditional occupation.
I include here the story of Jongbo who is one of the beggars (*longkhen*) in Gangkar, the neighbouring village of Sharlung. Jongbo and his relatives in Gangar have opted for a different economic strategy following the Household Responsibility System, which has led to a further alienation from the village community. Today, he and his family members are stigmatized and strictly excluded from the village community; they do not participate in public work, labour exchange, ritual events, or informal socializing. They reside in a small, unpainted house that has the appearance of being significantly poorer than its neighbours, with no fence surrounding it, no animals guarding it, and with iron tools and other equipment haphazardly deposited around the house walls. The house consists of two households; his mother makes up one household alone, and Kerang, his wife and their three children make up the other. His one daughter has been sent as a *nama* to a *longkhen* man in the valley to the south of Gangkar. Everybody in the house begs, either in the surrounding villages in Panam, in the county seat, or in Shigatse or Lhasa. During my stays in Sharlung, one of his three sons was begging in Panam, while the two others were helping his mother to beg in a semi-pastoral area in the upper part of the valley. In addition, Kerang does small ironwork (nails, horse shoes, knives, spoons), and some weaving (belts and shoe straps), but the family does not cultivate land.

When I asked him why they do not farm the land that was given to his household, he simply answered: ‘I don’t know how to do farm work (*shingle*). My father didn’t know *shingle*. My brothers don’t know *shingle*.’ According to other villagers, this is incorrect, because the *longkhens* had been part of the work groups and communes during the collective period and had at that time Kerang shown sufficient knowledge of *shingle*. As Tashi-la, the village leader, typically said: ‘*Longkhen* are too lazy to work.’ He points out that in 1981, the *longkhen* were given an opportunity to stop begging and become farmers on the same conditions as their co-villagers. When asked about the events of 1981 and the sudden access to arable land, Kerang explains:

*During the division we received land for five people* [his mother and father, Kerang, his wife and one daughter]. *They also gave us animals, maybe more than twenty ralug. Just*
after that we divided the household into two, because my wife had a bad relation to my
parents. So then we had land for three persons. We didn’t know how to do shingle, so we
leased the land to Gyeling [a wealthy, former trelpa House in Gangkar]. Every harvest
they give us 330 jin [165 kg] of the best ne (barley grain). But it is not enough to last for
the whole year, and our children are hungry. So we also have to beg.

I asked what they did with the animals they had received. He answered: ‘We slaughtered
some and sold the rest. We can’t take care of animals. We got some money in return, but
this has gone now.’

Other villagers in the valley see these acts of leasing out land and selling animals,
rather than raising them, as absurdly irrational. As one man said: ‘I don’t understand, but
maybe they like begging.’ The Household Responsibility System and its social
implications have confirmed and reinforced local perceptions of the longkhen as being
legitimately low-ranked. Economic irrationality, in addition to the concerns about
pollution, informs the local stigmatization of longkhen. The lack of economic rationality
is also, according to my informants, reflected in the fact that no beggars marry
polyandrously. I shall return to this latter point in last chapter of the thesis.

The Household Responsibility System provided all individuals regardless of
social background with access to arable land, and, accordingly, the former low ranked
skilled workers were provided with the same economic possibilities as their co-villagers.
As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, this process of socio-economic levelling has certain
limits for the traditional skilled workers, most importantly the exclusion from local social
and moral networks of co-operation. Despite these limitations, it seems that one
significant implication of the Household Responsibility System is a fundamental
equalization of the local peasants, i.e. all individuals were given usufruct rights to an
equal amount of land and animals. However, in order to secure continuous economic
prosperity, household composition is of utmost importance. I return to the issues of
household composition throughout the following chapters.
The structural changes in Tibetan communities during the last five decades have been enormous. Politically, Tibetans lost their de facto independence and became part of a new state that not only represented a foreign rule, but a different type of government altogether. Yeh suggests that the centralized state system in Tibet before the Chinese take-over could be thought of in the Foucaultian term of ‘sovereign power,’ in which the citizens had to fulfil labour and tax obligations. At the same time, the state had very limited contact with the citizens and did not in any sense ‘take care’ of its people, whether in terms of schooling, or health care, and law enforcement, etc. The state was not, Yeh suggests, involved in processes of transforming individuals into subjects of the state (Yeh 2003:187). After the Chinese invasion and the attempts to transform Tibet into a socialist society from 1959 and onwards, Tibetans of all regions were classified and included into a strongly present state power, influencing all aspects of an individual’s life. In this process, representatives of the peasantry were wooed by a state for the first time, and much propaganda was aimed at transforming Tibetan peasants to Chinese citizens, not only formally, but also emotionally.

Socially, Tibetans were reclassified into categories based on foreign criteria, establishing new social relations and hierarchies. The former hierarchy was turned upside down: The landholders, depending on their relations to hired labourers, were labelled ‘representatives of feudal lords’ or ‘middle farmers’, and occasionally enemies (drawo) of the people (Fjeld 2005). Landless peasants were classified as ‘poor’ and were given a prominent position in the local community. New leadership structures evolved, and, on the township and county levels, the leaders were chosen from the poorest sections in the local communities (Shakya 1999:304), including the people of menrig background. In Sachung, for instance, a former blacksmith was appointed as the village leader and remained in the position from 1965 until the mid-1970s, which would have been completely unthinkable in the pre-Chinese era of Tibetan society.

Economically, the villagers have experienced vast changes in the sociality of land, in control of the agricultural produce, and in the possibility to plan and chose their
economic endeavours. While in the traditional society people were strictly divided in terms of access to land - into the general categories of landowners (*trelpa*) and landless peasants (*yokpo*) - the reform history has transformed the organization of economic endeavour in various phases. The reforms have also had profound influence on the local organization of material life and the fundamental social organization.

In the pre-Chinese era, most people in Sharlung lived in nuclear families where individuals had independent work relations to a landholder. The nine *trelpa* and two *genbo* Houses, on the other hand, had estates of various sizes with various tax obligations to the local government. Schematically, the *trelpa* Houses held household-based rights and obligations, while the *yokpo* held individual and, often, short-term contracts. With the introduction of the Democratic Reforms, the nuclear families were given household-based rights to land, as well as obligations held by the household as a unit. However, as I have described above, these initial reforms only lasted for one year, until the introduction of the collective period, culminating in the implementation of full-scale communes in 1965. During this collective period, the individual was again the basis of economic rights and obligations. As member of a work team, a person gained work-points depending upon age and gender (not actual work conducted) which constituted the foundation for his or her remuneration from the collective. The organizational aspects of co-residence were limited and did not constitute a group with a common long-term economic endeavour. Hence, it was easy to establish new households in the village, because the natal household would not lose land or other economic benefits, and importantly, the residence group had limited socio-symbolic value.

The introduction of the Household Responsibility System altered this emphasis on the individual in the organization of economic life. As described, this last land reform placed the economic responsibility with each household and, thus enabled the residence group to plan and engage in long-term strategies. With the redistribution of land and animals, and the long-term timeframe of the reform, all farmers have usufruct rights to land in ways very similar to the former *trelpa* category in the pre-Chinese social system. As all rights and obligations of an individual are defined by household membership, the
relation between the individual and the household structurally resemble the former *trelpa* category. Moreover, as these households were given land, they had also been named. The naming of households has both a pragmatic and a socio-symbolic aspect, and while the sociality of land today resembles the former category of *trelpa*, their organization of domestic group resembles their corporate estates.

From the 1980s, the household as a social institution and an economic unit has been ‘pervaded by a positive reference’ in official discourse in China (Judd 1994:164). In the following, I shall argue that after the implementation of the Household Responsibility System, the cultural meaning and the ‘content’ of the household as a type of social organization is taking on unexpected forms. The people with whom one resides are classified as closest kin, and the place of residence is permeated with symbolic value and social meaning, emerging, as I shall argue, as a ‘House’ in the way similar to the concept as defined by Lévi-Strauss, that is as a corporate body of material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through time (1983:174). In the following, it is the Tibetan notions of and practices in ‘household’ (*khyimtshang*) that will serve as the underlying focus in my discussion of changes and continuity in marital practices after the land reforms of the 1980s.
CHAPTER THREE

FRATERNAL POLYANDRY
IN SHARLUNG
Facts and figures

Describing local marriage practices and preferences as found in Sharlung, this chapter seeks to describe the current distribution of marital forms (monogamy, polyandry and polygyny). Focusing on fraternal polyandry, it further illustrates the local explanatory models of such marriages by first describing the biography of the Tagrab and, secondly, by presenting six villagers’ explanations of the preference for polyandry. Hegemonic perspectives on Tibetan polyandry have followed the local explanatory models closely, and, when discussing these perspectives, I question the meaning of what has been translated as ‘household’ (khyimtshang). My suggestion is a broader perspective in which the social and symbolic meaning of the corporate residence group is emphasized, a cultural category that I term ‘House.’

Before turning to the present day, however, I shall give an introduction to marriage in Tibet in more general terms. I start this chapter with a brief description of marriage in traditional Tibet, that is, marital patterns as found in Tibet before the Chinese take-over. Following that, I turn to the legal aspects of marriage in Tibet today and
briefly discuss the 1950 and 1980 Marriage Law of China. As polyandry is illegal in China, I shall discuss how local officials handle the ongoing practice of such marriages in Panam.

**MARRIAGE IN TRADITIONAL TIBET**

Marriage in Tibet is a family matter and, as shall become clear throughout this thesis, it is so to an increasing extent among the farmers in Panam. In Tibet there has been a great variety of marriage practices, not only in terms of marital forms, but also in the nature of the arrangement. Two main arrangements were found in Central Tibet: those involving elaborate weddings rituals initiated by the parent generation (changsa), and informal co-habitations initiated by the couple themselves (khathugpa). 48 These two forms were socially distributed according to class (landholders and non-landholders), and, although both arrangements were followed by some ceremonial activities, these varied greatly in grandeur. My former yokpo informants also describe that wedding ceremonies were of a different, and less elaborate, character ‘before’, indicating a social marriage distribution not only in terms of plural and monogamous marriage forms, but also in the character of the arrangement itself. Aziz also notes that although all marriages were marked by some celebration, the 5-7 days elaborate wedding parties, that are known from the literature, were performed mostly by those ‘above the d’ü-ch’ung rank’ (1978a:174). This, I believe, is an important point.

It seems that, as a general pattern, members of the upper classes, that is those with hereditary access to land, arranged elaborate weddings (changsa) where the two respective households were heavily involved, while the landless labourers did not. Among the yokpos, a khathugpa union could be the result of the couple eloping or that they made the decision to marry their own. Where they often asked for their parents’

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48 Elopements as found in Tibet involved the consent of both the future groom and bride, although to various extent. Among Tibeto-Burman groups in the Nepal Himalaya, marriage could also be contracted by capture. When captured, a woman is taken by force (although in various strengths) with the aim of persuading her into marriage. If she refused the marriage she would in most cases be taken back to her parents’ house (see Schuler 1987:140-150). According to my informants, capture of a bride has not been an accepted practice in Tsang.
consent; this was not a condition for the arrangement. *Khathugpa* (‘the meeting of mouths’) were informal co-habitations where the couple often, but not always, established a separate household. Although limited in terms of wedding ceremonies, a *khathugpa* union should be characterized as marriage. Following Leach’s definition, *khathugpa* served to establish all of the criteria listed; legal parenthood and monopoly in the spouses’ sexuality, right to the spouse’s labour and property (if any) and a joint fund of property for the offspring of the marriage, moreover, it served to establish relations of affinity (Leach 1955: 183). In other words, *changsa* and *khathugpa* are both marriages, but with different initiating sources and ceremonial implications, and these were often found in the named estates, on the one hand, and in the nuclear families, on the other.

Underlying both these arrangements are negative marriage rules, in which elaborate incest taboos exclude bilateral kin as marriage (and sexual) partners. The extent of the incest taboos varies, and while my informants claim a prohibition of nine generations of patrilateral kin and seven generations of matrilateral kin, others have reported the numbers to be seven and five (cf. Goldstein 1971a; Ben Jiao 2001). As few, if any, are able to trace their relatives to this extent, the main point is that one should not marry those who can be termed ‘kindred’ (see Chapter Four for details).

Also negatively defined, sexual relations and, thus, marriage, should not occur across *rig* borders. A person commoner background should therefore not marry a person of a polluted (*rig tsokpa*) or a low *rig* (*menrig*), that is, the skilled workers and the beggars primarily. The avoidance of what is seen to be polluted *rig* is fundamental to all types of marriage arrangements and all marital forms.49

Unlike what is found in neighbouring India and Nepal, the ideal marriage in traditional Tibet was hypogamy, that is, a marriage arrangement between a higher ranked man and a lower ranked woman. However, as Aziz points out from her study of Dingri, in practice, hypogamy was found in only few marriages in the countryside (1978a:161). Most often (60 percent of the cases), she found, marriages were contracted endogamously within the upper classes of the aristocracy and lay religious elite (*ngagpa*). Hypogamy,

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49 See Chapter Nine for details on relative rank among *menrig.*
she writes, was often found in the lower social stratum of landless farmers, where women to a larger extent were married upwards in rank, either to *trelipa* husbands in rural areas, or merchants in the more urban settings.

Tibet has been known in the anthropological literature for its marriage forms, because, as Aziz notes: ‘Tibet probably exhibits a greater variety of marriage types than any other society’ (1978a:134). These variations include monogamy, polygyny and polyandry, as well as combinations of these three. In general, it seems that monogamy was found in all social strata, while the limited occurrence of polygyny was to a large extent found among the wealthy upper classes (the aristocracy), and polyandry was predominantly found among the landholding peasants (Stein 1972; Bell 1928; Goldstein 1971a, 1976). However, the distribution of polyandry in traditional Tibetan society has been the issue of some discussion. Bell refers to a discussion among ex-patriots and local officials in the 1920s in Lhasa, where Rockhill and Combe (the latter based upon the statements of Paul Sherab) argued that polyandry was only found among the landed gentry, in which Tsang was noticed as an area with an ‘exceptional prevalence’ of polyandry (1928:161) Bell and others (based on the statements of Kusho Tsendrön, one of Dalai Lama’s secretaries) argued against this and claimed that polyandry was common among both the peasantry and the pastoralists (1928:159-161). Bell concluded that ‘all agreed that, taking Tibet as a whole, monogamy was more prevalent than either polyandry or polygamy [polygyny]’ (1928:161).

In terms of distributions of marital forms and marriage preferences, there is a significant difference in the urban and rural areas of Tibet. While polyandry is still practiced and, it seems, increasing in the countryside such as in Tsang (cf. Ben Jiao 2001), this is very different from what is found in urban areas. Tibetans in Lhasa express a preference for monogamy and base this in the value of romantic love and mutual affection, but also in what they find to be a demanding nature of a polyandrous marriage and the absence of the economic rationale for polyandry in an urban environment. Moreover, in Lhasa, polyandry is widely seen to be a backward cultural practice (see Fjeld 2005:71ff.). These urban-rural differences might also reflect the varying degrees of
government intervention in family affairs in the city and in the countryside, because unlike what is the case in rural Tibet, the Chinese Marriage Law informs and regulates marital decisions and registrations of urbanites.

MARRIAGE LAW IN CHINA

In the PRC, the law prohibits any form of polygamy and, in the law, no distinctions are made between polygyny and polyandry. As described in the Introduction, Chinese scholars frown upon polyandry. Similar attitudes are expressed in official policies and in the media, where polyandry is depicted as an ancient tradition that is physically and emotionally harmful, and is a ‘tumour left over from the feudal farmer-slave system of old Tibet’ (Mcartney 1994). Despite the prohibition and public abhorrence of polyandry, the government does not interfere against polyandrous practices in rural Tsang today. The degree of government intervention in individual marriage arrangements has varied throughout the period of Chinese Communist rule in Tibet; however, it seems that rural areas of Tibet have had less interference in family issues than most Chinese areas.50

Shortly after the revolution, China’s Communist Party focused their attention on marital practices throughout the country. The 1950 Marriage Law outlawed multiple wives, concubinage, child betrothal, and the sale of sons or daughters (into marriage or prostitution), on the one side, and cadres and village leaders encouraged frugal wedding arrangements, on the other.51 While being successful in the Chinese cities, the latter policy change was only partly incorporated in rural life, and villagers continued elaborate weddings initiated by the parents. However, concubinage, marriage of minors, and polygamy were more or less eliminated as cultural practices (Davis and Harrell 1993). Davis and Harrell argue that the 1950 Marriage Law should be seen as the origin, rather than the consequence, of changing marital practices found in China during the Maoist

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50 The implementation of another policy regarding family organisation in China, namely fertility control, has been a prioritized field for the regional government in TAR. This issue is highly politicized, and it seems that there are vast regional variations (see Goldstein et al. 2002). As far as I known, in Sharlung, there have been no forced contraceptive operations.

51 These initial policies were based upon ideas found in Engels’s The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (Davis and Harrell 1993).
era. In their view, it is the convergent processes of industrialization and state policies can answer for the changes in family structures in China (1993). Although fully incorporated into the People’s Republic of China, ‘complex patterns of family changes’ in Tibet, cannot, I shall argue, be explained in terms of state policies on marriage, on the one hand, and industrialization, on the other.

The renewed Marriage Law that was implemented in 1980 reemphasizes the prohibition against polygamy by emphasising monogamy and banning ‘mercenary marriage’ that refers both to polygamy and concubinage. These prohibitions are the considerations of Article 2 and 3:

Article 2. The marriage system based upon the free choice of partners
Marriage upon arbitrary decision by any third party, mercenary marriage and any other acts of interference in the freedom of marriage are prohibited. The exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriage is prohibited. Bigamy is prohibited. (Engel 1984:956)52

Polygamy, originally prohibited in the 1950 Marriage Law, had continued to be a concern for the government, realising ‘the tenacity of tradition and the need of continued vigilance’ (ibid.). Engel, citing Beijing Review, notes that the government has a practical approach to the issue of plural marriage:

In Tibet, an “autonomous region” of China where polygamy is still common, the law has been modified to allow continuation of those polygamous marriages that were contracted before the 1980 law took effect’ (ibid.).

Engel’s observation reflects the legal aspects of marriage rather than local practice. As such, his observations on the differences between marriages contracted before and after 1980 are valid. In contrast to what Engel presupposes, my material indicates that

52 It is interesting to note that in the Chinese context polygamy is classified with concubinage as a practice where men that have the financial means ‘purchase’ extra women/wives, thus, they do not distinguish between marriage and polykoity.
polygamy in Tibet has increased, and not decreased, in the period following both the new Marriage Law in 1980. It seems clear that the various Chinese Marriage Laws have had very limited effect on local practices in Tibet. While Davis and Harrell (1993) have shown that law adjustments on marriage have been powerful as to instigate changes in the family organization in China, in Panam it seems that policies concerning land tenure have been more influential on developments of domestic life.

THE ONGOING SPREAD OF POLYANDRY IN SHARLUNG

The resurgence of fraternal polyandry (zasum) in Panam is significant in numbers. While earlier literature claims some 30 per cent of marriages in traditional Tibet to be polygamous and of those the clear majority polyandrous (Aziz 1978a:37-138),53 my findings indicate some 60 per cent polygamy (of which all but one marriage are polyandrous).

According to the township leaders the arrangement of polyandry is an accepted practice that is not challenged by the local government today. These leaders are from the Panam Valley and share a positive perception of polyandry. Although they are aware of the prohibition against polygamy, the leaders do not report violation of the Marriage Law to the higher authorities. Moreover, the higher authorities do not question marriage statistics presented from the township, nor do they inquire about marriage practices in general. One of the township leaders pointed to singular nature of the county and prefecture authorities’ policy interest, and claimed that as long as polyandry influences the local economy in a positive way, the Marriage Law would not be effectuated.

Perhaps more important, the township leaders do not register polyandry in their population records. When a marriage is to be contracted, it must be reported to the township authorities so that a legal permission can be obtained. When reporting a marriage to the township leaders, the polyandrous nature of an arrangement will not be

53 Goldstein notes that in his reconstruction of kinship from the Gyantse area, his figures indicate that 60 per cent of the trelpa families married polygamosly, and that in the remaining 40 per cent, the families had only one son of the particular generation, thus being unable to arrange a polyandrous union (1976:209). This suggests that among the trelpa, those who were able to, married polyandrously.
concealed. However, rather than including all members of a polyandrous marriage, the leaders register each marriage as being contracted between the eldest man and one woman. As one of the township leaders said: ‘It is not illegal for young men to live in the same house as their elder brother and his wife.’ This widespread practice of non-registering of polyandrous marriages, or rather, of registering polygamous unions as monogamous ones, makes polyandry a non-existing phenomenon in official records. Lack of visibility in public records should not, of course, be taken as an indicator of limited practice.

During my stay in 2002 I registered 51 marriages located in the forty-four households in Sharlung. Of these were 21 monogamous (41 percent), 29 polyandrous (57 per cent) and one was polygynous (2 percent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital form</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monogamy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyandry</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygynyn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1: Marriage distribution in Sharlung.

Ben Jiao, writing from a larger village (90 households) in the valley, registered similar numbers in his study, i.e. 54 per cent monogamy, 31 per cent polyandry, 11 per cent polygyny and 4 per cent polygyandry, the latter being a unions of to or more wives and two or more husbands (2001:125). According to my informants the distribution of marriage types in Sharlung is typical for the agricultural regions of Panam, and, they claim, the high percentage of polyandry should not be seen as exceptional in the area.54 As polyandry in Tibet is of the fraternal kind, its arrangement preconditions more than one son of the same generation. Hence, more interesting than the distribution of polyandry compared to the total marriages is a consideration of how many of those with two or more sons that have arranged polyandrous marriages. When considering the

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54 In the higher-altitude villages in Panam where people engage in semi-pastoralism, polyandry is limited (according to my informants).
twenty-one monogamous marriages, I found that seven marriages are *khathugpa* (initiated by the couple themselves, out of which five were established before 1980); additionally, four are *makpa* marriages (uxorilocal residence often when there is no male heir in a House) and seven marriages are results of partition from polyandrous marriages. The remaining three monogamous marriages are found in households with only one son or, in one case, the second son has established himself outside the village. The numbers illustrate a clear picture of polyandry as a preferred marriage form in Sharlung today, where elopement and the limitation of sons to none or one only instigate monogamous marriages among the younger generation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of monogamy</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Makpa</em></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Khathugpa</em></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partitions from polyandrous marriages</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One son only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2: Internal distribution of monogamous marriages.

The ideal constellation of a polyandrous marriage is three brothers and one wife, and both my male and female informants suggest that three co-husbands is also the most common constellation. When surveying marriage distribution, I found that the average number of co-husbands was close to three, however, most of the marriages were unions of two husbands and one wife.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-husbands</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average numbers of co-husbands 2,7

Fig. 3: Number of co-husbands in polyandrous marriages
Of the three marriages involving five husbands, only one is organized in a way that all co-reside at the same time. In the two other marriages some husbands are young and do not take active part, while others attend schools or work outside the village for longer periods of time. In practice then most, indeed with only one exception, polyandrous marriages in Sharlung involve three or less husbands. Although a large number of co-husbands is beneficial for the household labour-wise, constellations of four or more co-partner are recognised to be very demanding marriage, not only for the wife, but also for the younger brothers whose age will be significantly less than their wife. Therefore, in these cases, off-farm activities are encouraged.

Looking at the numbers presented, it seems clear that polyandry first of all is widespread, and second, that it is not a practice restricted to a small social category but rather distributed widely, and third, that of the many monogamous marriages registered, one third of these were couples divorcing from a larger polyandrous unions, indicating an even higher percentage of arranged polyandrous marriages in Sharlung.

The prevalence of polyandry is apparent not only in terms of numerical distribution, but also in the views of the villagers in Sharlung. Below I shall describe in some detail a narrative that illustrates the context in which marriage strategies are made meaningful and the events and actions that enable people to utilize the possibilities of polyandry.

**THE COMING OF A POLYANDROUS MARRIAGE**

The story of the coming of a polyandrous marriage in the Tagrab House is also a story of the rise of a House. It describes how a couple transform their social position in a community through a series of events that are more or, perhaps most often, less self-initiated and strategic. As many narratives, it is both typical and atypical; it describes a process in which the various parts are shared by many, while at the same time it depicts the unusual life of a long-term village leader, whose position in the village community is
unique. Still, the story of Tagrab is not a unique story, it resembles in structure that of many former yokpos in Sharlung.

To a certain extent, the Tagrab is an ideal House in Sharlung today. Its members include Tashi-la and his wife, Phentok, their three sons and one daughter-in-law, their one unmarried daughter, and their four grandchildren (three daughters and one son). While the three sons are conjointly married, the unmarried daughter is an ordained novice nun in the local nunnery. Due to a lack of living quarters in the nunnery, she resides in her natal House.

Tashi-la is the household leader (sayön) and thereby responsible for the allocation of household tasks. He is also representing the House in external affairs. Division of labour is a crucial part of the household leader’s domain, and for these tasks Tashi-la, although to a limited extent, co-operates with his wife. Phentok is the nangma, the female head of the household, and is responsible for dividing domestic chores and duties among the women. While the two paths of leadership are recognised, Tashi-la holds the highest authority. His leadership is unchallenged, although some of the other household members discuss, and often complain, about his strictness.

Several afternoons in Sharlung, I found Tashi-la sitting in the open space that connects the living quarters of the house, preparing the wool and drinking chang. It was the calm period of late autumn, when the harvest was completed, and more time is spent on leisure. The sun still warms the air and many people enjoy these afternoons outside. During some of these afternoons Tashi-la told the story of his family.

We were born as yokpo. [Phentok] was born to the south of here, to a poor family with thirteen children. A relative of her father adopted her, and she came to the Sharlung House in this village. She was young then, maybe seven years old. My family lived here, and my parents and my siblings worked for genbos here and in Gangkar, and sometimes further away. ... I had three brothers and four sisters, but now only me, and my youngest sister is alive. She lives in Sakya. Sharlung has a long history. That is why the village has its name, right? Sharlung had many fields also. I have only heard this story and I don’t
know if it is true, but suddenly seven people died, and then they had no labour and had to hire many people to work. Because of the big problems they had to pay them with fields. And then – they lost all the fields and all the people. That is why they adopted [Phentok]. They were so poor – just like yokpo.

I asked if the two met while working in the field.

We met while working at the same lord’s fields. It was around 1962, I think. It was khathugpa, and my parents did not intervene. They had many children; four daughters and four sons, and I was the eldest son. Three of my sisters were sent as a nama (in-marrying wife), and two of my brothers were sent as a makpa (uxorilocally residing husband). When we lived with my parents, we stayed together with my one brother and one sister as well. They were both unmarried, but my brother had a son living with him. Later, my sister died of pollution from the sky. Her head got swollen, and then she died. Then, my brother moved. And later he also died. ...

When we married, we were very poor. It was during the Team Period (lori tsogchung), and although we had land, we had to pay much tax to the leaders and had only little grain to ourselves. It was a difficult time. [Phentok] was not happy in the house with my father because they were always fighting. She wanted to move. After the second son was born, one day she said ‘I will take the children and live alone!’ It was a bad fight, and she claimed that my father did not treat her and the children well. She said that they did not get enough food. I didn’t know what to do, and she told me that ‘it is difficult to find parents, but it is easy to find a new wife’. But I decided to go with her. So, we moved into a small room that we got from the leader, and continued to be part of the same team as before. After some time the team helped us to build a small house. We called it Norshar–because it was located east of Shar. ...
When time passed, I became a member of the committee in township and the times changed. In 1980, the land was divided and this was a happy time for us. When the land was divided, we were five people in our family, including the three children. Orgyen was not born yet. That was in 1980. So they gave us land for five people. At that time I was the village leader, but that did not give me more land. It was divided equally, depending on the number of persons in the house. But I was also in the township committee then, and they gave me a horse so I could travel the township and county for meetings. Therefore I was given one extra field, to make food for the horse. Now the leaders have a car, right? Then I had a horse! The white horse is the foal of the horse the government gave me. And I still have the field. But at first we only had the land given by the reform (gentsang lamlug), and the one extra (for the horse). But my parents also had fields for five people then, and after some years, I inherited their land. …

After we moved away from my parents, they lived together with my younger brother and my younger sister, right? Then both my father died and my mother as well. As you know, my relation with my father was so-so; I didn’t live with him and didn’t inherit anything from him - only maybe one blanket. All the land and other things remained with my brother and sister. And after my sister suddenly died, my brother’s health was declining. It was difficult for him alone to use the land, and we agreed that I should take over the land, while he would move to the city. In exchange I should take care of ache olo (brother’s son). So then we were very lucky. Now we have land for twelve people for our family (nangmi). Because we were so lucky, we asked a lama to give a new and auspicious name for our house. He called it Tagrab.

Tashi-la, being the village leader, is often asked for assistance of various kinds, and one day while we were talking, a neighbour had come to see him. He had been sitting drinking his chang and listening to and commenting upon the story, and now he asked
Tashi-la to come with him to look at some meat he wanted to sell at the next village meeting.

Weeks later, we were sitting in the tabtshang (kitchen/living room) lit only by the small oil lamp hanging on the pillar by the stove, drinking tea and chang and chatting about the happenings of the day. The children were already asleep, lying in their homemade wool bags in between us. Orgyen, their youngest father, was preparing for a three-day trip to the mountains, bringing food and drinks to the herders who were staying there. Lobsang Drolma, the nama, was boiling eggs for him to carry, while serving tea to Tashi-la. Orgyen was making pag, clumps of barley flour eaten together with soup and much else. Tashi-la seemed to watch the process as he was spinning wool as usual, and resting from a trip to the county seat where he had met with other leaders. I asked him to continue the story of the family; ‘Tashi-la, you told me about the time when you married, and when you got land – but then, what happened?’ Tashi-la said: ‘When we inherited the land, we were very happy. It was good fortune. We became one of those with most land, and we were not so many people – only six persons then.’ I told him that I had heard that the boy who was the son of Tashi-la’s younger brother only stayed with him for a short time. And that he now lives in Lhasa. ‘What happened to him?’ I asked. Tashi-la continued:

Olo is in Lhasa now – yes, that is true. I have a relative (pungya) there, and we heard that there was a place in Lhasa for children without parents, so we thought that was a good place for him. I have been there, and it is a nice place. They took good care of the boy. Now he works in Lhasa. He doesn’t like the village life anymore.

Yes, yes, he is in Lhasa. At that time we had three sons and one daughter. This is a very fortunate number of people, particularly since we have much land. Some years ago, I think it was around 1983, an old nun from Gangkar asked many families for a daughter. She was the former abbod of [the local nunnery] and wanted to rebuild the nunnery. So she needed girls to help her. Many families in Sharlung and other villages sent one
daughter for ordination; we also did this. Our daughter was then thirteen. She was interested in religion and wanted to join the nunnery. ... So then we had the three sons, and Namgyal Tsering (the eldest son) was getting older, so we had to start thinking about marriage. Orgyen was still young, and he was also interested in religion, always saying prayers and reading pechas (Buddhist texts). Therefore we decided to send him to Daching monastery. He stayed there for some years.

Later we arranged a marriage for Namgyal Tsering and Wangchuk. ... It was not so difficult to find a good nama, because we have many fields, and also I know many people since I am a leader. The nama is from Sakya. I knew the leader in her village, and so I could ask for her. I had heard that she was good, good personality, and her age was compatible with them [his two eldest sons]. She is a good nama; most of the time she is hardworking.

I ask: ‘why did you choose zasum (polyandry) and not changsa re re (monogamy)?’

Tashi-la continued:

We have much land and need many people to work on it. With zasum my two sons could stay together, and we don’t need to hire labour (mila) for the tasks. It is very important to keep many people together. Especially when there is much land. The two also wanted it, because they did not want to be poor on their own with only land for one person. And their relation is good. Tagrab has many fields now – it is very good. If the children move they will split the fields, and nobody wants that. You know, zasum is a very good way – you can see that here and many other places.

Tashi-la smiled as to close the part on polyandry, and move on in his larger story.

It is a very good thing to send a son to the monastery, right? For a long time there were no possibilities of doing this, because the gompas were closed and the monks had to be
householders. But now it is better. Daching is a famous gompa - very important. It is old and has not been destroyed, and people travel here to visit and make offerings. So it is an auspicious place. Orgyen was in Daching as a novice monk, but then he didn’t like it so much anymore. They spent so much time in their homes, and only doing some rituals in the gompa for the 10th and the 25th day [of the month]. So he moved back home.

Orgyen, who is finished packing his travel bag, added:

We were in Daching very seldom, and only for short rituals. Earlier we also studied texts and had a good teacher. But then the teacher could not be there anymore, because of some false accusations against him. When the teacher left, I also did not want to stay. I didn’t keep the vows (dönba) very well.

I asked Orgyen whether it was his wish to continue as a monk or if he wanted to live as a householder. Before Orgyen could reply, Tashi-la answered:

We still have some things in the monastery, but how can we get them back? We can’t take things from the monastery - that would be very embarrassing and bad. But we should find a way. Anyway, when Orgyen came back from Daching, he was added to the marriage. This was the best way. Orgyen was then in a good age for marriage [18], and then he did not have to leave his birth home (‘his mother’s home’, nang ama). He is not very much younger than the nama, and he agreed to the marriage. I asked him and Namgyal Tsering [the eldest husband], who both accepted. Even though it is unfortunate to leave the monastery, we are lucky and can keep all the children here. Then, we could send one person to town to make money, and this is good for all of us. Now it is very good for us; Namgyal Tsering is working in Ngari, and he brings much money. Sometimes he brings 4000 yuan, and that is very good. ... The younger ones also want to travel, but I don’t let

55 The teacher was accused of producing political pamphlets, but it was later proven that it was not his handwriting.
them go. It is better that they stay here and do shingle (agricultural work). Orgyen helps in the fields mostly. He is also a good worker and helps others in the village, and sometimes in Gangkar or Sachung [the two closest villages to Sharlung]. Sometimes Wangchuk herds our animals, but not the ralug (goats and sheep), because we have mila (paid assistance) for that. Wangchuk likes to stay in the mountains. Ani helps her mother. They are building shak (monastic living quarters) in the nunnery now but Ani is still helping at home. This is good, for the nama is very busy with the nangle (domestic work) and ama is getting old. Soon, ama cannot work anymore; she is getting old and her health is declining.56

REFLECTIONS ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
Tashi-la’s story reflects not only his personal biography, but it also depicts central elements and connections concerning the organization of family and marriage in this area of Tibet. I shall use this narrative as a starting point for my discussions of polyandry and the local organization of domestic life. The coming of the Tagrab House reflects the change of marriage form from one generation to the next, indicating a concurrence between the constitution of the domestic group and its relations to land, and the evaluation of marriage forms. Moreover, it illustrates the different nature of marriage arrangements. These two main entrances into marriage, that is, couple-initiated or parent-initiated, are associated with the older and the younger generation respectively. Tashi-la’s narrative more specifically points to the change of marriage from, often, couple-initiated monogamy to parent-initiated polyandry, wherein the latter is arranged in the period after his household has been provided with new land. His story illustrates crucial concerns, anticipated expectations and consequences, as well as structures and principles of polyandrous marriage arrangements and organization. Without analysing the details here, I shall extract the elements that will constitute the central parts in the broader analysis to be developed throughout the following chapters. Moreover, it is my intention here to

56 Phentok unfortunately passed away only one year later.
delineate the local explanations of polyandry as expressed by villagers in Sharlung and, by doing so, to make explicit the cultural logic of this domestic arrangement.

Tashi-la is the well-respected leader of Sharlung village, a position he has occupied since the 1960s until today. In that sense, his biography is atypical. Further, the inheritance history of his family deviates somewhat from the experiences of his co-villagers, as he possesses not only the land given to him by principles of the land reform but also land inherited irregularly from another household unit, namely that of his parents and siblings. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Household Responsibility System has had an arbitrary effect on the various households in both agricultural and nomadic localities. Tashi-la’s story illustrates the inherent implications of inequality, not so much in terms of an unfair distribution during the actual land division, but rather in the aftermath where household composition is bound to change, and while in the case of Tashi-la these changes were to his advantage, others experience an expansion of the household but a loss of land.

Despite of the particularities of Tashi-la’s situation, his story describes a general process in which the domestic group gradually takes on the form associated with the former landholders. It is within this changing form of the domestic group that Tashi-la, as the household leader, makes his decisions on the future composition of people and material resources.

When allocating the human resources in a household, there seem to be two main options, namely marriage and non-marriage. Concerning marriage there are, schematically, three alternative options when considering the future of sons and daughters: first, inviting a *nama* to the son(s) or sending a daughter as *nama* to another household (virilocal residence); second, inviting a *makpa* to a daughter or sending a son a *makpa* to another household (uxorilocal residence); third, approving or not approving a couple-initiated marriage (neo-local residence). These three options are ranked in terms of preference where the marriages implying virilocal residence are seen to be most fortunate, followed by marriages implying uxorilocal residence which in most cases presupposes the lack of mail heirs, and lastly marriages resulting in the establishment of
new households are not only seen to be less fortunate, but clearly disfavoured. These preferences reflect the local emphasis put on the already established domestic groups.

Considering the future for his children and for the group to which they belong, Tashi-la chose both marriage implying virilocal residence and non-marriage. As two sons are married (together) reproduction of the social group is secured. This seems to be imperative for the household leader’s allocation of the human and material resources, and reflects the centrality of sons in the organization of domestic groups in Sharlung. For those outside these central positions, there are several options of which Tashi-la chose celibacy for both the youngest son and the only daughter.

While in many other societies non-marriage is problematic and in some cases even incompatible with the very constitution of a social person, this is not the case in Tibet. Here, non-marriage might involve enrolment into a monastic institution or simply imply a celibate way of life spent in ones natal home. When Tashi-la sent two of his children to enrol in monastic life, he did so of several reasons. One significant implication of the ordination of Orgyen is his relinquish of entitled inheritance rights. Moreover, monastic enrolment is a highly valued and well-established option for both men and women, and celibate sons or daughters reflect well on the family. This is particularly case with monks. Tashi-la sees his daughter’s ordination as a contribution to reproduction of the local monastic institutions, and the production of ritual expertise in general. At the same time, in Sharlung the nuns spend less time with ritual chores in the nunnery that they do with domestic chores in their natal homes. As such, the ordination of a daughter has a double implication; the continuous membership, and participation, in her natal group, and the positive reflection back on the same group. However, monastic enrolment of his only daughter excludes the establishment of affinal relations to another household. This is an important point that I return to towards the end of the thesis.

Narrating the story of the arrangement of one marriage only for his five children, Tashi-la discloses not only the various alternatives to marriage but also the inherent flexibility of Tibetan marriages. Once established, a marriage can easily be altered; adding and subtracting partners is common, particularly in the cases of plural marriages.
When Orgyen returned from the monastery, there were several options available for him; to marry independently and establish a new household; to marry as a makpa into another established household; to join the already established marriage in his natal home; to settle outside the village (often involving an engagement in wage labour); or to remain as a bachelor in his natal home. Of these options, only the establishment of a new household in the village requires an activation of his inheritance rights, leading to a fragmentation of the land. This is one of the reasons for the general disfavouring of post-marital neo-local residence practices. The inclusion of Orgyen into the already established marriage was in no way dramatic, as it did not alter any structural arrangements in the domestic organization; rather it remained status quo. Most importantly for the allocation of sons and daughters then, is Tashi-la’s arrangement of only one marriage per generation among those with inheritance rights. This principle is of utmost importance when planning a household composition in Tibet and has, as mentioned in the Introduction, been called the ‘monomarital principle’ (Goldstein 1971a). I shall return to this point in Chapter Five.

The decision making process through which Orgyen was added to marriage of his brothers also reflects other significant aspects of polyandry, such as the internal differentiation of statuses and the unequal distribution of authority in such marriage constellations. Lobsang Drolma, the nama of the marriage, was not consulted upon the expansion of her marriage, neither was Wangchuk, the second husband (achok). Rather, it was a decision made by Tashi-la and his wife, in accordance with the eldest husband of the marriage, as well as Orgyen himself. According to Lobsang Drolma, the lack of consultation reflects her weak position at the time, which, she claims, is related to the stage in the reproduction phase that the family was in. Orgyen was added to the marriage when Lobsang Drolma had only given birth to one daughter. As I shall discuss in some detail in Chapter Seven, the successful reproduction, preferably of sons, has a crucial significance for the consolidation of a nama’s strong position within a polyandrous marriage. Moreover, Tashi-la’s narrative points to the distribution of authority among co-husbands, in which relative age is of structural significance.
Lastly, Tashi-la’s biography and narrative of the coming of the Tagrab House illustrates well a point that will be emphasised throughout this thesis, not only ethnographically but, more importantly, analytically, namely what I shall term a shift in emphasis from nuclear families to socio-symbolic Houses. This is particularly apparent in the handling of marriage and household organization in the two generations of concern in Tashi-la’s story. In the earlier epoch of Tashi-la’s life, represented by his own marriage and family establishment, the conjugal unit seem to have been less an intricate part of a social group. Co-residing with Tashi-la’s parents was primarily of practical concerns due to the extreme poverty that structured their lives. This co-resident group did not share inheritable wealth, and when the disagreement between Phentok and Tashi-la’s father was resolved by moving, it has primarily emotional and not organizational implications. Tashi-la and Phentok did not leave his parent’s household impaired. Among the yokpos, the household as a unit was only to a limited extent embedded with cultural meaning beyond the individual family, and establishment of new households was not disfavoured as such. When they married, Tashi-la and Phentok, they say the marriage institution a contract between individuals, rather than between social groups. The collective period, when other group formations than the state-operated communes were frowned upon, such notions of the marriage institution were widespread. Looking at the distribution of marriage arrangement in the older generation, it seems that, during this period, post-marital neo-local residence was a common practice for people of all backgrounds.

There is a significant shift in emphasis when Tashi-la talks about his children’s future and marriage as he links these to the social reproduction of the group to which they belong, that is, the Tagbrab House. He exhibits an economic concern by emphasising the motivations for polyandry to be prevention of land fragmentation, on the one hand, and securing labour specialisation, on the other. He explains these motivations as ways to strengthen the domestic group. These named domestic groups with attached land are given additional meaning, beyond the economic aspects of household activities. Tashi-la’s narrative points to the shifts of the socio-symbolic meaning embedded in the domestic unit among villagers in Sharlung.
These shifts concur with the increase in the material standards of the houses that villagers resided in, and should be seen in relation to the redistribution of the physical houses, that had belonged to the landholders in Sharlung, amongst the former yokpos and later, to the widespread building of new houses. Before the Chinese takeover, Tashi-la’s parents’ had settled in a small room in the Lungko house (the telpa they worked for at the time). During the Democratic Reforms in 1959, when land and property were first redistributed, Tashi-la’s parents received a separate part of a house that had belonged to Dagpo, the other large genbo in the village. They kept this house for some ten years, when they built their own simple house close to the Dagpo house. Although the first house might have had a name, nobody seems to remember it today. When Tashi-la and Phentok moved from his parents’ house, the government provided them with a room in one of ‘public houses’ at the time (this was the collective period when most property and land belonged to the government). This place did not have a name, and it was not until they built a separate small house that they named it Norshar, the place east of Nor (another landmark house in the village). Years later, after the Household Responsibility System, and later the fortunate land inheritance from Tashi-la’s brother, Tashi-la and Phentok built a new and bigger house. For years, this house was referred to as simply the ‘new house (khangba serpa). For reasons not explained to me, a lama was then invited to name the house properly; he suggested Tagrab.

It was in this newly named house that polyandry was arranged in Tashi-la’s family’s biography for the first time. The concurrence of the elaboration of physical houses, new access to land and changes in marriage practices shall, as already mentioned, be analysed thoroughly throughout this thesis. Before I turn to the houses of Sharlung today, I shall present some of the ways in which my informants describe the prevalence of fraternal polyandry today.

LOCAL EXPLANATIONS OF FRATERNAL POLYANDRY
As with many cultural issues in Tibet today, the rural-urban divide is significant in terms of Tibetans’ perceptions of polyandry. As mentioned already, it is my experience that in
Lhasa, young Tibetans convey some curiosity, and even negativity, about the practice of polyandry. Tsepun, a thirty-five years old teacher who grew up a village in Central Tibet but has lived in Beijing and Lhasa for the last 20 years, formulates his view in what I found to be a typical way:

*Polyandry is an old custom, something that we need to change. There are many good customs in Tibet that we should work hard to maintain, but some are not so good, and we don’t have to continue to do something just because we have always done so. Polyandry is so strange, I don’t know why anybody would like to be married in that way anymore. Maybe in the village this is still useful, but at least in the city we don’t need so many people in the family. If there is one father and one mother, and two children – then that is enough.*

But also in Lhasa, there are young people expressing a more sympathetic view on polyandry, valuing the fact that it is a traditional practice. However, the same people often also express that they would not agree to take part in such union themselves. In Lhasa I often got the impression that Tibetans talk about polyandry with a certain sense of embarrassment or shyness, as if trying to conceal this practice from me as a foreigner sympathetic to Tibet. In Panam, however, my impression was contrary: villagers were, as mentioned in Chapter One, eager to talk about polyandry and the advantages of such marriages. Among other things, this was due to my experience that the farmers in Panam often returned to the issue of polyandry, with an eagerness to explain the current motivations for such marriages.

The local explanation of polyandry is materialistic, expressed as a strategy to strengthen the domestic group (*khyimtshang*). A polyandrous marriage in a household prevents land fragmentation, maximizes male labour within the *khyimtshang*, and limits the population growth in the village. Villagers in Sharlung emphasize different aspects of polyandry; most often, however, they mention one or two of the above listed. I shall present extracts of how six of my informants in Sharlung explained polyandry:
Some people think that those married as ‘one to one’ are happy. But this is not always the case, because they have very hard work. It is better with zasum because then we have more labour. Three husbands is the best – one to work in the fields, and one to work with the ralug (sheep and goats) and one to bring income. It is much better when each person has less work - that makes everybody happier. (Lakyi phala, the household leader of a previous yokpo, and now rather prosperous House)

In Sharlung some people have always had zasum. Mostly before it used to be the wealthy, but now it is the same for everybody. It is always good to be many people, and with zasum it is very easy. Even during the land division [1980-1981 reform], those with many people got more land. For instance, some butchers in Bargang; they had zasum with two wives and one husband before the division, and therefore they had many children and received much land from the government [due to the per capita distribution of land]. Then in the next generation the five sons married together, and therefore they have few children. So now they have land for many people without being many people – this is the smart way to go about this. (Gomchang, Dadul, fifty, married khathugpa monogamously with one woman and, after her death, remarried with her sister)

Polyandry is very popular here now. This is for its economic reasons. The most wealthy kyimtshang (household) have polyandry, right? For example, in the house by the foot of the mountain, Dagpo, five brothers share one wife. This is good because the problem in the village is that the number of people increases, but the land remains the same. In 1981 there were 200 people here, now there are around 300 or 400. But despite the increase in people, the land will not be redistributed in some 100 years. (Ösel, fourty, deputy village leader)

Zasum is the marriage in the very, very old drongba (drong nyingba nyingba). In the history of this place, it is those with zasum that have been prosperous and famous in the valley. The Dagpo, Lungko, Lampo, right? They were powerful in the old society, and they are still important. All of them have polyandry. They never had to split the land or the people. They stayed together, and the zasum was successful [no partitions]. So Dagpo are still powerful and wealthy (Longchang Mola, sixty)
The problem with monogamy (changsa re re) is that there are too few people, so it is not possible to make a household grow. Changsa re re are not so stable because if something happens to the one husband it is very difficult for the wife and the children. Also, if the husband has to travel outside to make income, it is difficult for the wife because she has to depend on mila [paid assistance] for ploughing and doing the rest of the heavy fieldwork. (Norshön Migmar, thirty-five, newly established a household with his wife and one brother after a long-term conflict with his parents)

Ha, ha, here, brothers do everything together – they even share mistresses. Look at the ama by the river, for instance, and her lover; the two are married together, and still have the same mistress! Why should they not be married together if they can have the same mistress?! (Lobsang Drolma, thirty-five, nama in Tagrab)

Central to these explanations is the economic rationale for polyandrous marriages, not for each individual, but for the groups of which the involved constitute a part. Such groups are residence-based, and referred to as khyimshang, dütshang or drongba: all translated as ‘household,’ although of various kinds (see Chapter Four). The economic rationale of polyandry is based in the combination of post-marital virilocal residence norms, equal inheritance for all sons, and the household administration of material wealth, including farmland and animals. Because all sons hold equal inheritance rights, every son’s marriage would potentially lead to fragmentation of the parents’ land; this is held to be unfortunate, not only for the group to which they belong but also for each particular couple. Further, expressed motivations for polyandry are closely connected to the three-folded economy of the area; namely, agricultural production, animal husbandry and wage labour. The fixed but limited amount of land is found to be best utilized by dividing the requisite labour among the household members themselves and, by doing so, to avoid the expenses for external workers.

Another motivation mentioned is the demographic aspect of polyandry; the interrelation between population size and the amount of land available. Villagers in leading positions express a wish to reduce childbirths because it influences the number of households in the village. With high occurrence of polyandry, fewer women marry, and
this reduces the birth rates in the village. It is important to note, as these leaders also clearly express, that, in Sharlung, children are seen to be the security for the parents and, that most people wish for numerous offspring. The demographic implications of polyandry has never been mentioned to me by others than the leaders (of various levels), and does not seem to a motivation but, rather, a consequence observed by those with a knowledge of statistical figures that can provide them with a more general picture.

People actively compare polyandry to other forms of marriage, and mainly to monogamy, and they assess the advantages and disadvantages of the different marital forms. The informants quoted above point to the heavy work burden of a monogamous couple and to the unstable character of such constellation of people. These remarks reflect the high value of (male) labour and should be seen in relation to the three-folded economy as mentioned above, but also, and more importantly, in relation to more general perceptions of gender hierarchies (see Chapter Seven).

Common to two of the quotes above is the emphasis put on polyandry as a historical marriage practiced among the upper classes, that is, the landholders (trelpa). Several of the high-ranking families in the village have, for as long as anyone can remember, arranged their marriages polyandrously. Polyandry is associated with these households and their history of wealth accumulation; polyandry is historical proven, so to speak, to be intimately linked with a high-ranking social-economic position. Significantly, the conceptual association of trelpa and polyandry has connotations beyond economy. As the older woman notes in one of the quotes above, the polyandrous trelpa have a biography of being powerful and well-known social groups that represent not only a wealthy family, but a high-ranked group of people (khyimshang thobo). The perception of polyandry as a marriage of the upper classes indicates an ongoing process within which alteration of marriage practices is one aspect, and where former servants and labourers (yokpo), as well as the low-ranked skilled workers (menrig), incorporate cultural practices associated with the former landholders.

A different kind of explanation emphasizes interpersonal relations between the co-partners in a polyandrous union, and, as stated with a grin in the last quote, the close
relation between brothers more generally. The consubstantial sameness of brothers creates both physical and mental resemblance, which, according to some of my informants, implies an expectation of similar preferences, also sexually. More generally agreed upon among my informants is an expectation of solidarity among brothers (or siblings, particularly of the same sex), a topic that I shall return to in the following section on dominant anthropological perspectives on polyandry.

The materialistic aspects remain crucial in the local explanation of polyandry. These explanations are made rational in close relation with the social organization in the domestic groups (khyimtshang) into which villagers defined themselves and others. The cultural logic of polyandry is closely related to the inheritance practice where all sons hold rights to equal shares of land. However, other peoples across the world experience similar challenges concerning the transfer of immovable goods from one generation to the next and, rather than arranging polyandry, they practice inheritance rules such as, for instance, as primo- or ultimogeniture. When discussing polyandry with villagers in Sharlung, such alternative practices are non-attractive because, as Dadul said, ‘brothers want to stay together.’ Closely associated with his statement is a young woman’s expression that ‘if we could chose, then all children would remain with their parents.’

Interpersonal relations and socio-economic aspects have been, to various degrees, made central in the anthropological analyses of polyandry, and in the following chapter I shall present the two main contributions to the field: Melvyn Goldstein, focusing on the socio-economic rationale, and Nancy Levine, focusing on cultural values in general, and interpersonal relations in particular. I shall do so in order to identify the relations that my perspective has with these hegemonic views of polyandry in Himalaya. Chapter Four starts, however, with the various categories of named and unnamed Houses in Sharlung today.
Although fraternal polyandry is widespread in Sharlung, it is not found in all social groups. It is known from earlier literature that this marriage form in Tibet was considered an upper-class phenomenon (Bell 1928; Goldstein 1971a), practiced mainly amongst the land-holding farmers. As we have seen, relations to land have been central to the local explanations of polyandry, as well as to the various academic models. This chapter describes and discusses the relations between marriage, land and organization of domestic groups. The central argument that I promote here is that in order to understand the spread of polyandry in Panam today, we need to look beyond access to land and focus on the constitutive character of the local group to which individuals belong, and through which they gain their rights and obligations. These local groups differ in various ways; in terms of embedded meaning, social position, biography, influence and rank, and ritual constitution.

When I introduced Sharlung village in Chapter One, I briefly described the named neighbourhoods and the various houses located there. Here I return to certain of these houses and describe in some detail the position these have, and previously have had, in the village. My main concern is mainly to establish the analytical categories yjay differentiate the various domestic groups, and to lay the foundation for the theoretical project of marriage and Houses.
NAMED HOUSES IN SHARLUNG

I classify the domestic groups in Sharlung into two main analytical categories: named Houses and unnamed houses. As I argue throughout the thesis, villagers in Panam are involved in processes of change wherein the character of their various domestic groups is gradually altered and given new meaning. In this process that I have called ‘dronbafication,’ the various houses share many similarities while also being distinct. The classification into analytical categories might indicate more clear-cut borders than intended, as some domestic groups share characteristics of both categories. These houses seem to be in a liminal phase in the process of being transformed into named Houses, although only time can tell the outcome of such process. Yet, the categories of named and unnamed houses are useful to differentiate various aspects of local organization, and, I suggest, particularly so in the analysis of local marriage distribution.

The named Houses share fundamental characteristics with the European noble houses described by Lévi-Strauss in the sense that they are corporate units that endure beyond the individual members. The named Houses in Sharlung might be understood in the way that Lévi-Strauss defines the house as:

>a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both (ibid.:174).57

What I term ‘named Houses’ in Panam include the former trelpa (i.e. the taxpayers, the genbo and those with ritual responsibilities), and the former yokpo (landless farmers) now rising into trelpa-like groups, as well some of the traditional skilled workers. Following the definition as provided by Lévi-Strauss, of the House as a ‘moral person,’ I classify a majority of the domestic groups in Sharlung, as Houses. However, these are internally differentiated according to economic stratification and rank, prestige and ritual power. Four sub-categories of Houses can be delineated: the prestigious Houses, the

57 I return to a thorough discussion of Lévi-Strauss’ concept of House later in this chapter.
occupational Houses; the ritually powerful Houses, and the stable estates. While the three former sub-categories presuppose a particular and long biography, the latter does not.

Prestigious Houses

What I term the prestigious Houses include the former *trelpa*, i.e. those with landholding status in traditional Tibetan society. These are most typically represented by the two *genbo* Houses, the Dagpo and Lungko, who served as the connection between the local government and the other *trelpa* in terms of policy implementation and tax claims.

Today, the Dagpo and Lungko hold a somewhat different position in Sharlung. Dagpo is a highly respected House, with newly accumulated material wealth and a large (five husbands) and successful polyandrous marriage, to which villagers often refer to when discussing the value of polyandry and its connection with high rank. Lungko, on the other hand, has a reputation among some in the valley of having been a particularly exploitive landlord, although among most of the younger villagers, the Lungko House’s glorious past is remembered with awe and respect. Today, the Lungko is not among the wealthiest in the village; however, embedded in the name are a well-known biography, former political influence and significant ritual employment.

Defined also as a prestigious House is the poor Sharlung. This named House is of another character than Dagpo and Lungko. Sharlung is one of the oldest Houses in the village, and the House that gave name to the village. It was a wealthy and powerful House until unfortunate events (sickness brought by a *döntri* (evil spirit)) occurred in the 1940s and led to its demise. Today, Sharlung is a poor household with few people and little land, while at the same time it is a House of high social standing in terms of being *potentially* powerful and strong in the future. With its long biography, its history of being influential and wealthy, Sharlung House is, according to people in the village, likely to rise again in the future.

In addition to the three Houses mentioned, I classify four other former *trelpa* families as prestigious Houses today, named Norchen, Norkhang, Nyikar and Lampo. These were *trelpas* before the Chinese take-over but held only a limited number of fields and hence did not employ *yokpos*. These Houses also have long and known biographies that depict a continuous transfer of material and immaterial wealth.
Ritually powerful Houses

Named Houses may or may not be inhabited by people. In the anthropological literature, we often see that a House incorporates several households. In African compounds or Indian extended families, for instance, several households make up one common unit of belonging. In Tibet, a House could host several households; however, Tibetans perceive the reduction of households per House to be a central conflict-minimizing strategy, and most often the number of households is limited to one only. This empirical quantitative concurrence of household and House may explain the uncritical use of ‘household’ as an analytical term in the literature on Tibetan social organization. In Tibet, a House may consist of several (newly established) households, or a House might be emptied of household activities and remains as a House until ritual activity terminates.

In Sharlung, there is one such uninhabited named House, in which no household activities are performed, but where the ritual presence maintains the power of the House. The run-down and poor-looking building is located in the western periphery of the village. I asked Tashi-la about this building, and he told me that it was the Lampo House. As it turned out, Lampo used to be an influential trelpa House with a large household. In the last generation, ten children were born into the House; however, due to personal conflicts all moved out successively. Since 1995, the house has been emptied of people; however, it has not been emptied of meaning. Because Lampo has a long history, it hosts a House protector (namo) of significant powers. The protector is the kye lha (‘natal god’) of those affiliated to the House by filiation, who continue to perform offerings either in the House, or by ‘long-distance offering.’ Lampo is a well-established House in Sharlung and has been a corporate body for as long as people can remember. Its historical high rank and ritual power are maintained through continuous offering to the House protector.

Much due to the protective powers of the namo the Lampo House remains the loci of belonging for the individual members, and it will continue to be so until the namo is moved or people for other reasons no longer make offerings in the House. This empty House might be seen as an illustration of the House as a corporate body; that it, as a social unit that has its existence beyond the people (no longer) living there. It is the House without a household.
Ritual power is not only part of the maintenance of continuity of an emptied House, it is also central to the definition of some Houses as high-ranked and important. While the protector of Lampo is a House-specific protector with localized powers, the Shamshar House hosts protectors of the more general kind, and particularly the all-important yul lha of Sharlung, the ‘god of the place.’ As already mentioned in Chapter One, Shamshar is the only House of this kind in Sharlung. This old trelpa House has an historical relation with the yul lha, and, according to present day members of the House, their responsibility cannot be transferred to others. Moreover, a tsen and a gyebo reside in the Shamshar house, and these have wide-ranging powers. The spirits have resided in the Sharlung house for as long as people can remember and because this is one of the oldest Houses in the village Shamshar the tsen and gyebo are seen to be very old. Through their long-time residence in the village, many people, also outside the House, have a protective relation with them and regularly make offerings, either by visiting the shrines, or by offering from a distance (see photo 7).

Shamshar used to own the mountain slope where the yul lha resides and throughout centuries its members have provided offerings in order for him to remain benevolent (see photo 2). The power of the yul lha stretches out and influences all Houses of Sharlung, and due to Shamshar’s historical relation with the yul lha, the leader of Shamshar participates in all ritual activities that concern communal interests. Most important is the yearly consultation with the spirit medium (lhaba) where Shamshar holds a prominent role in approaching and receiving advice from the yul lha and the other local protectors whom appear through the medium. The villagers regard the ritual work of Shamshar to be extremely important for the well-being of the village, its people and the land.

Stable estates and commencing Houses

In addition to the historically important and prestigious, and the ritually powerful Houses, more recently established domestic groups could be characterised as named Houses as well. I term these Houses the ‘stable estates’ as they have some material wealth and an established distinct name to which a, although shirt, biography is connected. These
Houses are, due to their estates and corporate nature, expected to continue as a social
group to the next generations.

The majority of the Houses in Sharlung could be classified into this category,
although there are significant variations amongst them. Here, I emphasize those Houses
now rising to be structurally and conceptually similar to the former trelpa. These are
former yokpos that have arranged polyandry often for the first time, which has enabled an
economic growth by diversification; members have taken leadership roles in the village
and township and developed large social and moral networks of dependency and
exchange with other named and unnamed houses in the village. My host family, Tagrab
and its neighbour Wangchö are typical Houses that are is rising to be influential and
highly respected within the village. These are economically successful by local standards
and, according to my informants these Houses are ‘like trelpa.’ The individual members
Wangchö, for instance, are known by this name, and independent of intern
disagreements, the House is seen to be a corporate body acting as one unit in the village
affairs.

A named House, then, is not necessarily materially wealthy, but, often, those
aspiring to transform into a new Houses, are. Among the prestigious and the ritually
powerful Houses, some have regained significant wealth since the de-collectivization,
while others remain poor, without the means to participate in the inter-House networks in
the village (see Chapter Nine on the relations of dependency among Houses of differering
rank). Material wealth is not alone a criterion for the classification of named Houses; the
old Houses are highly valued today due to their historical status and long connection to
the locality where they are placed. This is particularly true for the Shamshar House.

**Occupational Houses**
The traditional skilled workers have long biographies as named Houses in Panam. Their
names are closely associated with their occupation and are seen to be Houses of low rig,
that is, Houses of a polluted kind (*rig tsokpa*). The occupational Houses include two
butcher Houses, two corpse-cutter (*baru*) Houses, and one blacksmiths House, and all
these have provided services to the villagers of this part of Panam for several generations.
In contrast to the other named Houses, the occupational Houses are excluded from inter-House networks outside their group of same *rig*. Members of these Houses participate only to a limited degree in village life in the name of their House (see Chapter Nine on restrictions inter-*rig* relations). Nevertheless, the domestic groups of the traditional skilled workers are well-established in the valley, operating as corporations that reproduce themselves from generation to generation.

**UNNAMED HOUSES**

Differing from the named Houses, are those domestic groups, nuclear families and single householders that I have termed ‘unnamed houses.’ ‘Unnamed houses’ is a negatively defined term in the sense that it describes households of various sizes that do not have a known biography attached to its name, and that have not perpetuated themselves as corporate units through generations. The unnamed houses are similar in the sense that they are domestic groups that share a common economic endeavour and live in houses that are nothing more than dwellings.

Many, and indeed most, of these have names today, but these names are not embedded with meaning beyond the merely descriptive. Implied in the distinction between named and unnamed houses is the different character of house names in Sharlung. Some of the House names are unchanged names of corporations known throughout the valley and associated with particular activities, social standing or political influence, to which the individual members are emotionally attached. Other names are newly given to facilitate village administration, to which individuals attach less importance and feel less sense of belonging.58 Villagers in Sharlung express these unnamed houses to be temporal and most likely non-lasting constellations. Unnamed houses in Sharlung include former *yokpos*, some low-ranked artisans and individuals living alone. All unnamed houses are considered to be low-ranked; some are economic destitute and others are marginalized of ritual reasons.

Several authors have pointed to the fundamental problem of Lévi-Strauss’ ‘House’ concept as being at once too loose and too narrow (see for instance Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Joyce and Gillespie 2000). Such definitional problems are also

58 All names used in this thesis are fictive due to the need of anonymity, an analysis of types of House names is thus not impossible.
relevant to the Tibetan case. Domestic groups in general are not static entities, but dependent upon demographic inevitabilities, birth and death, marriage and divorce, as well as official policies. In Sharlung, as elsewhere, new establishments take place, old ones disintegrate, and others remain as loosely organised domestic groups. Although most of these have small estates in terms of access to fixed land, it is unclear whether these defined groups will continue by transferring some property, material or immaterial. In order to be analytically characterized as a House (in the Lévi-Straussian manner), I hold that its immaterial and material property is of fundamental importance. Continuing an identified social unit independent of demographic changes is at the core of the House concept as a social phenomenon, and, as noted above, I term those families without material or immaterial wealth, or a multi-generational biography as ‘unnamed houses.’

Two sub-categories of unnamed houses are recognised: those with and those without estates.

Most of the unnamed houses in Sharlung have small estates that were provided by the Household Responsibility System in 1981. Further, they were provided with houses by the local government during the re-distribution in 1960, and although some have rebuilt their houses more recently, many have not. Most of these are poor households with few people, and some have established dependency relations with wealthy Houses, as they are not self-sufficient throughout the year (see Chapter Nine). Of the unnamed houses, nine households are said to be ‘very poor’. Three houses remain without names, of which all consist of single women or men that are part of another House until their situation stabilizes in terms of marriage and reproduction.

The second sub-category of unnamed houses is that of the beggars, i.e. unnamed houses without attached land. As described in Chapter Two, the traditional beggars (longkhen) chose to lease out the fields provided to them by the Household Responsibility System, hence, they do not access land today. The beggars are heavily stigmatized in the local community, due both to the ritual pollution attached to their domestic groups, and to what is seen to be a lack of willingness to conduct proper work. Some of the unnamed houses without attached land are also without descriptive names. They are seen to be temporal and vague in their composition, marked by the movement
that the begging activities demand. These houses are physically located on the outskirts of the villages, and remain socially on the outskirts as well.

Distinctions similar to named and unnamed houses are made in other studies from the Tibetan ethnographic region. In Ladakh, for instance, houses are classified as khangchen (‘big house’), on the one hand, and khangbu (‘offspring of the house’), on the other. Khangchen is the centre of a ‘land-holding household estate’ and hosts the head of the estate and his wife and their offspring. Often there are three or four khangbu to one khangchen, inhabited by House members who are in a non-reproductive phase, such as the grandparents and celibate women (Mills 2000:20-21). In Panam it is uncommon that a named House has offshoot houses such as the khangbu as all generations co-reside in one house. However, as will be clear in Chapter Eight, the internal distribution of space follows a similar pattern as that found in the khangchen and khangbu in Ladakh as the non-reproductive individuals reside in one part of the house, while those in the reproductive phase reside in another, creating a domestic cycle where individuals move according to their current status. Offshoot houses in Panam often consist of an individual or a group of people who recently parted from a named House and who has not yet established themselves as a social unit on their own terms. Some of these are given names (for instance Sershön, meaning ‘little Ser’, denoting a group of people parting from the Ser House) while others remain without names for years and their relation to the centre House (the ‘khangchen’) varies to a great extent. The process of building a House is varied and involves allocation of both material and immaterial resources. For the villagers in Sharlung, marriage arrangements are closely linked to this process of transforming an unnamed house to a named House.

**POLYANDRY AND NAMED HOUSES**

Marriage forms and arrangements are socially distributed along the distinction of named and unnamed houses. While marriage in the unnamed houses very often is of the monogamous, informal kind (khathugpa), marriage in the named Houses is very often of the polyandrous kind. Within the group of named Houses, polyandry is found in both generations in the prestigious and the ritually powerful Houses, while in the stable estates of the former yokpo, polyandry is found most of often in the younger generation only.
These marriages of the younger generation are very often arranged after 1980; hence, after the Household Responsibility Reform.

It is perhaps not surprising that polyandry is found today among those who organize their domestic groups in ways similar to the former trelpa. What is important to note is that the parallel processes of transformations of domestic groups and changing marriage practices have analytical implications for the study of either. Even though polyandry has been known as a practice of the upper classes, it does not necessarily mean that all those rising to become part of these upper classes incorporate such marriages. In fact, in most places, they do not (Goldstein 1976; 2002; Haviland 2005). Only by making explicit these parallel processes of social transformations do the inter-connections between them become apparent. In Panam, polyandry is one of several ways in which those of an unnamed house can initiate a process of social transformation and it is the way that people have experienced that social mobility is possible. The association of polyandry with wealth is clearly expressed by my informants. Moreover, in Sharlung it is apparent that the two former genbo Houses, and some of the other trelpa Houses, have regained their positions among the local elite, not so much in terms of political influence, but more as corporate groups in the village that, due to their socio-economic position and often need of extra labour, others actively relate to and regard highly. The regained high position of the former polyandrous landholders has created a notion the polyandry is advantageous independent of structural changes; this was particularly clear during the per capita distribution of land of the Households Responsibility System where the most populous households received most land.

Before I turn to the discussions of what I argue is a fruitful way of analysing the parallel processes of change in the local organization in Panam, I shall describe the perspectives that form the foundation of what I believe is a broader perspective on polyandry.

**DOMINANT PERSPECTIVES ON TIBETAN POLYANDRY**

Materialistic explanations have dominated both earlier and more recent literature on polyandry. Westermarck (1925), for instance, claimed that plural marriage in general, and polyandry in particular, should be understood as a result of poverty and lack of means to
arrange monogamy. Scholars of Himalaya have more specifically claimed that the harsh mountainous environment of the region provides only limited arable land; this necessitates polyandrous arrangements in order to balance the relation between people and capita. Such perspectives, although in various nuances, are found not only in early literature (Prince Peter 1964; Majumdar 1962) but also in more recent studies dominating knowledge production today (Berreman 1980; Cassidy and Lee 1989; Goldstein 1971a, 1978a and b; Ben Jiao 2001).59

Succeeding the early materialistic and ecologically-oriented perspectives,60 Melvyn Goldstein was the first to present ethnographic material from Tibetan localities that emphasized ‘marriage and the family’ (1971a:64) in general, and fraternal polyandry in particular. Goldstein’s perspective on polyandry is a socio-economic rather than a merely economic one. His early work on social organization is based on ethnographic material from Limi in Western Nepal and exiled Tibetans from the Gyantse region now settled in India. Analysing marriage and the family in traditional Tibetan society, Goldstein puts emphasis on the distribution of the means of production and the various obligations that follow the particular relations to these means. He does not, surprisingly claim a Marxist foundation for his perspectives. Goldstein suggests that marriage should be analysed in the context of social stratification and land tenure, pointing to the ‘monomarital’ principle of the land-holding households in Tibetan societies (1971a). By monomarital principle, he means ‘one whereby for each generation one and only one marriage should be made, the children of which are considered members of the family unit with full jural rights relative to their sex’ (1978a:208). Such principle, he writes, is similar to the ‘stem family’ as found in parts of Europe and Japan, characterized by the selection (by rules of ultimogeniture, primogeniture, etc.) of one married couple to perpetuate the family; thus, the stem family is, ‘in principle, a “perpetual social organization”’ (Kitaoji quoted in Goldstein 1978b:327). Goldstein argues that a

59 One problem with an ecological perspective is, of course, that it does not account for the lack of tolerance for polyandry among other groups living in the same harsh conditions, such as Tibetan Muslims (kache) or non-Tibetan groups in Himalaya.
60 Although ecologically-based anthropological interpretations of polyandry have been replaced by socio-economic or cultural perspectives, some socio-biological work sees polyandry as closely related to poverty and resource access. Haddix, in an article published in 2001, compares polyandry with findings of mating systems among dunnocks, which indicate that when food is scarce, polyandrous associations predominate, whereas when food is abundant, monogamy is more common (2001:58).
polyandrous marriage produces such stem family; and it does so by ‘retaining all sons in the natal unit but linking them in marriage to a single bride’ (ibid.). In later writings, he holds that his approach is not deterministic and mechanical (1990:618) and points out that he has argued against a poverty explanation for polyandry. He has done so by describing polyandry to be found mostly among the wealthier social strata of Tibetan society, rather than among the poor ones (1981:10). Goldstein concludes that in Tibet fraternal polyandry is

‘a functional analog of other wealth conserving kinship mechanisms such as primogeniture, which operate to reduce the frequency of, or preclude, division of family patrimonies and, in an unperceived and unintended manner, also reduce fertility levels in their respective societies’ (1978b:335).

Such a perspective is an adoption of the local explanation of polyandry, being mainly motivated, Goldstein writes, by a wish to ‘preserve the productive resources of their corporate family unit intact across generations’ (1978b:326). Following Berreman’s point that polyandry should be analysed in its own particular context (1975:127-128), Goldstein points to the value of focusing on the ‘goal-oriented factors underlying marriage and family decisions’ (1978b:326), i.e. the local explanations of polyandry and its perceived implications. His claim is that the wish to preserve the resources across generations must be seen in the context of the tax system within the traditional Tibetan political organization. Importantly, for the trelpa, inherited rights to arable land implied large tax burdens that necessitated a broad labour pool within each corporate family in order to be able to fulfil these obligations in general, and the corvé taxes in particular. Goldstein notes that the two main ‘goal-oriented factors’ of polyandry include a wish to prevent land fragmentation in order to enable fulfilment of tax obligations, on the one hand, and a wish to maximize male labour, on the other; of these, he places emphasis on the former (1971a:72-73). Thus, Goldstein holds that the motivations for polyandry are materialistic and develops his analysis in those terms, focusing on production and concerns with the demands from the state. The underlying argument is that polyandry should be seen as ‘a means to an end’ (1990:619), rather than a goal in itself.
Although Goldstein’s analysis remains the hegemonic perspective in literature on Tibetan polyandry today, certain serious criticisms have been bestowed from anthropologists and perhaps most strongly from Nancy Levine. In her eminent study of the Nyinba in western Nepal, she aspires to develop a new and improved understanding of fraternal polyandry and presents her project as a ‘critique of arguments that find determinate materialistic logic in polyandry and seeks its causes in exogenous circumstances’ (Levine 1988:xiii). Her main opponent must be identified as Goldstein. Levine argues that, in the recent analytical contributions, what are seen to be the effects of a high incidence of polyandrous marriages, in particular preventing land fragmentation and constraining population growth, have been (mis)read as their causes. Further, she writes that:

In the Tibetan case, polyandry has been explained away as an adaptation born of necessity and individual self-interest: a strategy for conserving resources and limiting population in resource-scarce environment and a custom readily abandoned once economic conditions improve. I have, however, found this view to be misleading (1988:xiv).

Although she recognises the economic rationale to polyandry, Levine’s emphasis lies beyond the socio-economic aspects, focusing more on interpersonal relationships. She claims that polyandry, in addition to being ‘a practical response to environmental constraints’ (ibid.:159), has a ‘special cultural value’ in Nyinba society. Polyandry features in legends and genealogies of Nyinba ancestors and is seen to be part of Nyinba origin. Levine argues against Goldstein’s early statements on the inferior status of polyandry; ‘polyandry was valued as a technique for maintaining families intact, but as a form of marriage in and of itself it was considered inferior to monogamy’ (Goldstein 1971a:73). Levine addresses the fundamental question of why Tibetans choose to arrange polyandrous marriages, when it does not occur among other poor farmers in a similar situation with limited plots of land and patrilineal inheritance rights. She finds answers in

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61 According to Berreman, Rivers was among the first to point out that there is a great risk of confusing effects and causes of polyandrous practices in his book about the Todas from 1906 (1962:71). River’s main concern was the issue of sex-ratios and female infanticide.
the concurrence of polyandry and values of kinship and, in particular, fraternal solidarity; in addition to the already mentioned Nyinba origin myths. Crucial to her conclusion is that polyandry is not only a means to an end (securing the perpetuation of the corporate household) but that it is the preferred marriage form, i.e. polyandry must be seen as a cultural value among the Nyinba.

The discussion on whether polyandry is a means to an end or an end in itself encapsulates the essence of the debate between Goldstein and Levine. Although the debate reflects differing ethnographic material, most importantly it points to the choice of analytical emphasis. Crucial to Goldstein’s argument, on the significant concurrence between marriage form and distribution of production means, is the fact that in traditional Tibet polyandry was practised mainly among the upper classes, i.e. the landowners and the aristocracy. Among the poorer families (düchung or yokpo), i.e. those with no hereditary rights to land, monogamy was the most common marriage form. Further, Goldstein points out that among exiled Tibetans in India polyandry has very limited distribution. This he explains in the same terms as with the düchung in traditional Tibet, namely that in India Tibetans received individual rights to land, and this land could not be inherited across generations; thus non-hereditary access to land had removed the significant preconditions to the practice of polyandry.

Levine, on the other hand, argues that polyandry is the preferred marriage form among the Nyinba, independent of social stratification. Indeed, while emphasizing polyandry as a highly valued marital form and cultural values as shared across the Nyinba community, one expects no significant empirical difference in marriage distribution according to social strata. This, however, appears to be unclear, or even misleading in Levine’s work, as she describes and analyses marriage in Nyinba society as if it was a homogenous community without relevant social divisions. At the same time, Levine conscientiously mentions her limited access to some social groups in the village in the very beginning of her book: ‘I was identified with the higher-ranking group and found my access to freedmen more limited; my analysis suffers from this’ (1988:13).

62 Fürer-Haimendorf also emphasizes solidarity among brothers in relation to polyandry when writing about Tamang in Nepal (1964).
63 Goldstein notes that although Levine presents numerous tables in her book, she does not, strangely enough, provide a figure of marriage distribution according to social strata (1990).
Accordingly, her material mainly stems from the larger corporate households (called *trongba*), which constitute the great majority of households in the Nyinba community. Later, in a section on emancipation of the slaves (ibid.:80ff.), Levine mentions that there seems to be less polyandry among the poor freedmen than among the *trongba*; however, she does not discuss this matter further. Lack of access to a certain group in a small community is obviously a limitation, although qualitative implications of such limitation do vary according to the themes of discussion. Yet, in the context of discussing the nature of fraternal polyandry and her stated intention to provide a new perspective on such marriages, of which distribution according to social strata has been a centre of the previous debates, Levine’s failure to include the lower social strata in her analysis seems to be a serious flaw.

Levine’s contribution to the study of polyandry has been remarkable for its ethnographic detail, and she has also introduced a cultural perspective to the issue of polyandry. The main point she makes is that ‘the importance of polyandry extends beyond the economics of it’ (ibid.:159), and she lists five additional elements that she holds to be crucial to the explanation of such marriages: first, polyandry has a special cultural value due to the cultural representation of the past in which ancestors are portrayed as brothers linked by polyandry and characterized by their family harmony; second, fraternal solidarity is one of the core kinship ideals; third, the *trongba* (corporate household) system presupposes polyandry, and its economy; fourth, the Nyinba village, as a corporate unit, is structured around polyandry and non-proliferation of member households, making polyandry ‘structurally pivotal’; and fifth, most men and women find polyandry a personally comfortable form of marriage and the one that ‘suits culturally defined practical goals’ (op.cit). Hence, Levine concludes that polyandry has an economic rationale, but that in the earlier literature this has been ‘overemphasized at the expense of its kinship, political and symbolic correlates’ (op.cit).

Levine relegates Goldstein’s analysis, based on the economic rational, to be only a sophisticated version of the earlier assumption that ‘without polyandry, Tibetans would be reduced to poverty’ (1988:158). This seems to be a reading of Goldstein that is based on an exaggerated notion of difference. Moreover, it does not discuss Goldstein’s later work (1978a and b) in which the social aspects of the economic considerations were
given his main attention; hence, he developed a socio-economic rather than a purely economic perspective. The material Levine presents does not, to the extent that she maintains, disclaim Goldstein’s argument that polyandry is oriented towards minimizing land fragmentation and maximizing male labour in order to secure the economic growth of a landholding household. However, Levine contributes with additional aspects of the Nyinba preference for polyandry, emphasizing cultural values (represented in legends of the past) and interpersonal relations (fraternal solidarity and that people find polyandry to be a ‘comfortable’ form of marriage). Her remaining two points of important aspects of polyandry, namely, that the corporate household system presupposes polyandry and that within the village organization polyandry is ‘structurally pivotal’, concur to a large extent with Goldstein’s conclusion that polyandry in Tibet is oriented ‘toward the social consequences of economic productivity, rather than toward subsistence per se’ (1978b:329).

BEYOND LÉVI-STRAUSS TOWARDS - SEEING THE HOUSE IN ROUND

As the local explanations of polyandry in Panam centre around materialistic advantages, these explanations structure my analysis as well. Accordingly, I point to the relation between land and household, but emphasize the latter. It is not my intention to argue against the significance of the economic aspects of polyandry; I suggest a broader perspective where the economic rationale of polyandry is interpreted in the light of its social premises and implications. As I see it, this perspective is both in line with Goldstein’s later conclusions that polyandry is oriented toward the ‘social consequences’ of economic growth, and with Levine’s analysis of the interdependency of marriage, kinship and the corporateness of the household.

At the core of both Goldstein’s and Levine’s interpretations of polyandry is the character of the corporate residence group, what they both call the household. Goldstein is primarily concerned with the external relations of the residence group, and particularly with the state (in terms of tax obligations). Levine, on the other hand, focuses on both the politico-jural (political, economic and religious obligations) and the domestic (interpersonal relations) aspects of the residence group. They both argue that polyandry is closely intertwined with the corporate nature of Tibetan households, as Levine states:
Polyandry dominated among landed Tibetans for cultural, social, and structural, as well as economic reasons. It was associated with a household system which included several generations of brothers cooperating economically, where succession was joint, where the eldest brother led, and in which families tried to have more than one son, so that the household would prosper and provide insurance that it would continue on and, best of all, in the male line. Thus marital concerns, like the individual and familial concerns, are accommodated to larger household goals (1988:163-4).

Neither Levine nor Goldstein define ‘household’ analytically, and it seems that they use it as an emic term. According to my informants the continuation of the unit that can be labelled ‘household’ is one of the crucial motivations for arranging a polyandrous marriage, because such marriages enable accumulation and security of the wealth through economic diversification of that unit. The word they commonly use is *khyimtshang*, usually translated in dictionaries as family and/or household (Goldstein 2001:135; Das 1902:162). Breaking down the word, the etymological meaning of *khyim* is ‘home’ while *tshang* is ‘nest’ or ‘dwelling’. Other words also used to denote these basic units are *thempa*; literary translating as the people (*pa*) of the threshold (*them*) and *diütshang*; where *diü* (*dud*) translates as ‘smoke’ and *tshang* as ‘nest’ or ‘dwelling,’ that is, the dwelling place around a hearth. *Khyimtshang*, as well as *thempa* and *diütshang*, refer to the place of dwelling; to the house into which people belong, and through which they gain their rights and obligations, and their social identity. I suggest that these basic units are better understood as Houses, not in a simplified sense that includes only the physical structures (*khang*), but as a corporate units inhabited by individuals organised into households. In such a perspective, *khyimtshang* are social groups with distinct biographies where the individual members and their activities must be understood as of another order, particularly in terms of temporality, than the continuous House.

Tibetans articulate a wish to establish and organise only one household, in the sense of co-residing individuals sharing common activities related to production and reproduction, per House. By limiting the number of households, and increasing the

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64 While in other Tibetan communities, *trongba/drongba* is used to denote the households of corporate character (Levine 1988; Aziz 1978a), this is not widely used in Sharlung.
number of people within each household, the local farmers seek to secure the perpetuation of the House. Hence, we need analytical means and instruments to deal with continuity of the co-resident group, that is, the diachronic aspect of the local organization.

In Sharlung today, we find only very few Houses that consist of several households. However, it is important to note that the empirical concurrence of household and House should lead to an analytical concurrence of the two terms. The anthropological history of the two terms diverges extensively, indicating not only different connotations but, perhaps more importantly, different analytical potentials of the terms. Employing the House as an analytical concept in the study of polyandry enables a perspective that includes issues of relatedness and belonging that the former focus on household and land alone could not provide. Moreover, a focus on Houses, as defined units perpetuating across generations, allows for a diachronic aspect to be implied in the analysis, a perspective of utmost importance for an understanding of the parallel processes of change in marriage practices and the organization of domestic groups in Tibet today.

Household

In anthropology ‘household’ has traditionally been employed to describe groups based on co-residence. These groups were contrasted to those described as ‘families,’ units based on principles of kinship (primarily a genealogical understanding of kinship) (Yanagisako 1979:162), where the household has been treated as ‘an activity-oriented dimension of the “family” as a genealogical group’ (Gray 1995:17). According to Yanagisako, the limited definitions of ‘household’ reflect the actual usage of the term; she writes: ‘Generally the term refers to a set of individuals who share not only a living space but also some activities. These activities, moreover, are usually related to food production and consumption or to sexual reproduction and childrearing …’ (ibid.:165). Due to the extensive practice of the same activities in groups of people not residing together, several suggestions to separate the ‘domestic’ activities from the term ‘household’ have been suggested (cf. Bender 1967; Seddon 1978); however, production/consumption and reproduction seem to remain at the core of the household descriptions (Waldrop 1997). In the ethnography of South Asia, the household holds a central role in analyses of village organization, particularly in the earlier literature involved in developing household
typologies based on kinship relations and membership (cf. Madan 1965, referred in Gray 1995). More recent studies employ the concept of household in a broader sense in which the cooperative practices between people are the defining criteria (cf. Sharma 1980). The household is analytically distinct as a category based on common economic endeavour at a particular time and in a particular space.

Gray argues that the household as a concept has been taken for granted in anthropology, and in particular in the literature on South Asia. Cross-cultural studies of household variations have been published, and while these bring forward interesting variations in domestic organization, they do so by focusing on two distinct dimensions only, namely ‘form, that is, the structural characteristics of the household … and functions, that is, shared activities … which members perform cooperatively’ (1995:16). Importantly, Gray points out, these studies do not focus on the conceptual constitution of these households, i.e. the cultural meaning of the domestic. Yanagisako makes a similar point when she argues that an a priori perception of the activities found in local households as domestic is simply to impose western conceptions of domesticity upon other societies (1979). The fundamental limitation in household studies, Gray continues, is the lack of a holistic apperception. These perspectives, he holds, are informed by the idea of the society as a set of substances (as described by Dumont (1980), for instance). I agree with Gray and Yanagisako in their concerns about how scholars tend to take the conceptual constitution of local households for granted, on the one side; and the lack of holistic approaches to households, on the other. Moreover, my concern is with the temporal aspect of households, and the time limitation of an activity-oriented local group. Because a household as described in anthropology consists of the cluster of co-residing individuals with a common economic endeavour at a given time, the category is, I believe, inherently temporally constrained and, hence, limits an analysis of the process of the continuity of its various elements and, more importantly, of the cluster as a whole. While sympathetic to Gray’s project, I shall suggest a limited use of ‘household’ as an analytical term for describing the temporal domestic groups in agricultural Tibet and introduce the House as a more inclusive and illuminating term that embeds the holistic aspects of village organization.
House
People living together as members of the same group in Tibetan societies shares a common economic endeavour, including that of consumption and production. More than that, these are domestic groups within which an individual is provided with membership and through which the web of relatedness is defined and materialised for that same individual.

Since 1975, when Lévi-Strauss first introduced the House as an analytical concept in kinship studies, the term has been established not only as a kinship typology; more importantly, it has been developed further into a holistic device for studies of processes of relatedness and belonging. Although the House-concept has gained considerable influence in anthropology, Lévi-Strauss wrote only modestly on the theme (1983 [1975], 1987, 1991). The limited number of texts is perhaps some of the reason for the problematic vagueness of the concept, for which Lévi-Strauss has also been criticized (see, for instance, Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). Lévi-Strauss’ starting point for the elaborations on the House was his re-reading of Boas’ Kwakiutl material, and particularly what was, at the time, considered to be the confusing combination of patrilineal and matrilineal elements in their social organization. To describe these organizational principles, Boas had not found the established kinship terms of anthropology (tribe, village, clan, lineage, and family) useful, and had settled with numayma, the Kwakiutl term for their principle groupings. Frustrated by contradictory principles, he had concluded that Kwakiutl social organization was unique and not comparable with any other known ethnographies. Lévi-Strauss, however, claims that numayma should not be considered a unique social organization; rather, he points to Kroeber’s work on the California Yurok, arguing that the analytical problems of Boas and Kroeber were of similar kind (Lévi-Strauss 1983:172-173). Lévi-Strauss describes the Yurok house, which Kroeber has referred to simply as a physical building, as a ‘central feature of their social organization’ (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:6); he argues that it is very similar to the Kwakiutl namayma. Lévi-Strauss holds that such an organization into Houses is widespread in societies organised by cognatic principles of descent and points out the inadequateness of conventional kinship terms based on descent theory for describing this type of social organization.
The Lévi-Straussian ‘House’ is based on the European aristocratic houses of the Middle Ages; in fact, he claims, there is a striking resemblance between Boas’ definition of the Kwakiutl numayma and historians’ descriptions of these aristocratic houses. ‘[T]he language of the anthropologist and that of the historian are practically identical,’ he writes (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 174). Historians point out that the houses of the Middle Ages were institutions where the ‘noble lineage … does not coincide with the agnatic line’ (ibid.) and where the noble lineage should be seen as nothing else than a ‘spiritual and material heritage’ (Schmid in Lévi-Strauss 1983:174). Following the medieval lists, Lévi-Strauss defines House as corporate bodies that share certain characteristics namely the holding of material and immaterial wealth that perpetuates itself down a real or imaginary line made legitimate through the language of descent and affinity.

The House, in this sense, is termed by Lévi-Strauss a ‘moral person,’ which indicates that the House is much more than a physical structure for dwelling. It is not a corporate group based upon rules of either patrilineal or matrilineal descent, filiation or residence, close or distant marriage; rather, the House unites these seemingly contradictory principles of organization. As such, Houses transcend the distinctions that have been used to classify societies by their kinship rules (1983:184-185), or as Howell writes: ‘they constitute social groups with names, rights and responsibilities’ (2001:18). This social group is, in essence, a ‘property-holding unit that endures through time’ (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:14), but, significantly, the group is legitimized with the language of (real or ‘fictive’) kinship. Hence, people might express the perpetuation of social groups in terms of lineages, but, he suggests, these expressions reflect legitimization processes rather than principles of organization. This is particularly relevant in Tibet. As a property-holding unit, the House often includes both a household and a family. More importantly, the House encompasses those two units in a diachronic way, emphasising the past and the future, i.e. the origin and the perpetuation of its biography.

Although the House as a holistic approach to relatedness has been embraced in anthropology, many of Lévi-Strauss’ theoretical ambitions concerning house-based societies have been severely criticized. In his earlier writings, Lévi-Strauss focused his kinship interest primarily on understanding social systems as organised by exchange and
alliance, categorizing these into ‘elementary’ and ‘complex’ structures. His ideas about house-based societies are in ways a continuation of what was first outlined in *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969). Here, Lévi-Strauss writes that the elementary and complex structures describe two stages in an evolution of kinship organization. The first is characterized by the presence of positive marriage rules leading to concrete exchange networks that constitute social groups and units in a society. Societies with complex structures have only negative marriage rules, i.e. varying incest taboos, which lead to more obscured exchange patterns, in which other institutions of a political and economic kind replace networks initially based on kinship (i.e. marriage exchange). Lévi-Strauss’ interest in houses was founded in the problems of analyzing social institutions and principles of what had been termed cognatic or non-differentiated societies; in fact, as Howell points out, he started the final lecture series on the house by stating that it should be the last series devoted to cognatic societies (1995:150). Societies, he points out, could not be analysed in conventional kinship terms of ‘descent or property or residence’ (1987:154) because none of these criteria alone constitute social (corporate) groups. The evolutionary aspect of societal development is highly problematic in Lévi-Strauss’ kinship theories in general, and this reappears in his lectures on house-based societies. House-based societies, he holds, should be seen as a transitional form, in between elementary, and on the way to become, complex structures. Scholars working in so-called cognatic societies have in particular argued against the strictly defined House category, due to the somewhat forced theoretical ambition underlying Lévi-Strauss’ project. However, the House concept is readily applicable to stratified and differentiated societies; in fact, many of the studies utilizing the House as an analytical tool describes social forms with a dominant unilineal ideology (see, of instance, Fox 1983).

It is not my intention to classify Tibetan societies according to Lévi-Strauss’ typologies, and I do not find his reification of the House concept into a typology valuable. What I find useful with relation to Tibet are the analytical implications of defining the House in a Lévi-Straussian way, with its explicit emphasis on endurance, hierarchical ranking and the unification of seemingly contradictory principles (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:7-8). The House incorporates not only the people that reside there and, hence, constitutes the group, but also the property, names, titles and other
The House in studies of relatedness

A new type of anthropological analyses focusing on the House appeared in the beginning of the 1990s. This literature had Lévi-Strauss’ House typology as a starting point, but, already early in these debates, significant problems in the use of this term arose. In his lectures on the House concept, Lévi-Strauss had referred to ethnography from Indonesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, as well as Africa. Although one of the earliest contributions to the study of the social, physical and metaphysical aspects of Houses came from the Austronesian region (Fox 1993), it was primarily Southeast Asianists that developed what has been termed the House-debate in anthropology (cf. Waterson 1990; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Errington 1987; Joyce and Gillespie 2000; Sparkes and Howell 2003). This was also the region wherein scholars had already published studies of domestic space as microcosmic representations and as such given attention to houses as more than physical space (cf. Cunningham 1964; see also Chapter Eight).

In the recent literature the House as a societal typology has been replaced by the House as a ‘heuristic device that opens up a new approach to the study of kinship’ (Hsu 1998:68), as well as a starting point for a more holistic anthropology of architecture, alongside the anthropology of the body, where the house, like the body, is taken as a prime agent of socialization (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:2). With this turn, the House
concept was made relevant outside Southeast Asia.\footnote{The House concept has been employed in most regions of the world (see, for instance, Pine 1996 on Poland, Gillespie 2000 on Central America); however, for the more general theoretical developments the texts on Southeast Asia and Amazonia have been most influential (see various contributions in Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995).} In their influential Introduction in \textit{About the House}, Carsten and Hugh-Jones seek to bring together aspects of the house that have previously been treated separately, as they write: ‘Seeing the houses “in round” enables us to focus on the links between their architectural, social and symbolic significance’ (op.cit.), i.e. to include material culture as a shaping factor of social practice.

In an article on the social and material life among Naxi and Moso in southern China, Hsu lists three aspects of seeing the House as a heuristic device for kinship studies: first, an increased emphasis on residence and territory; second, a focus on local concepts of house, hearth and home which includes not only the locality but also the physicality of the house; and third, a perspective where daily domestic life is given preference as an entry into kinship issues (1998:70-72). Similarly, Carsten points out in a more recent work that a house perspective brings forward processual aspects of kin relations and belonging, and that ‘houses offer us a way of grasping the significance of kinship “from the inside”, that is, through an exploration of everyday intimacies that occur there’ (Carsten 2004:56). The emphasis on residence and locality, on local concepts and perceptions, and on everyday life constitute the core of the House perspective that I have found useful in the analysis of Tibetan agricultural organization.

AN INCREASING LOCAL EMPHASIS ON HOUSES

A focus on Houses, as these are discussed in the anthropological literature, enables a more nuanced perspective on the processes of social, economic and cultural change in Panam. Moreover, it allows for a broader analysis of marriage as it ties marriage practices to these overall processes of change, in general, and to group formations, social hierarchies and village relations, in particular.

In agricultural Tibet, there is an ongoing process of alteration in which previously poor farmers form local groups of some social standing. These groups share significant characteristics with the corporate body defined by Lévi-Strauss as a House. The named
House is the core to social and economic identity, but it is also a metaphor for kinship, and it is so to an increasing extent, i.e. to a growing proportion of the population. This increased local emphasis on houses as more than dwellings, and the newly gained opportunity for the local farmers to initiate the formation of such socio-symbolic houses is, I argue, essential for an understanding of the increased interested and spread of polyandry. This renewed emphasis on Houses seems to have been (unintentionally) initiated by Chinese policies already during the late 1950s when the houses of the trelpa were redistributed to people of yokpo status, and continued throughout various reform periods, culminating in the post-1980 period when the domestic groups where given corporate status.

The state initiated socio-economic changes has led, and is continues to lead, to a stronger local emphasis on the House as the prime structuring principle. Such House structures are known from the past as the domestic organization of the former landowners (trelpa), and central to such organization is fraternal polyandry. Polyandry is closely associated with trelpa Houses (cf. Stein 1972; Goldstein 1971a, 1978a). Polyandry is one of several cultural practices that were associated with the landholders and that is now being incorporated by the former landless workers (yokpo). The new access to land enables the yokpos and the traditionally low ranked artisans to organise themselves polyandrously and, by doing so, transform unnamed houses into named Houses, in manners associated with trelpa and high-ranking Houses of the Panam region. As polyandry and trelpa are conceptually connected, inherent in the organization into Houses is an expectation of polyandrous marriages. Moreover, polyandry is recognised locally as the ultimate means to strengthen the domestic group, and additionally, to secure perpetuation of such social group.

Polyandry is the preferred marriage form amongst Tibetans from various areas, also in periods of economic growth, and it is a practice that secures a good life for members of a House. Rather than seeing ‘exogenous circumstances’ (cf. Levine 1988:xiii) as something that necessitate plural marriage, I hold that these circumstances enable polyandry and the realization of its economic and cultural potential. It is a highly valued form of organizing family life, and has the greatest potential, not only for the economic success of a household and its members, but also for the interpersonal relations
between family members. A polyandrous marriage permits people to stay together, to contribute to a common goal with one’s own close kin. Also, polyandry is a kind of social security, a guarantee, for each individual, i.e. for the parents, the brothers, the wife and their children.

Emphasizing Houses as central to the organization of kinship and belonging in Tibet brings forward fundamental connections between marriage, relatedness and social change, hence, it enables a more holistic interpretation of various principles of group formation, rank and identity. Social organization and issues of relatedness have only to a limited degree been made central parts of the new anthropology produced from Tibet. The general pattern drawn is that while Tibetans outside Central Tibet organize themselves according to patrilineal descent often including clans (cf. Diemberger 1993), in Central Tibet residence is rather the fundamental organizational principle (Aziz 1978a, see Chapter Five). Descent and residence are two aspects of local organization in Tibetan communities, and I hold that a House perspective, as a spatially founded understanding of social practice, encompass and systematize these two principles and their internal connections in ways that enlighten discussions on social organization especially among landed Tibetans in Central Tibet.

Seeing residence as a basic principle according to which a social organization if formed is problematic. Although co-residence is an observable pattern it cannot generate a social form in itself; other principles of membership into these co-resident groups do. This has been recognized by various scholars, also in the Himalaya studies. Levine writes that ‘to treat residence as prior is to argue from observed social relations rather than from the underlying concepts and rules implicated in individual decisions, and collectively, in the generation of social forms’ (1988:128). In Panam, the ideas and rules of membership indicate a combined focus on filiation, marriage and residence, all oriented towards the established House as a corporate body to which the individual members identify themselves, and are identifies by others. As shall become clear in the following chapter, patrilineal descent is of limited relevance to group formation in Panam, and as such differs from much of the ethnography of the Himalayas. The contextual relevance of patrilinearity is of a different character and, contrary to the position of the clans some Himalayan society (Diemberger 1993, Mills 2000), patrilineages in Tsang have very
limited organizational. In the following chapter the distinction between kinship as constitutive of personhood and constitutive for local groups shall be an underlying concern, as I turn to the sources of membership into the Houses of Sharlung.
5. The fortress-like house.

6. Leaving the Shamshar House, Serkhang was established towards to south of the village.

7. The *nama* and a relative of the House make offerings to the powerful *gyebo*.

8. Harvest is a busy period.
The Sharlung House accommodates and constitutes the locus for belonging for various numbers of individuals and generations, ranging from one to twenty people. Although the group is often of large size, it should not be confused with hamlets or compounds known from India, where each son takes his own wife and establishes his own household within the compound, or polygynous West-Africa where each wife sets up her own household in the compound. The Sharlung House is one unit, both in terms of marriage - by monomarital principle (Goldstein 1971a) - and household organization - by sharing economic endeavour. It is a corporation, in terms of being a group of people ‘who together act as a single legal individual’ (Keesing 1975:17).

Life-long membership into these corporate bodies is primarily gained by bilateral filiation or marriage, but also by ‘fictive kinship’, i.e. adoption (a point also made by Lévi-Strauss in his definition of a House). In Panam, membership into a House is exclusive, and new partners are included upon marriage and adoption, as well as birth. Hence, when a new member is included in a House, she or he looses those formal rights gained through previous membership elsewhere. In principle, those born into the
patrilineage affiliated with the House should manifest a more stable and secure position than those being incorporated from outside (by marriage or adoption, or both). In practice, the source of membership does not determine a person’s position within a House as such; however, the extent to which a person exercises the rights varies according to time, as well as relative age, gender, and inter-personal relations. While I return to the consolidation of positions within the House in the following chapters, I here focus on the sources of membership and their implications for an analysis of the local organization of relatedness and belonging in Panam.

Patrilineal descent is an explicit ideology when people talk about local organization in Panam, and when asked, people often answer that patrilineal descent is important. However, when studying local group and identity formations in Panam it becomes apparent that patrilineal descent alone cannot be recognized as the prime criterion for organization; this is due to the widespread manipulation of patrilineal succession and the lack of corporate patrilineal groups, as well as the residence patterns and practices of adoption. The discrepancies of descent ideology and practices are well known in much of the kinship literature in anthropology (Keesing 1975; Barnes 1962; Schneider 1984), and it is within a similar context that I shall analyse descent and residence in Tibet.

Defining kinship in Tibet is a complicated matter. While patrilineal descent is talked about as significant for the organization of identity and belonging, it has few, if any, practical implications in village life in Panam. Rü gyud, which literally translates as the ‘lineage (gyud) of the bones (rü)’ and denotes the patrilineage among other Tibetan groups, describes the more general patrilateral kin in Central Tibet (see also Goldstein 1975). Likewise, sha gyud, which literally translates as the ‘lineage (gyud) of the flesh (sha)’ and describes what is often portrayed with various degrees of lineal meaning in other Tibetan communities, denotes matrilateral kin in Central Tibet. These differences are closely related to the significance of clans in many Tibetan groups in the Himalayas, and the absence of these in Central Tibet. Moreover, the practical use of the terms rü gyud and sha gyud indicates significant differences in kinship ideology and practices of
relatedness on the one side, and of kinship as constitutive of personhood and as an 
organizational force on the other.

The ideological significance of patrilineal descent might suggest an organization 
closer to unilineality with significant complementary filiation; yet, as in many such 
ethnographic cases, in daily life a range of practices suggest other more relevant criteria 
for group formations. As with Central Tibetans in general, the villagers in Panam do not 
express an interest in ancestors, that is, they do not keep long genealogies of lineages (cf. 
Benedict 1942:315 on the lack of kinship terms for ancestors of the third ascending 
generation). However, my informants keep track of as many patrilateral and matrilateral 
relatives as possible in order to avoid what are perceived to be incestuous marriage 
unions between kindred. That does not mean that they are uninterested in the past, or in 
biographies. On the contrary, they keep record of, discuss and emphasize the biographies 
of the named Houses.

While kinship is recognized with different strength depending upon male or 
female links, for all significant purposes links through both men and women, laterally 
and lineally, are made relevant. This is particularly apparent in the negative marriage 
rules, that exclude all relatives as potential marriage partners; these are all those called 
pha pun (father’s relative) and ma pun (mother’s relative). These are generic terms that 
include those related by rü gyud and sha gyud, and while the latter two have lineal 
connotations, they are used interchangeably with ma pun and pha pun.

FLESH AND BONE – the ideology of patrilineal descent

Comparing kinship and social stratification among Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman peoples, 
Levine concludes that ‘… it seems that patrilineal descent constructs (Scheffler, 1966) 
are given recognition in all these groups, although it is questionable whether descent 
categories in the form of clans are recognized by the people of Central Tibet’ (1981:73).66

66 Most Tibeto-Burman peoples organise local groups on other principles than patrilineal descent (with the 
exception of Solu (Levine 1981)). The patrilateral group formations (such as the pha pun) have been much 
debated in the literature, some even arguing that kinship, as the determinant analytical category, is 
misleading as it is residence that seem to be the determinant criterion for membership into these groups and 
their tasks are main ritual (see Mills 2000).
My concern here is the lack of recognition of clans and what I found to be the contextual relevance of descent among farmers in Panam. What is important for the identification of an individual with a local group is his or her membership into a House. Although patrilineal descent is not generative for these Houses, Houses often consist of individuals related as agnates.

Two points should be noted here on the inter-connections between the House and descent; first, patrilineal ideology as the legitimizing language of the House; and second, the implications of a cumulative past of patrifiliation on the strong presence of agnates within a House. Patrilineal descent is an ideological legitimization for those corporate named Houses that provide individuals with their most significant group identity. Patrilineal descent is the language by which continuity is expressed; however, it does not generate the perpetuation of the group. This notion is closely related to an understanding of a House as a moral person where it is notes that the House expresses its legitimacy and continuity ‘in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both’ (Lévi-Strauss 1983:174). Indeed, the legitimacy and continuity of the House is expressed both in kinship and affinity terms in Panam. Before I return to the issue of filiation and descent, some notes should be made on the local categories of ‘relatives’ (pun) and ‘co-residents’ (nangmi).

When describing relatives, Tibetans often use the term pungya or the written form pun. This generic term includes both patrilateral and matrilateral kin, specified as pha pun and ma pun. These categories do not include non-consanguinals. The closest pungya are siblings of the same mother and father (pha chik (‘father one’) ma chik (‘mother one’)) and siblings of the same House. These are pun nyebo (close relatives).

At a more general level, the term nangmi is important. It denotes those sharing residence and membership into the same House and literally translates as ‘inside (nang) people’ (mi). Nangmi are not necessarily related by patrilineal descent, but rather by cumulative filiation, that might, as shall become clear include patrifiliation and matrifiliation, as well as marriage (see Chapter Eight on other usages of the term nangmi).
Fundamental to the description of relatedness in Tibetan societies are the two elements in the folk theory of procreation, namely rū (bone) and sha (flesh). Of these, rū is considered most important, both in terms of the biological constitution of the body, as well as the social implications of the sharing of bones. Rū is a polysemantic concept that refers not only to the physical bones, but also to patrilateral kindred, and in some cases hereditary status (although rig is more often used to denote hereditary status in Panam). Here I will deal with the two former, while in Chapter Nine I return to the aspects of social differentiation based on rū (rig).

It is difficult to find an English equivalent to the concept of rū, but the various levels of meaning could usefully be explained in terms of kinship and in particular patri-biases in Tibetan notions of relatedness. In an article from 1981, Levine discusses the interrelations between the various meanings of rū in Tibetan societies, pointing to the multi-layered character of the term. Her ethnographic material is from the Nyinba; however, I have found significant similarities in how villagers in Panam explain the fundamental meaning of the concept. As Levine notes, the root concept is ‘bone’ (of humans and animals), and, through the local theory of procreation, the bones form the basis for the other meanings of the term (ibid.:55). The bones are transferred via the sperm from the father during intercourse and are manifested in the bones of the conceived child’s body. Hence, rū is transferred directly from one generation to the next. The whiteness of the sperm is identified with the white bones and is transferred from father’s father to father to children, i.e. defining the patrilineage to be constituted by those with the common rū (rūba (‘bone people’), rū chikpa (‘one bone’) or simply rū gyud (‘bone lineage’)).

Rū, and its opposite sha, have metonymic significance for the kinship categories for Tibetans. While Levine and others find the rū gyud to denote the patrilineage and in many cases named clans in various Tibetan groups in the Himalaya (Levine 1981; Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Jest 1974), this is misleading in terms of Central Tibetan ethnography. When talking to people in Panam, they do hold that rū gyud is exactly what it says, the
lineage (gyud) of the bones, i.e. the patrilineage. Those sharing bones are termed rüba chik. In daily life, rüba chik and pha pun (father’s relatives) are used interchangeably, and in the very few (ritual) cases when agnates summons as a group they does so as the generic pha pun, that is, the patrilateral kin. Hence, while the rü gyud is both constitutive of personhood and an important organizational element in other Tibetan communities, its organizational force is very limited in the Panam. The bones constitute the matrix of a person’s body, which is the fundament for a person’s physical and mental abilities. Hence, the sharing of bones implies an expectation of similarity both in the physical features and in personality. This fundamental sameness of those related as pha chik ma chik is also one of the local explanations of fraternal polyandry in Panam, a point I shall return to in Chapter Six.

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67 Davis and van Driem write that the Jesuit priest Desideri claimed that ‘the difference between rüba chik and sha chik is that the former denotes a group descendant from some same ancestor, whereas the latter denotes “normal proximal consanguinal relatives”’ (1985:141-142). Similarly to Benedict (1942) and Davis and van Driem (1985), I did not find any indication of such distinction. Some scholars working in the Nepali Himalaya have argued that the rü gyud and sha gyud remain irrelevant for other than productional processes (Jones and Jones 1975), which indicate a significant distinction from what I found in Central Tibet where rü gyud and sha gyud have no productional relevance.
**Sha gyud**

While bones constitute the matrix of a person’s body, flesh (sha) is, according to my informants, less constitutive of both personhood and social relations. The solidarity and emotional closeness that is expected among those sharing bones is not raised concerning the sharing of flesh. Moreover, while those of common bones can summon as a group, although they do so in only very few situations, common flesh does not inform group formation at all. The sha gyud, the ‘flesh lineage’, should be understood as being of a fundamentally different character than the rū gyud.

The sha is seen to be the manifestation of the (red) menstrual blood of the mother in the child’s body.68 While a child receives the bones from the father and the soft substances from the mother, the notions of transfer differ. These differences have organizational implications. While bones are transferred in a direct line through the male links, the flesh is transferred only indirectly: the menstrual blood of the mother is a manifestation of the bones that she received from her father. Hence, flesh is transmuted rū from the mother’s father, via the mother’s menstrual blood. Importantly, her menstrual blood does not origin from her mother’s flesh.

The indirect transfer of rū through sha has certain important implications for our understanding of the sha gyud and its potential organizational aspect. The sha gyud does not have lineal character, and should be understood as denoting laterality only. Due to the nature of the indirect transfer of flesh through the menstrual blood of the mother from the mother’s father, the sha gyud cannot continue after the third generation. If we take one individual as the starting point (generation 0) and trace those of common flesh, we find a very limited distribution of people: namely siblings only. Also the mother does not share the same flesh as she has received from her’s father. Each woman indirectly transfer her’s father’s rū, and following generation 0 the sha will come from elsewhere (from a new father’s rū) and the common sha will thus not continue. Thus, although gyud translates as ‘lineage’ the sha gyud should not be understood as a descent lineage as

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68 Some Tibetan groups, such as Nyinba, identify the substance from the mother’s body to be blood (trag) (cf. Levine 1981). In Panam, trag has no metonymic significance in terms of kinship recognition.
conventionally used in anthropology (see Levine 1981; Diemberger 1993).

When asking my informants about the meaning and relevance of the *sha gyud*, I often received vague answers. One woman told me that just as the *sha* does not inform the character of a person in a strong way, the *sha gyud* is not very important to a social life of that person. The local notion of women’s limited contribution to a child’s body and its identity in terms of descent should not, however, lead us to overemphasize the importance of patrilineal groups. Annette Weiner, in her reanalysis of Poole’s study of Bimin-Kuskusmin from the East Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea (1982), makes the point that even in strictly patri-dominated societies, the complementary roles of the two sexes should not be overlooked. She finds that women, as bearers of the reproductive abilities of the patrilineage among Bimin-Kuskusmin hold a central position in the reproduction of the patrilineage. This is particularly true considering that her fertile substances are transferred through patrifiliation. In a similar way, Tibetan kinship categories are patri-dominated in the emphasis put on *rü*, but the women too transfer *rü* by providing the flesh. Regardless, traditional principles of substantial composition of the body should not be taken as evidence of agnatic organization. Rather, this patrilineal emphasis is an indication of a significant distinction made between relatedness as constitutive of personhood, on the one side, and relatedness as informative to social organization, on the other. While *rü* predominates in the notion of personhood, it does not generate significant group formation in Panam.

The *rü gyud* and the *sha gyud* are, thus of different character, as the *rü gyud* might be termed a descent lineage in anthropological terms, while *sha gyud* might not. They are, however, equally important to keep track of. While agnates often are of immediate relevance to each other in daily life (see below), those belonging to the same *sha gyud* are not. There are several obvious reasons for this, connected both to post-marital virilocal residence patterns and to the emphasis put on the internal strength of the group that co-habits the House. Moreover, the *sha gyud* consists of very few people, who are often separated by significant distances. Because a woman usually moves into to her husband’s house upon marriage, the original group of *nangmi* (insiders) are siblings of
the same mother(s) and father(s), and the majority of members in a House belong to the same patrilineage. Polyandrous marriages amplify this effect of post-marital virilocal residence practices as the husbands are siblings (of the same patrilineage) and therefore increase the number of people related by patrilineal descent in a House.

In general, I found very little concern with pedigrees among my informants in Panam. While patrilineal descent was used as legitimization in the sense that an influential House should ideally manifest an unbroken patrilineage, the sha gyud is not talked about in relation to Houses or other local group formations. Independent of the relations of descent among the individual members Houses are perceived to be of same character, although they differ in rank. As such, the House constitutes the unifying force of organization, and recruitment into Houses follows various paths.

MEMBERSHIP BY VIRTUE OF FILIATION
Independent of sex, all those born into a House gain formal membership there and have the right to remain in that House throughout life. Those born into a House should ideally share the same bones (rü). However, patrilineal descent is only in limited cases the decisive factor for membership. Matrifiliation and other bilateral kinship relations are also easily accepted as a legitimate source of membership. As filiation is the main criterion for membership, both sons and daughters are legitimate members of the House, and they remain so as long as they are not incorporated into another House. In this sense, the organization of membership is similar to Freeman’s description of the Iban bilek (1962) where, although the young marrying Iban couple faces a greater flexibility of choice than Tibetans do, membership is determined by the (chosen) post-marital residence patterns. Just as the Iban cannot hold two memberships at the same time, Tibetans also give up one membership for another. Membership is exclusive also for those belonging to the patrilineage associated with a particular House, as these individuals cannot keep their membership there if incorporated into a House elsewhere.

Ideally, a House should consist of an unbroken patrilineage where at least one son remains in his natal home and produces male heirs. Hence, sons are central to the
reproduction of the patrilineage (obviously) and as such to the legitimization of the continuity of the House. However, membership by the virtue of bilateral filiation includes not only the male heir, but also his unmarried sisters and their children. This pattern is found in all generations; so that (from a male ego) the father’s unmarried sisters and children might also share membership in his House. The children of unmarried women who reside in their natal home do not share the bones with their fellow House-members and they belong to a different patrilineage; however, my informants do not find this to be problematic. Because a woman indirectly transfers the bone of her patrilineage through her menstrual blood, transmuted into the soft substances (sha) of her child’s body, her child is (indirectly) connected to the patrilineage and, as such, ideally to the House. Nevertheless, when asked about the membership of an unmarried woman’s children into her House, my informants say that these children are members of the House as long as they do not have membership elsewhere; this is not because of the sha connection to rū, but rather by virtue of being born by a member (man or woman) of the same House.

Membership by bilateral filiation is also expressed in the post-birth treatment of the placenta. The placenta of all children born by members of the House is buried into a hole in the courtyard; as such, each child is anchored to the House and physically connected to their same-House relatives, that is, to the ‘insiders’ (nangmi) (see Carsten 2004:44). The location of the placenta represents the potential execution of rights in the House of which the courtyard forms an important part (see Chapter Eight on the courtyard and the spatiality of Sharlung houses).

Affiliation and non-marriage

Daughters of a House gain membership by birth, and they remain members until they are incorporated into another House, i.e. when they marry. This section deals with unmarried women, that is, women who remain as members of their natal House, while the following section concerns membership upon marriage.

High incidents of polyandry logically imply a surplus of unmarried females in a specific area of study (Schuler 1987; Goldstein 1971a; Prince Peter 1963; Majumdar
1962; Childs 2001). This is also the case in Sharlung and its neighbouring villages, where the majority of the Houses host an unmarried daughter. I do not have sufficient material to present the figures of surplus women in Sharlung, so I support my rather vague claims on Ben Jiao’s numbers from the township centre. His findings show that of a total 198 women ‘30.6 % of the women aged 30 years or older were unmarried and 21 % of these were never married’ (2001:121). By contrast, only three men had not married by the age of thirty, and these were one celibate monk, one disabled man and ‘one man that never married’ (op.cit.).69 In Sharlung there are two main categories of unmarried female House members: spinsters residing in their natal home, nuns ordained in the local nunnery and single women (widows, divorcees or never-married) that reside in a household alone with or without their children.

In terms of access to life-long membership in a House, filiation as a source does not differentiate according to gender. Yet, gender is significant when defining the particular rights and duties inherent in the membership. While sons constitute the structural centre of the future of the House, daughters do not (see Chapter Seven on the structural periphery of certain individuals in the organization of Houses). In spite of their peripheral structural position, unmarried women that remain in their natal House hold, as already mentioned, the right to transfer membership to the children to whom they may give birth. Matrifiliation is effectuated, not only in situations when there is a lack of a male heir but also in the cases when a sister shares residence with her brothers and their family.70 Spinsters residing in their natal home often complicate the in-married wife’s attempts to gain a strong position, and although the spinster remains on the outside the reproductive core of a House, she often holds an authoritative position by alliance with her consanguine relatives, and particularly her mother (see Chapter Seven).

69 In her study of Chumik in the Nepal Himalaya, Schuler (1987) argues that the high percentage (44 percent) of unmarried women cannot be explained only as an implication of polyandry. In Chumik, a surplus of unmarried women is also an implication of several additional factors rendering women as peripheral in the social and economic context in Chumik, such as patrilineality and primogeniture, the various forms of endogamy and the categories of legitimate and illegitimate birth.

70 When an unmarried woman becomes pregnant, it is common that she establishes a new household with the child’s father. Because most men are married in a polyandrous organisation, in such a situation he thus leaves his brothers and wife in order to start a new household.
In Sharlung, fifteen out of the forty-four households host nun. This number is high compared with the neighbouring villages, and must be seen in relation with the ongoing process of rebuilding the local nunnery. Similar to what mentioned regarding monks in Ladakh in the previous chapter, the nuns in Sharlung remain as members of the natal House independent of participation in household activities or actual place of residence.

In Panam then, filiation both describes more accurately the process of recruitment into the corporate local groups and indicates the relation between decent and these corporate groups. In the anthropological studies of kinship the terminology of recruitment principles has been under continuous debate, and a large number of suggestions have been put forward. While societies described to be organized into corporate unilineal descent groups were more easily fitted into a ‘kinship system’, this proved difficult for the vast number of more complex, or simply different, organizations. The idea of filiation, rather than descent, as an organizing principle is well-established in anthropological kinship studies; however, it does not seem to have solved the explanatory challenges of describing an organization over time (see for instance Fortes 1953; Scheffler 1985; Freeman 1962; Barnes 1962; Firth 1957). Fortes pointed out that filiation denotes merely the ‘relationship created by the fact of being legitimate child of one’s parents’ (1959:206), while descent is the ideological rule that ‘states which of the two elementary forms of filiation and what serial combination of forms of filiation shall be utilized in establishing pedigrees recognized for social purposes’ (Fortes 1959:207). This distinction is useful in the analysis of Tibetan social organization. It is my contention that bilateral filiation is the prime principle of recruitment to the prime social units in Panam, and although descent is emphasized contextually, it is done so in a limited way, and cannot define kinship and group formation in Central Tibet. Membership is thus defined by virtue of bilateral filiation, and in the case of patrifiliation this is also spoken of as patrilineal descent.

While filiation describes the process of membership, it cannot properly explain the development of an organizational pattern in which the corporate groups perpetuate
themselves. In similar ways to what Barnes (1962) suggested on the patri-dominated groups in the Highland of Papua New Guinea, in Panam there is a cultural preference for father’s group and a cumulative past of affiliations (‘cumulative patrifiliation’) that have resulted in the co-residence of agnates (Keesing 1975). While there seems to have been a traditional cultural preference for father’s group in Panam, patrifiliation is strengthened in recent times. Such an increasing emphasis and preference for patrifiliation must be linked to the rise of the polyandrous Houses in Panam, leading to a process of cumulative patrifiliation, which again implicates the co-residence of individuals belonging to the same patrilineage.

At the same time, the surplus of unmarried women in a community with a high percentage of polyandry also affects the composition of the residence groups as these women give birth to children (belonging to a different patrilineage) who become members of their mother’s House. These parallel processes indicate an analytical perspective that goes beyond descent and cumulative patrifiliation, to a holistic perspective that encompasses the various aspects of kinship and group formation in Panam, but that define the home-group to be the unifying force in terms of belonging and access to rights and duties, on the one side, and in terms of a perpetuation social form, on the other. In the literature on group formation in communities with cognatic descent systems (particularly in Oceania), the perspectives have followed a similar route; from cognatic descent or bilateral kinship, to residence-oriented theories often connected to Freeman’s work on the Iban bilek, to a more holistic view where the House is seen to incorporate these various aspects (1962). I see bilateral filiation and the increasing practice of patrifiliation as better terms to describe membership into the local corporate groups in Panam today, and find these to relate well to the theoretical project of analyzing the local reproduction of social organization.

A remaining important question is the relation between descent and residence in Panam. My informants told me that the ideal is to maintain an unbroken rū gyud; beyond that, the descent relations of people co-residing have limited, or no relevance. As such, unmarried daughters are made peripheral to the ideology of the House. Yet, when
recruiting new members and considering the household composition of a House, descent is given some importance beyond the issue of belonging. These new members are primarily incorporated through marriage, or in some cases, by adoption.

**MEMBERSHIP BY VIRTUE OF MARRIAGE**

Independent of the type of marriage arranged, the new partner becomes a formal member of her or his new House. Although personal relations persist after marriage (including the continued offering to the natal deity (*kye lha*)), the moving partner renounces his or her membership with their natal group. Membership by marriage involves participation in both production and reproduction and is, as such, an important way to secure the perpetuation of the House and to maintain and develop the estates connected to the household (labour balance). As in Central Tibet in general, all three post-marital residence options are practised in Sharlung. Virilocal, uxorilocal or neolocal norms can be ascribed upon a marriage arrangement; depending upon the motivation for marriage, the people involved, and from whom the marriage initiative has come, one form will be chosen. When describing residence patterns, people in Sharlung claim that the dominant rule is that the woman resides with her husband’s family after the wedding and, hence, becomes a member and takes the name of his House. Other practices exist, they say, but these are ad hoc solutions to unfortunate situations, such as lack of a male heir (resulting in uxorilocal residence) or that a young couple falls in love and initiates their own marriage (which most often results in neolocal residence). In spite of the sense of exception that people express concerning uxorilocal and neolocal residence practices, these are nevertheless traditional practices fully acknowledged to be valid and constitutive of legitimate marriages. In Sharlung village today, of the 51 registered unions, 55 percent were virilocally residing, while 15 percent were uxorilocally residing and 30 percent were neolocally residing. These figures indicate that although virilocal residence is the ideal, it is still only practiced in little more than half of the arrangements. These numbers are not completely accurate in terms of original arrangement, as many of the now neolocally residing couples do so because of conflicts and divorce from
marriages that were originally arranged as virilocal. Hence, with the original residence of
the marriage included, more than 70 percent appear to be virilocally arranged.

Independent of residence practices, strict incest taboos inform the choice of a
(sexual) partner. As already mentioned, partners should not be related by neither
matrilateral nor patrilateral kinship, i.e. all kin marriages are prohibited. Based on
analysis of kinship terminology, as well as empirical knowledge of Tibetan-speaking
groups in the Nepali Himalaya, Allen has suggested that positive rules promoting cross-
cousin marriages were widespread in Tibet in earlier times (1976; see also Stein
1972:108 for a comment on the relation between the maternal uncle and niece; and
Benedict 1942; Davids and van Driem 1985; Jones and Jones 1976 on kinship
terminology among Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman groups). Among Tibeto-Burman groups
the term used to denote mother’s brother and father’s sister’s husband (ashang (ashang
tsawo)) is also used for father-in-law, which indicates that a wife could be invited from
the maternal uncle or paternal aunt’s family (the FZH would the seen as the wife-giver).71

In Sharlung I have never heard ashang being used to denote father-in-law
specifically. However, both ashang and aku (paternal uncle) are honorific terms used to
address males of the parent generation, and as such they also could include ‘father-in-
law.’ I commonly heard ‘my husbands’ father’ (kyope phala) or ‘my wife’s father’
(kyeme phala) used to describe father-in-law. For direct address, phala (father) is simply
used. Having said that, marriages between matrilateral cross-cousins (from a male ego)
are found both ideal and dominant among many of the Tibetan-speaking peoples in
Himalaya today (Childs 2004; Levine 1988; Watkins 1996; Vinding 1998; Schuler 1997;
Goldstein 1975), and many of these Tibetans hold that their ancestors who originated
from Central and West Tibet brought the cross-cousin marriage practice with them.72

Regardless of origin, in Central Tibet today cousin marriage is perceived to be

71 The method of characterizing social structure through terminology is a problematic endeavour in
anthropology, particularly in kinship theory, for various reasons: first and foremost because of the
translation problems inherent in classificatory kinship systems, but also because of the honorific terms that
have a broad usage.

72 Central Tibet, with its influential monastic institutions and the centre of the Tibetan empire, is perceived
by many Tibeto-Burman groups to be their place of origin. Indeed, Central Tibet could be seen to be a
place of cultural expertise and the origin of tradition.
sinful (dikpa) because of its incestuous character and Tibetans frown upon those involved in such liaisons. My informants hold that the cousin marriage practice is in opposition to the Buddhist moral codex and suggest that these marriages have evolved from too close contact with their Hindu neighbours in Nepal. Incest taboos in Panam include sexual relations with seven generations of matrilateral kin and nine generations of patrilateral kin,\(^73\) which seem to be similar to other Tibetan (as well as Mongolian) areas (Lindskog 2000; Makley 2002 for more general observations of the incest taboos in Amdo). People emphasize the practical problems involved in keeping track of such vast number of kindred, but nevertheless it remains an ideal, and in practice, partners are found without any known kinship connections.\(^74\)

Lack of positive marriage rules and the presence of strict and elaborate incest taboos imply that the in-marrying wife (nama) often is recruited from a distant social network. Although formal membership is granted upon marriage, a nama’s status as an outsider remains relevant in the first phases of the marriage. Until she has consolidated her position in the House, there are significant differences in her power and influence compared to those affiliated by birth. Nevertheless, the nama’s rights and obligations within a House are defined by her formal membership upon inclusion, and although being an outsider, the nama has a great potential for consolidating a strong position in a House. This is particularly the case in polyandrous marriages (see Chapter Seven). Before I turn to the internal differentiation and hierarchies in the individual Houses, I shall describe other variations of membership by virtue of marriage, namely marriage forms differentiated on the basis of uxori- and neolocal residence forms.

\(^{73}\) Occasionally defined to be five (or seven) generations of matrilateral kin and seven generations of patrilateral kin (see Goldstein 1975).

\(^{74}\) Severe sanctions are instigated upon violations of the incest taboo in Tibetan communities. Childs, for instance, reports a story told to him by a Tibetan man from Kyirong: ‘We believe that cracks will develop on your forehead if you marry a relative. In the past, two cousins related through matrilineal descent married in our village. They were sown together in a leather bag and cast into the river’ (2004:99).
Tibetan marriage forms

Marriage serves as a means to secure the perpetuation of a House, on the one side, and as a formalization of mutual attraction, on the other; independently of the source of arrangement, one or all of the partners involved gain life-long membership into a new social group following the wedding. As already mentioned, in Tibetan societies there is an established and common practice of marriages between a woman and an in-marrying husband (*makpa*). A marriage involving the inclusion of a *makpa* is based on a similar rationale as virilocal marriages in the sense that an outsider is married into an established House in order to secure the perpetuation of that social unit, but results from a lack of male heirs in the House he is marrying into. While an in-marrying wife (*nama*) marries a man who resides with his parents, and who is the legitimate heir to the House estate, a *makpa* marries a woman with no resident brothers and he becomes the legitimate heir to his wife’s House estate. A *makpa* is thus not married to a *nama*, but to a *kyeme* (wife), and a *nama* is not married to a *makpa*, but to a (husband).

Uxorilocal residence should hence be seen as an accepted solution to a defined problem, rather than an ideal form of marriage. However, it is a well-established and preferred solution to the lack of successors, and once arranged, it is not contested in any ways. A *makpa* marriage does not in it self weaken the House, nor does it influence the position of the House in the local community. The introduction of a new patrilineage into a House is of little, of any, significance to the social status and the reputation of a named House.

The *makpa* should not be understood as being a *nama* of the opposite sex, as his role in the new House is more complex (see Chapter Seven). The *nama* enters a wedding (and a House) as a reproducer of heirs to the House. She does so in an environment where most of the other House members are related by filiation. Her position is based on being an outsider and although she most often rises to become the female head of the House, she remains in a subordinate and low position in the earlier periods of her marriage.
A makpa is also invited to reproduce, not the patrilineage, but the House. Although he is, like the nama, perceived as one who shall produce heirs to the House, upon inclusion, he becomes the legitimate heir of the House in his generation. In a situation when a makpa is invited there are no men of his generation, and as such the power relations differ greatly from those experienced by the nama. The makpa is invited to become the new household leader, and once included into the House, his outside origin is only very seldom made relevant. A makpa is often referred to in the literature as an ‘adopted bridegroom,’ which indicates his inclusion into the lineage of the House (see for instance Bell 1928; Stein 1972). In Sharlung, however, a makpa is not said to be adopted (putsab), and there is no attempt to conceal his origin in terms of descent. Rather, as in the case of the nama, his natal House is a source of potential assistance, and sexual relations with his patrilateral and matrilateral kin remains incestuous also after his inclusion into a new House. Importantly, the name of the House into which he is wed becomes his upon the inclusion.

Gender is of crucial importance to the perpetuation of a House in the sense that only men can inherit a named estate. The various marriage alternatives reflect the need to find a male heir to the House, which can be done by filiation, adoption or by inviting a makpa. The fact that it is the in-marrying husband (makpa) of a woman without brothers that become household leaders of her natal House indicate that gender identity is the crux of the matter in the ideology of the perpetuation of named Houses, that is, men inherit Houses, while women don’t.

A makpa marriage brings a fortunate solution to a House without heirs, and as such it is a valued arrangement. Although inviting a makpa secures the perpetuation of a House with its name and property, it cannot prevent a discontinuity in the patrilineage. Although, as I have mentioned, a House with a makpa is not seen to be inferior, this type of marriage is considered less fortunate as it deviates from the ideal of perpetuating the agnatic line in the House. More importantly, uxorilocal residence (most often, at least initially) involves monogamy rather than plural marriage, and this is another aspect expressed to be unfortunate. The type of marriage that the residence patterns enable is, I
argue, the significant element when villagers evaluate marriage arrangements and their possibilities. The advantages of polygamy in general are clearly and in unison expressed by the villagers in Sharlung, and central to this rationale is the ability to strengthen the established corporate unit. Both marriages that involve a nama or a makpa are potentially polygamous, although it is only in very few occasions that a makpa marries polygynously. Thus, the value of polygamy, of keeping family together, and of strengthening a named House, is crucial when people evaluate marriage.

From the early literature, Tibet has been known for its many co-existing marriage forms (Stein 1972; Bell 1928), and most of these forms have been practiced in the course of history also in Panam and Tsang. There is a high degree of continuity in marital practices in Panam in the sense that today all known traditional marital forms are found in the various villages surrounding Sharlung (although they are found in different social categories). The marriage form chosen primarily depends on the household constellation and gender distribution among the marrying generation. As described in detail in Chapter Three, virilocal fraternal polyandry is often preferred in cases where there are two or more sons in a House. When there is only one son, virilocal monogamy is arranged, while in cases of no sons, but daughters, uxorilocal monogamous marriage is given preference. Moreover, if these marriages prove to be barren, additional partners might be added, leading to sororal polygyny or sororal fraternal polygyny. Also, if one partner dies early and leaves a labour shortage in the household, additional options are considered and might lead to the establishment of bi-generational polygamous marriages where a widower and his sons marry a new wife, or a widow and her daughters marry a new husband. These two options are only seldom practiced, but when they are, they are nevertheless accepted by the villagers (see also Ben Jiao 2001).

In Sharlung today, we find monogamy, fraternal polyandry and sororal polygyny only, but, if we include the three neighbouring villages, we also find fraternal sororal polygyny as well as bi-generational polyandry and polygyny. In order to illustrate the

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75 Polygyny denotes plural marriage involving both two or more men and two or more women. In Tibet these forms most often are fraternal and sororal, i.e. a group of brothers are married to a group of sisters. The two groups must be unrelated.
solutional aspect of sororal polygynous and bi-generational polygamous marriages I briefly describe the background of some of these marriages.

The one case in Sharlung of sororal polygynous marriage is found in a House called Baro, and this marriage came into existence in a typical way. Baro had no sons but several daughters, and therefore they invited a makpa to marry one of them, Nyima. Puchung, the makpa, moved in, and after two years Nyima gave birth to a son. However, after that, Nyima did not get pregnant. Seven years later, Nyima’s parents suggested that one more daughter should be added to the marriage, in order to secure more heirs for the next generation. Puchung and Nyima agreed to this, and one of Nyima’s younger sisters, Dechen, who was already residing with them, was included into the marriage. She gave birth to two children during the first three years. However, after the inclusion of Dechen, Nyima also gave birth to three more children, making the numbers of offspring from the marriage to be six, three sons and three daughters. Thus, we can see that sororal polygyny is a solution to failed reproduction in an already established monogamous marriage. Because Puchung moved as a makpa into a House with several unmarried sisters, there was easy access to an additional wife. Importantly, the additional wife was already a member of the House, and no rituals marked her inclusion into the marriage.

Uxorilocal residence is, however, not a precondition for sororal polygyny; it is also found in later phases of monogamous and polyandrous marriages organised by both neolocal and virilocal residence. In the cases of polygyny, the rationale does not so much concern labour balance or securing a strong household, but deals directly with the question of continuity and, thus, succession of the social unit, as the additional wives are included to resolve a problem of barrenness. A polygynous arrangement produces heirs in the cases where the monogamous marriage has not. In the following chapter I shall discuss consubstantial relatedness and perceptions of similarity and solidarity among siblings; here it is sufficient to mention that due to the interpersonal complex situation of polygamous marriages, siblings are preferred as additional partners.

Ben Jiao, writing from the township centre, reports two cases of bi-generational polyandry and four cases of bi-generational polygyny in the village of more than ninety
households. He points to the absence of a ‘negative stigma’ (2001:125) of such marriages. The first case involves a father and a son (the son’s mother is deceased). The second case involves a father’s brother and his nephew, who was adopted (putsab) into his House at early age. Of the four incidents of bi-generational polygyny, three involve a mother and a daughter, and one involves a woman and sister’s daughter (ibid.:126). Due to the proximity of these villages, my informants in Sharlung are also aware of these six unions. While spoken of in a curious manner, people in Sharlung accept the solutions as legitimate and rational. Bi-generational polygamy mostly comes about as a monogamous marriage between the widow/widower and a new partner, and in due time the children from the first union are added into the new marriage if this is found suitable to all parties. Such a solution, people argue, results in the preferred reproduction system within a household, namely the limitation of the sets of heirs to one only.

Although these miscellaneous marriage types are arranged for different reasons, and in various phases of life, they are all considered to be legitimate marriages based on the same principles and serving the same purposes. The monomarital principle is consolidated both with monogamy, fraternal polyandry, sororal polygyny, as well as polygynadry and the bi-generational variations of these. As the examples of Chapter Three demonstrate, monogamy and fraternal polyandry are by far the most common marriage forms, and in fact these are the two forms that are initiated and arranged by a household leader, leaving the other marriage forms as adjustments of such arrangements.

Most of the marriage types above involve virilocal or uxorilocal residence rules. These marriages are also for the most part arranged by the parents of the couple. The last category of residence patterns, the neolocal establishment of a household upon marriage, is also widely practiced today in Tibet. In Sharlung, neolocal residence is often the result of either a divorce, and fission of a House, or of a couple-initiated marriage based on mutual attraction (khathugpa). As described in Chapter Three, khathugpa marriages follow a different rationale than the unions arranged by parents, as they do not concern themselves with the continuity of an already established social group. Rather, these marriages are less formal manifestations of romantic attraction and are individually
initiated (although parents are asked for consent). As with divorce, *khathugpa* marriages are seen to be unfortunate occurrences because they result in the establishment of a new household with only limited access to fertile land and minimal labour force. Also, as a residence group they will be without influence in the village. Young couples that initiate their own marriage also realize these potential problems of monogamy, and in some cases they include an additional husband in order to strengthen the internal organization. This happened in one of unnamed houses in Sharlung. After Pema and her boyfriend, Ngodrup decided to marry, they worried that they would be a weak household and agreed to ask Ngodrup’s younger brother to join in their marriage. Because Ngodrup had four brothers, his parents agreed to their suggestions that the two brothers marry out and establish a new household. Later, the parents arranged a virilocal fraternal polyandrous marriage for their remaining three sons. Significantly, the practice of adding partners to a marriage, and as such adding new members to a House, is open to all types of marriages. This indicates not only the flexibility of the marriage institution in Tibet, but also the numerous options for gaining membership into a House by virtue of marriage.

Independent of the type of marriage arranged (by parents or the couple themselves), inclusion into a marriage results in formal membership into a particular House. Additional partners who were not present at the original wedding ceremony are not discriminated in terms of membership, either in terms of rights and duties in daily life or in terms of fundamental rights of inheritance and succession. However, the execution of these rights and the general position within a hierarchical structure within the House is open to individual negotiation. Often an added partner remains in a low-ranked position compared to his or her co-partner(s), but this, I shall argue, depends on relative age rather than status as a secondary partner (see Chapter Six). Before I turn to the internal differentiation of power and authority in the next chapter, I shall discuss another well-established criterion for membership into Tibetan Houses, namely what is usually translated as adoption (*putsab*).
ADOPTION (*PUTSAB*)

As in many societies, re-placement of children either for fostering or adoption is a common and accepted practice in Tibet. In Tibetan the word *putsab* refers to those children that have been permanently moved to non-biological parents and who, upon inclusion into a new House, have gained full inheritance rights. *Bu* translates as ‘child’ and *tshab* as ‘replacement’ or ‘substitute’ (Goldstein 2001:876), which indicate the secondary, or solutional character of the process where an external child is included as a formal member of a House. Earlier sources indicate that in traditional Tibet adoption was particularly common among the upper classes, i.e. the aristocracy and the landholders (Fjeld 2005; Petech 1973) as well as within the families of monk officials (Goldstein 1989:8-9). In Sharlung today, adoption is more often found in the poorer households. Underlying these changes (and possibly regional differences) in the social distribution of adoption is, I argue, an alteration of motivation for initiating adoption today. While succession, and the continuity of the House, was of major concern for adoption practices among the upper classes, the emphasis today is rather turned towards a focus on the labour force and balance in adult personnel of a household. Adoption is a pragmatic strategy to balance household composition in order to secure labour and parental care.

In a recent study of international adoption, Howell points to the great variations in the motivations for adoption practices in general and concludes that no clear patterns of adoption practices emerges (2006:60-66). However, certain issues might be alluded to from these studies. Goody suggests three purposes of adoption: providing a home for ‘orphans, bastards, foundlings and the children of impaired families;’ providing ‘childless couples with social progeny;’ and providing ‘an individual or couple with a heir to their property’ (in Howell 2006: 53-54). Moreover, Melanesian and West-African ethnographies point to alliance and social network building as an inherent part of adoption practices (see for instance, Anderson 2003; Alber 2004), as well as the more pragmatic labour concerns. In Tibet there are several purposes for adoption; providing a heir to the property and social group owning the property, household constellation and labour expansion, as well as providing the childless couple with social progeny in order
to secure care for the older generation. Network and alliance building is a lesser part of the adoption rationale in Tibet.

While the theoretical debates on adoption centre around kinship, parenthood and childhood (Howell 2006; Alber 2004; Bowie 2004), it is my intention here to discuss adoption as a means for membership into a social group, i.e. a House, in Panam. Here I want to point to the distinction made in anthropological literature between adoption, on the one side, and fostering, on the other, where the latter is often included in the first concept. While fostering conventionally involves parents looking after someone else’s child, adoption in addition involves ‘kinning’ of the child into the fostering parents’ kin network (Howell 2003; Barnard and Spencer 2002). Adoption (putsab) as practiced in Tibet is an in-between category that involves incorporation into a social group but only to a limited extent kinning into the fostering parents’ kin network. More precisely, upon adoption in Sharlung a person becomes a full member of a House; that is, he or she gains formal, unlimited inheritance rights. However, this inclusion into a new House does not obscure the biological origin of the adoptee and is not expressed in a kinship idiom. In addition, fostering also occurs, although for shorter periods of time, but because it does not involve membership into a House, it will not be dealt with at length here.

Howell defines adoption to be ‘the practice whereby children, for various reasons, are brought up by adults other than their biological parents, and are treated as full members of the family amongst whom they live’ (Howell 2006: 52). This definition is broad and only differs from fostering in the latter point of the children being ‘treated as full members of the family amongst whom they live.’ Membership, and the process of becoming a formal member, is of crucial importance for understanding adoption, and Howell suggests elsewhere, that such study would fruitfully focus on the process of ‘kinning’ (2003). She defines ‘kinning’ as ‘the process by which a foetus or new-born child (or a previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent

76 This analytical distinction between adoption and fostering is somewhat forced, and the two aspects are often parts of the same process. Nevertheless, a distinction enables some analytical points concerning closeness in relations and long-term implications of a child’s changed residence. I use the two concepts here with some caution, and do not argue that these are absolute categories.
relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom’ (2003:465). ‘Kinning,’ she argues, is a universal process that ensures intersubjective relatedness. Central to the process of kinning is what Howell calls transubstantiation, i.e. ‘the substance (biological body) remains; the social essence (being, self) is changed’ (ibid.:470). By such transubstantiation, she argues, an adoptee is kinned, and their relation is expressed in an idiom of kinship. In the following I shall use the concept of kinning to analyse the character of putsab in Tibetan societies.

As already mentioned, throughout history Tibetans of differing social backgrounds have adopted children for various reasons. In Panam today, there are adoptees in several households, many of who were adopted at the beginning of 1960s. Upon the closing of the local monasteries and nunneries following the Chinese take-over, many monks and nuns were adopted into local households of relatives. Adoption was a way to secure household membership while refraining from marriage, which meant breaking the monastic vows.77 Later, these former monks, and particularly nuns, often formed their own small household within the House that they were adopted into. In order to form a viable household while at the same time continuing celibacy, many preferred adoption as a solution to the need for household expansion.

The majority of recent adoption histories in Sharlung and the neighbouring villages are found in poorer households established after the 1960s. These cases indicate adoption as a significant strategy for labour constellation, on the one hand, and to secure succession and property inheritance of land, on the other. While the former concern is a continuous motivation, the latter is a more recent one that seems to have been made more relevant after the implementation of the Household Responsibility System in 1981, where the poor households were given some land and started the process of transforming into corporate groups. One House in Sharlung is a good illustration of the use of adoption

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77 According to one former monk in Daching the vows must be ‘returned’ (through a particular ritual) upon disrobing, in order to avoid the multiplication of the effects that the robes provide. This was particularly important when breaking the vows, as the negative effects of this sinful behaviour would be increased if done with the vows. Returning the vows was not allowed in the 1960s; thus, many of the former monks and nuns refused to have sexual relations, for example. In Panam, some of the former Daching monks collectively returned their old vows in the mid-1980s.
Magnub

Magnub is a very small household, consisting of one monogamous couple, which hold only small plots of arable land. The woman, Drolkar, was a yakpo (landless farmer) before the Chinese takeover, and worked for the trelpa (landholding Houses) in the area. In 1960 she married Dawa, a former monk of Daching monastery who was forced by the new government to disrobe during the first reforms in 1959. He was a relative of the Dagpo, the chief trelpa House that Drolkar worked for at that time. As this was the period of the Democratic Reforms, the two received a small house located in the western part of the village (khang nub– the western house) and arable land from the local government. After some years their marriage appeared to be barren, and, because they needed assistance for agricultural and domestic work, they decided for adoption. Giving away a child is considered a loss, and a gift, and should therefore ideally be a transfer between people of close (nyebo) relations. In practice, such a transfer primarily occurs between relatives. Drolkar had few relatives, and the only ones she could ask had three sons and were planning a polyandrous marriage for them. Thus, the only option they had was to ask Dagpo, Dawa’s matrilateral relatives and Drolkar’s former employer, who had twelve children (five sons and seven daughters).

To ask for a child, Drolkar and Dawa brought chang, tea bricks and kathags to the leader of Dagpo. According to Drolkar, they were easily given Tendöl, a twenty-year old unmarried woman. Tendöl, bringing only some new clothes provided by her parents, moved to Magnub shortly after. She stayed with them for several years and was part of the household during the land distribution following the ‘Household Responsibility System’ reform, which provided Magnub with fields for one extra person. Because they needed cash income at that time, Drolkar and Dawa decided to send Tendöl to Lhasa to work in the construction business. While working in Lhasa she met her future husband and they settled down in the capital after marriage. When Tendöl no longer provided
income for Drolkar and Dawa, they were again in need of labour and help in the house. The two were getting older and concerned about with their health and lack of help, so they decided to ask Dagpo for another girl. The leader of Dagpo, having six unmarried daughters still living at home, agreed to transfer one of the younger girls, Sedön, to Magnub. They were very happy about this, Drolkar said, as Dawa’s health was declining, and Sedön was a caring person.

After two years, when Dawa had died, Drolkar wanted to arrange a marriage for Sedön, but because they were poor they could not afford to invite a *makpa* for her. At this particular time, Drolkar’s relatives, who had already arranged a polyandrous marriage for their three sons, were experiencing some difficulties. The youngest husband, Tsering, was unhappy and argued with his much older wife, and he wanted to part from the marriage. Drolkar suggested that she could adopt him, and, if they liked each other, he could marry Sedöl. They agreed, and Tsering moved in with them in Magnub. Although marriage was intended, they defined the transfer as adoption (*putsab*) rather than in-marriage (as a *makpa*). A year later, Tsering and Sedöl married, and they now have three children.

Two purposes for adoption can be accentuated in this case: that of labour (Sedön) and that of marriage and, succession (Tsering). While the first type is most common, the latter is not. As already described the adoption of a husband (*makpa*) to marry a home-residing daughter is both a common and well-established practice, but there is a significant nuance of difference between a *makpa* and an adopted man who later becomes an in-marrying husband. The distinction should be made in the intention, in the structural implication of the transfer, and in the exchange of gifts following the transfer. In the process of negotiation and transfer the type of relation manifests, either as an affinal relation or a relation of adoption. While affines have a formal and agreed upon relation in which the mutual aspect is highlighted (by gifts and aid structures), adoption involves a time-specific and one-directional relation, i.e. the biological parents transfer the child and the giving and receiving part have very limited formal obligations following the transfer. The inherent power structures of a wife-giver and wife-taker relation, on the one side, and
of the biological and adoptive parents, on the other side significantly differ. While
marriage is arranged among (ideally, and mostly also in practice) equal ranked Houses,
adoption is often found to be a transfer from a wealthy to a poor House. The example of
Magnub and Dagpo illustrates the discrepancy in social positions between those adopting
and those providing an adoptee, which must be understood as an aspect of the local
rationale of the monomarital principle and economic diversification. In a social
organization based upon these principles, certain individuals are structurally peripheral
(unmarried women and excess sons outside the core marriage of the House) and for these,
adoption is one strategy for House membership. In Sharlung today, those Houses with a
large group of children tend to be wealthier, as the following household composition
enables economically diverse strategies for income (see Chapter Nine). Occasionally, the
adopters, being poorer, ask the givers for help, but the givers are not obliged to provide
such help, and in many cases they do not. As such, inviting a makpa, and asking for an
adoptee should be recognised as different in the temporal and formal aspect of the
relation between giver and receiver. While an affinal relation is formal and long-term,
and concerns mutual assistance, an adoption relation is not. Yet, as a one-time transfer,
adoption is formal and recognised, by both families involved, by the village and regional
leadership.

The main point I want to make with this illustration is not to determine whether or
not adoption or marriage was anticipated in the first place, but rather that the process of
putsab is one where formal membership is granted, both in terms of inheritance rights,
the right to represent the House in village matters. As such, putsab should be seen as one
path to membership alongside with filiation and marriage. In the process, the process of
kinning seem to be limited as little effort is put into the transformation of the person’s kin
relations ascribed by birth.

**Labour balance and succession**

*Putsab* is clearly a means to balance labour as well as to secure succession (by an in-
marriage at a later point), and an adoptee is given full membership including inheritance
rights. However, this process involves limited effort to kin the adoptee into a network of the adoptive parents. Rather than focusing on whether putsab could be defined to be ‘adoption’ or not, I shall point to the process of transferring a (formerly unconnected) person as member into a new House, not by the virtue of marriage but by inviting a child to reside elsewhere than with the biological parents. In this, I shall discuss the ways adoptive parents try, or do not try, to establish a kinship relation with the adoptee, arguing that, although the kinship idiom is not used in their relation, the adoptee is included into the House in the same way a member by virtue of filiation would be, thus indicating a permanent and juridically legitimate position of the adoptee in the House. Seen in a kinning perspective, putsab is a process that only in a limiting way intends to kin the adoptee. Tendöl and Tsering, who both came into the House by putsab, were not kinned in terms of expressing their relation to the group of people in Magnub in a kin idiom. Tendöl and Drolkar do not use daughter-mother terms to each other, and in the same way, Tsering does not call Drolkar mother; rather, both use affectionate and honorific terms for ‘old woman,’ in the same way as closely related outsiders do.

Rather than being included into the social group by kinning (into the kin network), we might say that Sedön and Tsering were incorporated into the House (and the House network) through a process of ‘housing’. As House membership is exclusive, Sedön and Tsering are formal members in Magnub only, and as such, the past memberships of their natal Houses are no longer of significant relevance. Upon inclusion, the new members are ‘housed’ in the sense that their natal belonging is made irrelevant for the present identification with a local group. Upon Tendöl, Sedön and Tsering’s move into Magnub, this became the name by which they identify themselves and are identified by others in the local community. Upon inclusion, and with time, the new members (and particularly the man) come to represent the House in external affairs, such as the village meetings, participation in mutual aid networks, and in labour exchange. They are formal members.

Adoption represents a challenge to the epistemology of relatedness in Tibet, as the idiom of kinship is grounded in a biological connectedness of shared substance (bones,
and to a lesser degree, flesh; cf. Howell 2003:466). However, this biologically based idiom of kinship does not exclude other forms for incorporation into a House, and kinship understood as filiation is one of several sources of formal membership. As argued in Chapter Four, it is the principle of co-residence, defining the prime social group for identification and belonging and joint with patrilineal descent as the ideological ground, that legitimizes the House. Thus, membership into a House is in parts grounded in a language of kinship. The biological aspect of kinship (descent) is, as argued earlier, not necessarily present for such a legitimization in a House, and, as found in many societies, manipulation with succession is widespread. *Putsab*, being an arrangement for securing the perpetuation of the House, is a process of kinning, but it does not involve an effort to make an adopted relation resemble a relation of bones (shared substance). Although they are fully incorporated into the group, the fact that Tendöl and Tsering do not violate the incest taboo by marrying each other illustrates the limited degree of kinning. Lack of emphasis on biological resemblance, of course, is an indication of the limited relevance of the sharing of bones (patrilineage) in terms defining the boundaries of the prime social group. In the *putsab* process, this biological connectedness is never challenged, and no ritual activities are performed to mark the transfer of parenthood.

The strong effort put on ‘naturalizing’ adoption found in Western cultures (see Howell 2003) might be, suggests Alber (2004), due to the fact that adoption and fostering are seen as neither ‘ordinary nor mainstream’ (ibid.: 33; see also Carsten 1991). This might be true. Closely connected are norms of parenthood and the ideal of the overlapping of biological and social parenthood. This ideal is not salient in Panam, and there is no negative stigma connected to adoption. Yet, there are significant markers of a process involving the making of kinship, namely activities whereby the adoptee becomes a representative of the House into which he or she is adopteed. The daily activities of a common economic endeavour – co-residence (including nurture, participation in ritual activities of the house), inclusion into a network of kin (for mutual assistance), and, most importantly, the defining of the adoptee to be the legitimate heir to the House and its estate – are all signifiers in terms of a kinning process. Through this process, as well as
the known motivation for the transfer of the child to be the next heir, the adoptee is becoming like kin. Most important they become the heir to the corporation that is a social unit ideally seen to consist of a group of relatives. Although not expressed in a kinship idiom (mother-daughter), those residing together, the adoptee and the adopters, share a House name, serving as the most important marker of identification to a local group and as the loci for belonging. Moreover, the post-adoption position is permanent and identical to that of being heirs by virtue of filiation, and their individual rights (most importantly inheritance) are not contested; neither within the household, nor outside.

The intention of putsab is said to be the transfer of inheritance rights, which I take as a strong indication that this practice should be defined as ‘adoption’. The element of incorporation is strong, but there is also an element of emotional ties involved in putsab, founded in co-residence, which resembles that connected to filiation. In the literature on adoption and fostering, ‘adoption’ is conventionally used as the ‘transference of full parental rights from birth to social parents’ (Bowie 2004: 5), focusing on the legal aspect of such transfer (much based on the Roman notion on adoption (Howell 2006)). Such focus on the juridical aspect alone in order to distinguish between adoption and other forms of fostering arrangements, does not, I believe, fruitfully enable a comparative perspective. Also, defining related categories of a loose character, such as ‘social parenthood’ (Goody 1982; Bowie 2004) seemingly leads to more confusion than clarity. While focusing on juridical aspects, such as the transfer of rights and duties as important parts of an analysis of adoption, we also need to keep in mind that which is related to the issues of belonging and the more practical aspects of participation in everyday village life as a member of a particular social group. As Howell points out: ‘adoption is what adoption does’ (Howell 2006: 77), and in the case of Panam, putsab enables the transfer of rights and obligations associated with a formal membership to a previously unconnected person. By doing so, putsab is juxtaposed with filiation and marriage as sources of inclusion into a House.
SOURCES OF MEMBERSHIP AND STRUCTURAL POSITIONS

The source of membership is contextually relevant in the intra-House organization and must be understood as closely connected to the structural positions of the individual, gender and relative age. Social organization in agricultural Tsang is patri-dominated ideologically, but filiation provides the structurally central positions within a House in Sharlung; i.e. sons of the male household leader are perceived to be the core in the succession of the House. This is particularly true for communities with a high incident of fraternal polyandry where the cultural rationale is that of maximizing male labour within the established unit by limiting the centripetal effects of new household establishments in each generation. Further, fraternal polyandry keeps a group of brothers together, a highly valued concern that reflects local perceptions of consubstantial relatedness. At the same time marriage and adoption are legitimate and common sources for House membership, and both adoption and marriage can provide structurally central positions for the individual. Yet, depending upon life phases, women and younger brothers share the fate of being in potentially peripheral positions and thus depend more upon personal attributes and abilities to make alliances with influential House members. Hence, the positions of members from all sources are vulnerable in some periods, albeit to varying extent. In the following chapter I argue that, once included into a House, the sources of membership are less significant; rather, gender, relative age and personal abilities are crucial in the individual consolidation of a strong position in a House organization. As long as the new individual is included into the House and, over time, share meals and activities, he or she will remain a member with all the rights and obligations that is attached to the House.

In the following chapter I shall focus on the significance of relative age and gender in the distribution of central and peripheral positions in a House. I shall do so by first discussing co-partnership in polyandrous marriages and, secondly, by analysing the various categories of women in a social organization dominated by fraternal polyandry.
CHAPTER SIX

CO-PARTNERSHIP
AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELATIVE AGE

In Tibet, polyandrous marriages are arranged fraternally, although in some few cases cousins, being members of the same House, are co-partners. There are no moral prohibitions against non-related co-partners in marriage as such; rather, as brothers are bodily constituted by the same substances and a sibling group of the same mother and same father(s) (pachik machik) is seen to be a unit, not only with physical resemblance but also with very similar personalities, they are expected to share a strong sense of loyalty and belonging. Hence, polyandry is arranged fraternally in order to minimise the conflict potential between the co-husbands. However, substantial similarity does not eliminate the possibility of hierarchy, and, as this chapter shall illustrate, relations between brothers are strongly structured in terms of authority and subordination, both in the co-partnership and elsewhere. Lévi-Strauss has pointed out that in the intra-House hierarchy, this ‘distinguishes the individual members of each unit according to the order of birth and the proximity to the common ancestor’ (1983:181). In Tibet, the basic structuring principle within a same-sex sibling group is relative age and although there are contextual openings for personal negotiation and manipulation, the superior position of the eldest brother (genshō) is largely undisputed (see also Levine 1988).
This chapter focuses on the status of eldest husband and brother (phala and genshō) in polyandrous marriages whose position is dominating although all co-husbands should be recognised as partners in marriage. In the following, I shall suggest a perspective on the organization of co-partnership in polyandrous marriages, arguing that the hierarchical relations between the co-husbands could be understood as one of ‘encompassment’ (Dumont 1970, 1979). In such a perspective it appears that the eldest husband encompasses the younger ones and comes to symbolically stand for not only the marriage but, on a more general level, the House. I shall describe the role of the eldest husband in terms of division of labour (briefly), sexual access to the common wife and the issue of socially validated paternity (in more detail) by pointing to the special relation between him and the nama. Further, I shall turn to polyandry-specific conflicts and argue that the different handling of the conflicts that involve the eldest husband, on the one side, or a younger one, on the other, is a further indication that suggests that the eldest husband within the House should be understood as what Dumont calls an ultimate value.

THE GROUP OF BROTHERS

As already described in some detail in Chapter Five, a sibling group with the same mother and father is perceived in Tibet to be the closest consubstantially related; and further, those of same sex in a sibling group are claimed to have a particular emotional connection. Levine takes similar local conceptions as a vantage point for her analysis of polyandry in the Nepali Himalaya and argues that, following the consubstantial similarity, a solidarity among the brothers evolves, and this solidarity, she holds, should be treated as the central motivation for fraternal polyandry among the Nyinba (1988:9, 278). Several theorists have taken a similar stand on the association of the unity of a sibling group and the prevalence of fraternal polyandry before Levine (see Radcliffe-Brown 1941:7; Mandelbaum 1938; and to a certain extent Prince Peter 1963). However, Levine does so from an empirical point of departure and does not defend a social theory within which sibling solidarity holds a prominent place. Consubstantial similarity and the following expectations of closeness, solidarity and common interests are also evident in
Panam, and are apparent in non-sexual relations as well as both non-marital and marital
sexual relations. Levine points to the common practice of young Nyinba brothers sharing
pre-marital sexual relations (ibid.:9), and in Sharlung, there are also some cases of
brothers being co-partners in marriage as well as sharing extra-marital relations.78

The value of relative age is apparent from early childhood. The perceived
preponderance of the eldest son is found in unfair distribution of food, health care,
clothing, and emotional involvement (cf. Levine 1987a, 1987b), both from the woman
and men in the House. Upon marriage arrangement, such age hierarchy is reflected in the
various stages leading to a wedding and a marital life. In the initial period of marriage
negotiations, the eldest brother (genshö) often visit (in disguise) the potential nama and
accept or reject the parents’ suggestion. The younger brothers do not have this
opportunity, and in the cases of the genshö being absent, the task will simply not be
performed. During the wedding ceremony, the genshö’s dominant position is
acknowledged when the nama is seated on his left side, while his brothers sit on the right
side, again organised by relative age. The eldest husband can thus be seen as a mediator
between the nama and his co-husbands. Moreover, on the night of the wedding it is the
genshö who initiates the nama’s sexual practice in the marriage, and she stays with him
throughout the first night. The next nights she will stay with the younger husbands, also
arranged by age. Later, the genshö, in co-operation with the nama, will decide the
frequency and the distribution of the younger husbands’ access to the nama’s sexual
activity.

**Relative age and encompassment**

Some scholars writing on polyandry have claimed that these unions should not be termed
marriage, but rather cicisbeism or polykoity, because, they argue, the wife is married only
to the eldest in the fraternal group, while the younger ones are merely co-residing with

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78 Also, when adultery happens, people say that it most often occurs between a married man and his wife’s
sister(s). This is also a common perception among exile Tibetans (Tsomo Svenningsen, personal
communication 2004). In Sharlung, a sister of a deceased wife is also a preferred second marriage partner,
of reasons more related to expected concerns for her sister’s children.
the monogamously married couple (Fisher 1952). Although I disagree with the conclusion to classify these unions as non-marriages, it must be acknowledged that the positions of the co-husbands are ranked and the younger husbands are thoroughly subordinated. Although personal attributes might be given preference in certain contexts, a husband can nevertheless always claim his rights based on his position in the age hierarchy.

Needham, in his article on ‘Age, Category and Descent’, argued that relative age as a means for social differentiation is more typically made relevant in cognatic societies, as opposed to lineal descent systems, although, he wrote, such criterion might be employed for social classification in the latter cases as well (1974:104). A theoretical debate on relative age and kinship systems did not evolve after Needham’s contribution, and it is, as Gottlieb points out (1992:83), strange that relative age has not become a clearly defined focus in studies of kinship in cognatic societies (or alliance dominated societies). Here, I shall not turn the discussion to one of relative age versus category, but rather focus on age as a criterion for classification within one category (or generation), much in line with Needham’s point.

The analytical perspective that I shall suggest for the study of co-husbandry and relative age, is based on Hertz’s article on ‘The Pre-eminence of the Right-Hand’ (Hertz 1909), and the following discussion between Needham (1973) and Dumont (1979) on the further contribution of Hertz’s analysis with regards to dual opposition in general, and the preponderance of one of the opposites in particular. In his essay Hertz shows the widespread occurrence of a pre-eminence given to the right, as opposed to the left:

> an almost insignificant bodily asymmetry is enough to turn in one direction and the other contrary representation which are already completely formed. Thereafter, thanks to the plasticity of the organism, social constraint adds to the opposed members, incorporates in them, those qualities of strength and weakness … which in the adult appear to spring spontaneously from nature (1909:21).

Similarly, co-wives in polygynous marriages are ranked according to relative wedding order, most often corresponding to age (although young age in such polygyny tends to be an advantage in terms of influence and ability to build alliances with the husband) (see, for instance, Sommerfelt 2004).
Hertz’s point is that the relation between right and left is one of qualitative difference, and that fundamental aspects of these differences are found not only in nature but also in religion and in the body. He vividly describes the inferiority of the left in various cultures and points to the common feature that while the right hand is able to conduct independent actions, the left hand is passive and dependent. He further writes: ‘The preponderance of the right hand is obligatory, imposed by coercion, and guaranteed by sanctions; contrary, a veritable prohibition weights on the left hand and paralyzes it’ (ibid.:6). The different qualities of the right and the left hand can be described as based on organic symmetry, wherein the right hand is in a position to stand for the whole body, and thus incorporates also the left hand. This ability of the right hand to stand for the whole is central to its superiority, Hertz emphasizes. In 1973, Needham edited Right and Left. Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification, in which the authors discussed the ideas in Hertz’s famous essay. The book was an attempt to ‘arrive empirically at a theory of thought and action’ and included eighteen empirical cases illustrating the two basic points that ‘oppositions can validly be established, and that these can be systematically interrelated’ (Needham 1973: xviii). The problem, according to Dumont’s later publications (1979) is that the systematic interrelations suggested by Needham et. al., do not systematically analyse the classified oppositions and homologies, as these are de-contextualised with regards to the overall relations. He writes: ‘In short, the distinction of situations ceases to be considered as pertinent at the moment we pass from elements to the set as a whole … ‘ (Dumont 1979:808). Rather than renewing Hertz’s well-made points on the polarity of oppositions, Dumont claims, Needham’s edited volume illustrate them.

Dumont, already having published ‘Homo Hierarchicus’, suggests that the relations between the oppositions that Hertz pointed out to be characterised by incorporation, should more precisely be seen as hierarchical relations of a particular kind; Dumont writes, ‘ the two terms or poles do not have equal status: one is superior, the other is inferior’ (1979:810). According to Dumont, seeing the opposition as a polarity or complementarity, will not enable a proper answer, although it poses the question of why
pre-eminence is given to one side. What seems to be the main problem is the lack of focus on context, i.e. the fact that the oppositions cannot be defined in themselves, but ‘only in relation to a whole’ (ibid.:810). What Dumont calls a hierarchical opposition is the opposition between a set and an element of this set, where the element is identical to the set of which it forms a part (ibid.:809). Further, the element is also a contrariety to the whole, and as such is a double relation. This double relation connects to the nature of hierarchical opposition and informs Dumont’s well known conclusion that ‘essentially, hierarchy is the encompassing of the contrary’ (op.cit.; see also Dumont 1970:66).

Encompassment here launches a perspective that emphasises the differentiation of the parts in their relation to the whole, the characteristic of certain parts to incorporate the other parts, and finally, for these parts to symbolically represent the whole, i.e. the set of parts incorporated.

Co-partnership in polyandrous marriages could fruitfully be understood as a hierarchical relation in the Dumontian sense of the term, where the eldest husband encompasses the younger husbands, not only in terms of internal organization of the marriage but also in terms of symbolic representation. The eldest is thus to be seen as ‘ultimate value’ of the marriage, with a particular significance for the House. Such encompassment can be seen in various contexts, both in the wedding process and in the organization of daily life. Further, I shall argue that encompassment as an analytical concept provides a useful perspective on co-partnership that enlightens the often, contradictory handling of marital problems involving the eldest or the youngest husband in polyandrous marriages. Before I turn to conflict patterns, I shall describe the organization of every day conjugal life, focusing particularly on the encompassing status of the genshō as found relevant to the issues of distribution of leadership, sexual access and recognition of paternity in polyandrous marriages.

80 In Hertz’s example of the right and the left hand, this whole is also very tangible since it is the human body.
DISTRIBUTION OF AFFECTION AND AUTHORITY

Central to the success of a polyandrous marriage is a fair distribution of affection. These issues do not involve a fair distribution of offspring among the husbands, but is rather a question of appreciation and sexual access. Fair distribution is the common responsibility of the wife (nama) and the eldest husband, much dependent on the individual position that the nama has gained in the marriage and in the House (see Chapter Seven for details on the nama’s position). It is thus outside the responsibility of the older generation of male or female household leaders; however, it is not necessarily outside their influence. The contentment of the partners involved in polyandrous marriages is seen to be of a common concern for the members of a House, and while the responsibility of distribution is shared, it is the nama alone that is blamed for failure of marital success.81

Upon marriage, a system for sexual distribution (kora khor) is defined. At this time, the nama has only limited influence on the arrangement because she has been in the House for short time and is often in a position of much embarrassment (ngotsa). Kora khor translates as ‘going around in circles,’ and is the basic principle of sexual access in a polyandrous marriage. In cases where the nama has a weak position, it is her eldest husband who administers the kora khor. However, such cases are few in Sharlung. Most common, it seems, is a close co-operation between the nama and her eldest husband in the period when he is present, and an independent administration by the nama when he is engaged in off-farm activities.

There are several patterns into which sexual access can be distributed, depending upon the labour division among the co-husbands, structural elements of the interior of the house, the quality of the relations of the partners and the preferences of the nama. Below I shall describe three typical arrangements, as these were practiced in Sharlung, that

81 Fair distribution of affection and a successful kora khor within the polyandrous marriage is a concern of House members also outside the conjugal unit. There are several ways to indicate ongoing sexual activity in a room, and two are the most common. In Darkhang, for instance, when the nama and one husband enter a room for sexual activity, the she puts either the strap holding up her boots or the belt for her chuba on the door signalizing a need for privacy. In other houses, women put their straps on top of the blanket, signalizing the same. Because there is no electricity the rooms are very dark at night; thus, the strap on the blanket is for people to be warned by touching the blanket if they have already entered the room. The practical signalisation of ongoing sexual activity does not only avoid what is seen to be embarrassing situations, but also informs others in the house about the kora khor.
indicate the dominating role of the genshō in the distribution independent of his presence or absence, on the one hand, and the changing phases of the nama’s influence, on the other. As I return to the latter in the following chapter, I focus here on the status of the genshō.

Much dependent upon the interior architecture of a house, the co-husbands and the wife have private sleeping rooms. In the large houses, such distribution of space is common, while in smaller houses the husbands might alternate where they sleep. My informants hold that it is important to provide a private room for the nama, and she shares with the eldest husband most often in the cases of limited space. According to my observations, however, most of the namas does share their room with the eldest husband, an arrangement often preferred by the nama herself. Only very seldom does she permanently stay with the younger husbands.

The simplest system for distribution of sexual access is found in the many polyandrous marriages that involve only two husbands and where one of them works outside the village for several months per year. In such cases, where one husband is away for half the year, it is common that he will stay with the wife in the whole period that he is home, while the home-based husband and the wife share a room when alone.

A more complex system evolves when several husbands co-reside for the majority of the time. In the Darkhang for instance, the wife and her two husbands practice a typical kora khor system, which reflect the early phase of their marriage. Both the husbands and the wife have separate rooms, and the wife alternates between sleeping in her room and with the husbands. The two co-husbands work together during most of the day (in the field, or elsewhere) and at some point during the day they decide on the sleeping arrangement. When the evening sets, the designated husband takes his blanket to the wife’s room, and, by looking at the blanket, she will know with whom she will have sex that night. Although the nama in Darkhang has a good relation to her husbands, she does not take part in the decisions regarding kora khor; however, she claims that in a few years time, when her children are older and her position in the House is more strongly consolidated, she will administer her own kora khor.
In the neighbouring Gongpo House, Phundrol, the *nama*, is more active in defining the *kora khor*. She has a strong position within the House, both in relation to her parents-in-law, and to her three husbands. The spatial arrangement is such that Phundrol shares the sleeping room with her eldest husband, while the two other husbands have their own room. The eldest husband works outside the village for some four months per year, and in these periods Phundrol sleeps alone (with the child) and is in complete control of the *kora khor*. Upon the arrival of her eldest husband, Phundrol sleeps with him only for two weeks, before returning to the regular *kora khor* system. According to Phundrol, she has defined a *kora khor* system according to her own preferences but, importantly, her eldest husband has agreed to it. Contrary to the practice in Darkhang, Phundrol goes around to the husband’s rooms. However, she always returns to her eldest husband when sexual activities are completed. Their marriage is still in an early period, when the children are small and childcare is demanding. Although the children usually sleep in the common room together with grandparents and other non-reproductive House members, a nursing child always sleeps with the mother. However, independent of breastfeeding, Phundrol always returns to her (and her eldest husband’s) room after completed intercourse with her younger husbands.

The third type of *kora khor* is the clustering of sexual activities, i.e. a system where the *nama* visits all husbands during one night. This seems to be less common, and only practiced in marriages of maximum three husbands. According to people in Sharlung, two *namas* in the village prefer this system, and although it is accepted, people do discuss it with some curiosity.

Here I want to draw the attention to the relations between the *nama* and her oldest husband, on the one hand, and her younger husbands, on the other. Phundrol shares a room with the *genshō*. Such co-residence, Phundrol claims, is not possible with the younger brothers, because, she says, ‘I have a better connection with the *genshō*.’ The bond between the *nama* and the eldest husband is different in character from her relation with the younger ones. Women openly reveal a more affectionate relation to the eldest husband as well, which is often reflected in the *kora khor* system, where the wife is based
with the eldest husband, merely visiting the younger ones. These different relations between the nama and her husbands is founded in the dominant position of the genshō among his brothers. Moreover, the nama and the genshō hold a particular position with regards to the future leadership of the House, where he will be the next male leader and she will be the female head. Their co-operation is of crucial significance for the future of the House, and much emphasis is put on this, both among themselves and among the parent generation.

The distribution of affection and sexual access is not reflected in the issues of paternity, where, although the eldest husband symbolically stands for the group of fathers by being termed ‘phala’, all husbands are recognised as genitor and pater.

Socially validated paternity, but one Phala
Central to the organization of polyandrous marriages is the issue of paternity. In the known cases of fraternal polyandry, paternity is defined biologically, classificatorily or socially; which, Levine and Silk have argued (1997), very much influences the conflict level of polyandrous marriages. Levine’s Nyinba material indicates that a high level of conflict is found among those who openly acknowledge biological paternity among the co-partners, while this is in a lesser degree the case among those with limited knowledge of biological paternity. Such an argument is based in a per stirpes inheritance system where the land is transferred from a father to his biological child, regardless of age hierarchy. Following such an assumption, I shall describe co-partnership in Panam as relations of a low conflict level and connect this both to the recognition of socially validated fatherhood and to the acceptance of an age hierarchy defining every partner into a particular role known to him by socialization. In this age hierarchy, the role of the eldest is one of encompassment, and his representation of the whole groups of brothers is also reflected in the classificatory aspect of paternity. By paternity ideology, the eldest husband is the classificatory father (phala), while his co-partners are termed according to relative age, all referring to them as father’s brothers within the same marriage (achok, achung). Thus, the younger husbands are not conceptually linked to fatherhood, but to
brotherhood. However, I shall argue that the terms used for the co-husbands by their children do not fully describe the relation between the eldest husband, his brothers and their offspring; although only the eldest husband is termed ‘father’, all husbands are recognised to be social fathers (pater) as well as genitors of the offspring of the one marriage of the House. The *phala* corresponds to the House leader and encompasses not only his co-partners, but as the House leader, the whole House.

All husbands are considered to contribute with male substance in the creation of a child born to the wife. As already described in the previous chapter, male substance manifests in the bones of a child, and because the co-husbands are (ideally, and most often in practice) of the same patrilineage, the substance transferred is seen to be identical among the co-husbands.\(^{82}\) Thus, the explanation of fatherhood is connected to local understanding of biology and the constitution of a child’s body, emphasizing the identical nature of siblings of the same mother and same father(s) (*pha chik ma chik*). Children of polyandrous marriages say that they are siblings of ‘one father one mother,’ that is, co-husbands are seen to be part of ‘*pha chik,*’ and fatherhood must be seen to be socially validated. Fatherhood is, however, more than that. All children produced within a particular marriage are understood to be ‘fathered’ by the mother’s husbands, not only socially, but also in terms of providing the crucial genealogical matrix of the child. Central to such perception is the mother’s practice of keeping the genitor unknown to her husbands.\(^{83}\)

Women are seen to be fertile in a period of around five days (the fifth to the tenth day) in the menstrual cycle, which means that in a situation with several husbands present, the genitor cannot be determined.\(^{84}\) My female informants share a perception of one intercourse as sufficient for impregnation, i.e. there are no perceptions of nurture by

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\(^{82}\) Even in the cases of several generations of polyandry where the co-partners are half brothers or cousins, they usually share the same patrilineage.

\(^{83}\) Women do whisper among themselves about the biological origin of their children, but they do not articulate this information to men.

\(^{84}\) Berreman notes that in Jausar Bawar, in the Indian sub-Himalaya, women assign paternity upon divorce to the one husband she first had sexual contact after her last menstruation prior to the child’s conception (1975:128-129), but such assignment is unheard of in Panam. Levine claims that also in Tibet the biological father was assigned by appearance (Levine 1988:167), but this was not the case in Panam, and my informants had never heard about such practice in their neighbouring regions.
additional sperm for a successful impregnation as found among other peoples (see also Diemberger 1993). Thus, each impregnation recognises only one genitor, but his identity is not revealed in public. There are however many cases where only one husband was present in the house during impregnation, and even in such situations where the genitor is known by practicality, this fact should under no circumstances be expressed or emphasized (not even during divorce and division of the marriage partners). I have not heard about cases of conflicts where fathers or mothers violated this norm. Contributing male substance to a particular child does not define the father-child relation in a way differing from a relation to other children of the marriage, and I have found no signs of genitors being more emotionally attached to their children (see also Levine 1987b).

With regard to paternity then, we see a particular position of the eldest husbands, being the only one addressed as ‘phala.’ Importantly, the younger husbands are also recognised as pater of the children born within the marriage. More particularly, all husbands are ‘one father,’ a group represented by the eldest called phala. The phala encompasses the achok (the second eldest) and the achung (the third), and he is not only a part of the whole (‘one father’) but his relation to the whole is of a particular kind; the phala symbolically stands for the whole.

**Transfer of leadership in polyandrous houses**

The dominant and superior position of the genshō is thus based upon the principle of hierarchical ranking according to relative age, underlying the organization of co-partnership in polyandry. While one might expect a deviance from the organising principle, I argue that among co-partners, the foundation of authority distribution is unchallenged. Relative age as an organizational fundament for polyandrous marriages is confirmed in leadership structures and practices of power transfer. While there is always the possibility to influence and manipulate an ascribed position within hierarchical relations, I argue that in terms of House leadership, it is only in few and exceptional cases that personal attributes challenge positions defined by relative age.
The leadership structure of a House is formal, and organised around a male (sayön) and a female leader (nangma), of which the former is one of general authority. The sayön, meaning ‘the leader of the place,’ is recognised, both internally by the House members, and externally by the community of which the House is a part. He is the ultimate leader of the House who organises not only the daily male tasks, such as farming, herding and occasionally trading and other off-farm activities, but also the future planning of the human resources (for instance, the children’s marriage arrangements). He further represents the House in community work and builds and maintains the mutual aid obligations of the house.85 In Sharlung there is an unchallenged concurrence between the sayön and the eldest son of a House, i.e. House leadership is transferred from the eldest male in one generation to the eldest male in the next generation. At the same time, House leadership presupposes a marriage, and should the eldest refuse a married life, he cannot gain the leader position. In an organization based on monomarital principle and, following, one household per House, the eldest husband also holds a dominant position in the one marriage of his generation.

The transfer of House leadership is a gradual process in which authority passes from one elder generation to the next. As the father and son reside together, the transfer is a long-term process, with a blurred beginning and finalization, which is most often completed before the son reaches the age of forty.

As with most stratified arrangements, age hierarchy between siblings is naturalized among Tibetans. My informants simply explain the difference in influence and authority among brothers with the tautological truism that the genshö is more highly valued because he is more important and that it is natural that he is more important because he is the eldest. From birth, the eldest son is taught to be in a superior position and to lead; likewise, from birth the younger brothers are taught to be in an inferior position, to be led by him, and only seldom do younger brothers challenge the legitimate authority of the genshö. Only in cases of extreme incompetence or very long-term periods

85 Mutual aid networks (ganye, kyidug ngalak and lerog) are of great importance in village life, and form the core of the social network for a House and its members, and one of the most important tasks for a the sayön is to maintain these.
of absence is it accepted for a younger brother to take-over the sayön position. In Sharlung, I have found some female House leaders; however, I have not seen male House leaders that were not the eldest living members of his generations. To a lesser extent than gender, as will be discussed thoroughly in the following chapter, relative age is an unchallenged organizational principle. While discontened younger husbands in polyandrous marriages part from the marriage, they do so without challenging the age hierarchy. Before I return to a discussion of the handling of discontent and partition, I shall in this following section describe domestic conflicts specific to polyandry, and present one example of a serious conflict that resulted in the division of the original House, and the development of hostile relations among close kin. This conflict is not founded in the transfer of leadership, but rather in the problematic relations between individual House members of same sex in the same generation, and the particular emotional and co-operative relation between the nama and her eldest husband.

POLYANDRY-SPECIFIC CONFLICT PATTERNS

Scholars of various disciplines have put much focus on conflicts and partitions of polyandrous marriages. As already mentioned this well-developed interest in the problematic sides of polyandry can be seen to reflect the underlying notion of polyandry as going against a Western idea of male sexuality. Trevithick, who is an editor of The Voice Newspaper, argues that in all known cases of polyandry these marriages are ridden by tensions arising from ‘jealousy, pair-bonding and /or polygynous tendencies’ (1980:154). Similar claims about conflict-ridden polyandrous marriages are found in other studies as well (Levine and Silk 1997; Haddix 2001; Goldstein 1978b). It is important to note, I believe, that although many polyandrous marriages are divided at some point in time, many also stay together, either in the original constellation or with a reduced number of people in the marriage. Further, according to statistics referred by the the township leaders in Kyiling, the conflicts leading to a divide are very often non-specific to polyandry and rather concern inter-generational disagreements, most often between the nama and her mother-in-law.
Nevertheless, Tibetans acknowledge that polyandry is a more demanding form of marriage than monogamy, although found to be less demanding than polygyny due to the problematic competition between sets of heirs in the latter. Three main polyandry-specific conflicts can be delineated: first, an unfair distribution of affection and sexual access (the *nama* disrespecting one of the husbands); second, an unfair contribution to, and distribution of, economic resources; and third, the youngest husband’s lack of interest in the *nama* (particularly in cases of large age differences between the two). In addition, conflicts between the *nama* and her sister-in-law are common in polyandrous Houses; although these cannot be defined strictly as polyandry specific, they are more frequent and of a particular character in such Houses. Relations between women in polyandrous Houses are the defined topic for the following chapter, and here I shall focus on a conflict that concerns the distribution of both affection and economy, albeit, I argue, these conflict issues seem to be legitimizations of other power struggles within the sibling group. Conflicts of the third type mentioned above are, I shall argue, of a different character, as these involve the younger husbands and are dealt with in a significantly different manner than those that involve the eldest.

Polyandry is expressed to be a demanding marriage form because of its complex inter-personal relationships in terms distribution of affection, and when talking about conflicts and fissions of polyandrous marriages, my informants in Sharlung often claim that most of these cases are of the first type, that is, the *nama*’s inability to distribute her affection and sexual access in a fair and even way among her husbands. These claims reflect the responsibility given to the *nama* alone in polyandry; however, in the various cases of conflict escalation and divorce, it seems that the *nama* and her eldest husband operate as one union. In the situations where the *nama* has a problematic relation to one or more of the younger brothers, the genshō will often side with her, and similarly, she will support him during conflicts with his brothers (or with parents as is often the case). Conflicts that involve either the genshō or the *nama* result in divorce and establishment of a new household, and only in very few cases do the *nama* and a younger husband move and re-establishes themselves elsewhere. As in the Norkhang case to be described
below, domestic conflicts that involve the *nama* and *genshō* are perceived to be very problematic and serious efforts are made to mediate, both locally and regionally. When mediation fails and fission occurs, the eldest son’s parting from a House is morally and materially sanctioned, often leading to limited inheritance.

**The partition from a House: Norkhang versus Norshön**

The House emphasizes sibling unity; patri-ideologically this particularly concerns brothers, but in the context of high incident of polyandry and a surplus of unmarried women, sibling unity also often includes a sister in practice. A classical conflict in kinship organization is that between siblingship (filiation) and conjugal relations (affinity), and one of the fruitful implications of a House perspective is that the House unites and transcends these contradictory membership criteria. Having said that, siblingship is the core of the polyandrous Houses in Tibet, and the in-married wife is perceived to be one that potentially threatens the harmony of the sibling group, and particularly the position of her residing, unmarried sister-in-law.

The following example brings forward several aspects of co-partnership on the one hand, and the superior role of the eldest husband on the other. Three dimensions of polyandrous conflicts shall be given emphasis: first, I shall briefly describe the foundation for the conflict and the internal power relations in a sibling group; secondly, I focus explicitly on the decision making process during conflicts and the intimate relation between the *genshō* and the *nama*; and thirdly, I discuss the handling of domestic conflicts and the sanctions against the eldest son for threatening the perpetuation of the House. I present this example here to illustrate the moral and material aspects of a conflict that involves the eldest son of a House and, further, to discuss widespread inheritance practices in polyandrous Houses. I do so in order to promote the argument that the particular handling of conflicts that involve the eldest son reinforce and reconfirm the position of the *genshō* as the ultimate value of the marriage and, in that, of the future House. In the handling of conflicts, I suggest, the social order is reconfirmed as an organization whose principles are embedded in the status of the eldest son of a House.
The genshō represents the succession of the House and has, through extensive socialization, been given the responsibility of representation, not only formally in terms of local political processes, but also symbolically in terms of encompassing his brothers and co-husbands, as well as the social group into which they belong. Throughout this description, the long-term investment that has been made in order to transfer responsibility for the House to the eldest son shall become apparent.

In Sharlung, several long-term domestic conflicts are currently in process. Some of these started more than twenty years ago and have never been resolved; others have a shorter history and negotiations might sporadically occur. The following is an example of a partition that took place in one of the chief Houses in Sharlung called Norkhang. The fission was the result of several failed attempts to reach an agreement within the original House. The split was very dramatic, and four years after, the two parties still avoid contact with each other. Although this particular partition has some unusual elements to it, the basic problems encountered are, I believe, representative for partitions of polyandrous marriages in Sharlung.

The Norkhang household was divided four years ago, when the two eldest sons, their common wife and only child moved and established a new household on their own. The three young adults borrowed money from the wife’s natal House in the neighbouring valley and received financial help from friends in Sharlung, and started to build a small house on the less fertile plot of land that the two brothers inherited from their natal household. They called the house Norshön – the ‘little Nor.’ Remaining in Norkhang were (from the perspective of those men who moved) the mother and father, one brother who had also been part of the conjoint marriage, one nun sister, as well as three younger siblings and the mother’s sister. Norkhang is still considered to be a prestigious House, that is, with a biography of influence and prosperous economy. However, after the partition the future strategy for the perpetuation of a strong House would need to be redefined.

86 In Chapter Seven, I shall return to the mother’s sister who has, since she was twelve years old performed as a man, and who, I argue, exemplifies the flexibility in the local gender categories.
When we enter their story, the sayön of the Norkhang House, the makpa Dawa Tsering-la, and his wife had suggested to their three eldest sons that a nama should be invited to the House. The three sons being 26, 23 and 18 years old all agreed to conjoin in a marriage. Through his affines in the neighbouring valley, Dawa Tsering-la was told about an unmarried girl called Sökyi who was of the right age and from one the wealthiest Houses in the neighbouring valley to the south, and he decided to approach the household leader. They easily came to an agreement, and Dawa Tsering-la informed his three sons about Sökyi.

As is common in the initial phases of negotiation of marriage, the sayön and the eldest of the future husbands travelled in disguise to meet the girl. The genshö called Migmar and Dawa Tsering-la pretended to be dzo-sellers visiting and were invited into Sökyi’s House. During the stay, Sökyi served them tea and chang, as is usual when receiving guests, and according to Migmar, her way of serving, her striking beauty and suitable age, convinced him that he and his two brothers would love her very much.

The role of the eldest as a representative for the group of future husbands is uncontested in this initial phase of the marriage negotiation. When I asked Migmar’s younger brother, Namgyal, if he could have travelled to see Sökyi that first time, he answered that he could see her and decide if he liked her, but he could not make a

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87 The two have five sons and three daughters, of which the two youngest sons are still in junior middle school in Panam and primary school in Sharlung and not considered as potential partners in marriage. One daughter was sent as a nama to two brothers in a neighbouring valley, while the fifteen year old daughter sill lived at home together with the eldest sister, who was an ordained nun in the local nunnery.

88 Norkhang today is seen to be a prestigious House with rig thobo – high rig. High rig is due to Dawa Tsering’s background, as he was born into what my informants called a semi-noble House in neighbouring Gangkar village. Due to this semi-noble background Dawa Tsering-la is, except for the village leader Tashi-la, the only one in the nearby villages addressed with the honorific la to his name.

89 Agreeing on the transfer of a nama is often a long negotiation about compensation for the loss that her household will suffer when she moves out. The receiving household first has to bring gifts to her household members (very often clothes), and khatags. Some ten to thirty days later (depending on the astrology), the langchang is arranged, in which the girl is informed and led to her new house. On this occasion her natal household members receive more gifts, and most importantly, her mother is given a new woollen chuba, an apron and blouse as the ‘uri pagden’ (uri: breastfeed, pang: the area on the belly where the baby sits while breastfeeding). In addition, the nama-receiving household should bring at least two bags of tsampa and/or barley (unroasted), a sha gog, which is a newly slaughtered sheep where the wool and the head are kept, and the stomach is filled with wool. These gifts are standardized and the negotiations rather concern the amount of tsampa and barley, extra meat and wool, as well as extra demands from the girl’s household leader.
statement on whether his brothers would like her. That, he said, is only the ability of the genshō. Hence, the difference between a distribution of authority as superior and inferior parts, on the one hand, and hierarchy as encompassment as suggested by Dumont, on the other, is, I suggest, indicated already in the early process of polyandrous marriages. The genshō is one part of the whole group of brothers in marriage that has a particular embracing character embedded with expectations of an ability to act in accordance with the will of the other encompassed parts. The encompassing status of the genshō is reflected, in addition to the daily organization of domestic life, in conflict escalations, where often the genshō takes a central role together with the nama, and where his younger brothers might or might not loyal to their eldest brother.

The problems in Norkhang started shortly after the wedding. The nama, Sökyi, was not happy in the house, and in particular she was discontented with the way her sister-in-law and mother-in-law treated her. Dawa Tsering-la and his wife (Sökyi’s mother-in-law) had two main concerns: primarily, that Sökyi did not manage a good kora khor; and secondarily, that Migmar contributed too little to the household economy.90 Conflicts between filiation and affinity within or between generations, and conflicts concerning the distribution of affection are widespread in Sharlung. Interestingly, these conflicts often involve the nama, and, contrary to what earlier scholars have suggested, do not concern jealousy among co-partners.

According to Dawa Tsering-la, the House experienced a dramatic change in terms of co-operation and co-residence relations after Sökyi moved in. Their claim is that Sökyi did not treat the three brothers equally; in fact, they say, she did not like the youngest one. By observing the marriage, they claim that Sökyi did not talk to the youngest husband and did not ‘love him’ (that is, did not include him in a fair kora khor). The parents and the eldest daughter (who is a nun), tried to make Sökyi relate in a good way

90 The information I have of this conflict is gained from talks with Dawa Tsering-la, Migmar, Sökyi and Tashi-la who acted as a mediator in various stages of the conflict, as well as other members of the Tagrab House. It is not my intention to map an objective source of the conflict, as I have not discussed the issue with all involved parties; rather I describe the two constellations and their presentations of the sources of conflict.
to the youngest brother, but she then reacted by becoming angry with everybody except Migmar and Namgyal, her two oldest husbands.

Migmar and Sökyi on the other hand, deny the unfair distribution of affection, and claim that the youngest husband was included in the _kora khor_. They hold that the accusations from the parents (in-law) were defined after the conflict was established. Similarly, they claim that the expressed discontentment concerning Migmar’s economic contribution from off-farm activities was a complaint made up after it became apparent that Migmar took Sökyi’s part in the conflict. The lack of economic contribution and unfair distribution of affection are indeed two areas of problems that legitimize a divorce in a polyandrous House, and as such, these are the most common complaints from the elder to the younger generation. Further, conflicts based in distorted power relations among people of same sex within the same generation are common in with polyandry. What I want to point out here is the immediate support given to Sökyi by her eldest husband when her discontentment in the House became clear. Initially, the quarrels and mischief occurred between the _nama_ and her sister-in-law particularly, and to a certain extent between the _nama_ and her mother-in-law. When Sökyi spoke out about what she found to be bad treatment from her female in-laws, Migmar immediately sided with her. He did so regardless of the moral sanctions attached to a break with one’s parents. This choice of sides reinforced the particularly close relation between Migmar and Sökyi as the _genshō_ of the fraternal group and _nama_ in the House. From then on, Migmar tried to convince his brother to side with them against the parents, and after some time, Namgyal joined them. However, the youngest husband did not.

After some time, two constellations started to emerge in the household: Sökyi, Migmar and Namgyal on the one side and Dawa Tsering-la and his wife, the youngest son in the marriage and the nun, ani Lobsang Drongkar, on the other. The younger household members were not involved in the conflict. The disagreement between the two parties escalated and at some point it turned into a physical fight between Migmar and his father. After the fight, Dawa Tsering-la expressed that he did not want Migmar to reside in the same house, as he did no longer trust him to treat the other members well. For the
first time after the conflict escalated, the two parties agreed, because Migmar and Sökï also wanted to move, although for different reasons.

Independent of the conflict level, the splitting of a household is a complicated process in which the inheritance of immovable property is the major concern for all parties. This is, I argue, particularly the case when the eldest son is moving, a point to which I shall return towards the end of the chapter. In the following I describe the process of negotiations, the parties’ claims and the results. I do so in order to show the material sanctions that accompany the moral sanctioning of the genshō upon moving out from his natal House.

After the decision to part was made, the negotiations of dividing immovable and movable property started. Migmar and Namgyal were entitled to equal inheritance of land, while the nama was entitled to, in addition to her original dowry, compensation for the work already conducted in the household. The three claimed: two individual’s shares of land, that is 2,4 pu of land each in line with the ideal inheritance norms, and land instead of cash as compensation for the nama’s work, the amount set to be land for half a person, that is 1,1 pu. Dawa Tsering-la refused all three claims. His position was that the two sons should inherit no more than 1,5 pu of land each, while the nama should get some compensation for work to be paid in barley (ne).

One could expect that land inheritance after the Household Responsibility System would have been made easier by the fact that all members have brought a quantified share of land into the household. In Sharlung, as already described in Chapter Two, each individual received 2,4 pu of land during the 1981 distribution. According to the National Inheritance Law of 1985, each child of a household should thus be entitled to inherit a full share of land (Palmer 1995), that is, 2,4 pu upon exclusion or partition. Although being the practice in other parts of Tibet (Samdrup, personal communication), age neutral inheritance rights among sons of a household are primarily an ideal in Panam, and in practice, the transfer of land is negotiated in every individual case.92 Within the

91 They also claimed wood from one fourth of the ceiling, but I shall leave this point here.
92 The local interpretation of rights to use the land after the land reform varies to a great extent in Tibet, and in China as a whole, but in Sharlung, people perceive the land to be strongly tied to the household rather
village, some of Norkhang’s *ganye* relations and later Tashi-la, as the village leader, tried
to mediate between the parties. They all agreed with Dawa Tsering-la’s claims that
because Migmar would severely damage the strength of the House upon moving, he
should be materially sanctioned and receive only 1,5 *mu* of land, and the *nama* should
receive her compensation in *ne* rather than fields. ‘We have to consider the situation for
the parents’, Tashi-la explained to me, ‘and for them, it is a great disadvantage that their
two sons move. They have to make a new plan for the future. That is difficult because
they are getting old.’

Being unhappy about the village leaders decisions, Migmar and Sökyi went to the
township leaders and asked for their assistance. Two leaders looked at the case and
decided that Dawa Tsering-la should respect the reform and give 2,4 *mu* of land to the
two sons as this was their full share provided by the government.93 Further, the leaders set
the compensation to be given to Sökyi for her work in the household to one *mu* of land,
as well as five yuan per day of work. After two years of marriage, this turned into 3600
yuan. Migmar, Sökyi and Namgyal were of course satisfied with this solution. But Dawa
Tsering-la refused to pay, because, he claimed, the township leader was biased towards
Sökyi because they come from the same village and because decision was not made in
accordance with local norms of divisions and inheritance in polyandrous Houses. Dawa
Tsering-la brought the case to the county court, which is the highest legal authority in the
area. There, three judges decided that Dawa Tsering-la should give two full shares of land
to his two sons, but only cash or kind compensation to the *nama*. This was set to be 1800
yuan, that is, five yuan per day for one year.94

Looking at the two lowest levels of mediation, the *ganye* and the village leader, it
is apparent that the mediators put a strong emphasis on securing the elder generation, and

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93 This was also based on the fact that, with the current household composition, the Norkhang would still
have more than the per capita share of land during the division.

94 Dawa Tsering-la was to pay as soon as possible. Borrowing money from his associates, he paid 1000
yuan cash and 1000 *jin* of barley to the new household. Four years later, the rest of the compensation has
not yet been provided, and the relations between the two parts remain hostile (cf. Palmer 1995 on the
challenge of law enforcement in China).
by doing so, they sanctioned those who moved. Both the ganye and the village leader disagreed with the claim of full land inheritance for the sons. A central element in their concern with the eldest generation was obviously the loss of work force.

In addition, the handling of the move of Migmar, Namgyal and Sökyi could be seen in relation with the ongoing turn in local emphasis towards a concern for strengthening and perpetuation of the already established domestic groups in the village, i.e. the Houses. This is a particularly explicit concern within the polyandrous Houses. Moving out in order to establish a new household was morally and economically sanctioned by both the ganye and the village leaders, and this, I believe was because it undermines the social order of what we can call a House-based organization. In the context of increasing emphasis on the perpetuation of the named Houses, conflicts are dealt with accordingly.

Despite the ideal of equal inheritance rights amongst sons of a House, the practice of unequal inheritance rights in polyandrous Houses is well-known from the trelpa estates of the period before the Chinese takeover.\(^95\) Although equal inheritance rights of all sons is one of the underlying principles for the cultural rational of polyandry in Sharlung, individual sons that move out are sanctioned by the restriction of their inheritance rights. There are alternatives open to younger sons who, for various reasons, are not included in a polyandrous marriage. Today, these are primarily to enrol in school followed by settlement in an urban centre, to marry out as a makpa and thus becoming a sayön elsewhere, or to seek work in the construction business outside the village. These options are less available for the eldest sons.

Migmar’s partition left the Norkhang significantly impaired. Firstly, the estate is smaller, both in terms of land and labour. Secondly, Norkhang lost the future leader and representative, who is the person that has been raised to be authoritative in his generation. Thirdly, because the wife and a child moved with Migmar, there was a backlash in terms of household viability phases of the household. Lastly, as in most cases involving the

\(^95\) Levine notes that among Nyinbas only husbands that have not yet had intercourse with the wife can expect full inheritance upon marriage (1988:165, note 12).
genshō, the process of parting was very difficult and led to hostile relations between him and his natal House. This is not only emotionally problematic but also has significant impact on future work exchange and mutual aid systems central to the organization of village life.

The Norkhang example indicates that conflicts involving the genshō are sanctioned both morally and materially. In the following, I shall compare the handling of polyandry-specific conflicts that involve the eldest or the youngest brothers in a group of co-partners, and discuss the differing sanctions and solutions following a break-up from a marriage.

ENCOMPASSING THE BROTHERS AND STANDING FOR THE HOUSE
Although people claim that the most common separation of polyandrous marriages occurs when the eldest husband and the nama establish a new household on their own, demographic history of the area indicates differently. Looking at the household constellations over time, it is apparent that the youngest husband most commonly parts from polyandrous marriages in Sharlung today. Such discrepancy of perceived conflicts in polyandrous marriages could, I shall argue, be seen as an indication of the differing social implications that the partition of the youngest or the eldest husband have for the continuity of the House as a social group.

As illustrated with the Norkhang case, conflicts that involve the eldest husband of a polyandrous marriage are serious and often lead to public discussion and mediation in order to minimize the risk of partition. In the cases of partition and re-establishment, the relations between the eldest husband and his natal House very often remain problematic for years after. On the contrary, problems that involve the youngest husband only very seldom develop into full-blown conflicts, and post-partition relations remain good. This must be seen in the context of the relation that the younger husbands have to the group of husbands as a whole and the group’s relations to the House as a social category. Because the younger husbands are encompassed by the eldest in relation to their House of belonging, the implications of their partition is less severe for the continuity of the House.
While they, and particularly the youngest one, constitute significant parts, they do not manifest the whole.

Age is relevant not only in terms of the internal organization of co-partnership but also as an important topic in the relation between the wife and multiple partners. In marriages with a large age difference between the co-husbands, and thus between the youngest husband and the *nama*, discontentment of the youngest often concerns lack of sexual attraction towards his wife. Such problems are solved with a focus on pragmatic and flexible solutions. Upon arranging a marriage, age is seen to be important for securing successful relations. The ideal age of the wife is to be younger than the eldest but older than the second husband. In the large polyandrous marriages of four or five co-husbands, then, the youngest husband will often be significantly younger than his wife. For instance, in the marriage in the Dagpo House where five husbands share the *nama*, the youngest brother is fifteen years younger than his wife. Because of this significant age difference he has partly been raised by his wife, something recognised to be potentially problematic for future sexual relations. Today, the boy is thirteen and enrolled in middle school in the county seat. It has been made clear to him that after he has reached puberty, he will have to make a decision on whether to actively become part of the established marriage. The alternative is to live and work outside the village.

Discontentment involving the eldest or the youngest husband is handled very differently, for while strong moral and social pressure is put on the eldest to stay in his natal House, a smooth transition is facilitated when involving the youngest husband. When looking at the demographic data of Sharlung village, we see that in many of the large polyandrous marriages, the youngest husband has parted from the marriage and moved out of the House. Many of these are expressed to be unproblematic partitions, where solutions acceptable to all parties have been established. Important to such resolutions is the issue of inheritance and, particularly the transfer of land. While a young husband settling outside the village cannot and does not claim land from his natal House, those who remarry and remain in the village activate their inheritance rights, and as such their partition is perceived to be more complex and problematic than the former cases.
However, even in the latter cases of remarriage in the same village, such partitions are seen to be less serious and are dealt with in a different way than those exemplified by the Norkhang House above.

A youngest husband’s marital discontentment has several solutions, and those which are preferred precondition that he does not establish a new household in the village and, hence, does not activating his right to land from his natal House. One readily accepted solution is to remarry as makpa, thus moving uxorilocally into his new wife’s natal House and becoming the leader there in due time. Such a solution does not challenge his relations to his natal House; rather, and in amicable relations, a makpa will also serve his natal House with labour assistance during harvest and other critical phases. His departure is, in addition to the emotional aspect, seen to be mainly loss of labour, and his partition from the marriage is not marked ritually, nor is it sanctioned morally. The acceptance of a youngest son’s wish to move must be understood in relation to the expectations towards his contribution to the household as a common economic endeavour, and to the House as the basic social group of belonging. These expectations are fundamentally different than those found in the case of the eldest son of a House.

Hence, while problems involving the eldest husbands are expressed to be a conflict resulting in crisis, problems involving the youngest husband are seen to be simple issues that are easily resolved. While the significant social group, the House, remains unmarked by the youngest husband’s departure, it deteriorates significantly upon the eldest husband’s establishment of a new household.

Much has been written on fraternal solidarity among Tibetans in the Himalaya region (Levine 1988; Fürer-Haimendorf 1964; Prince Peter 1963), and elsewhere (Radcliffe-Brown 1941). Through the local procreation theory, a group of brothers are seen to be, if not identical, similar. Similarity produces expectations of fraternal solidarity and good relations, and these expectations are made relevant when fraternal polyandry is arranged within a House. Yet, as it has been my intention to show in this chapter, fraternal solidarity does not exclude a hierarchical organization. I have argued that co-partnership in fraternal polyandry could be seen as a relation characterized by one part’s
encompassment of the other parts, in which the encompassing part comes to stand for the whole. Underlying is the principle of relative age, and the process of encompassment is gradually secured through socialization, through which the eldest son learns to act responsible and authoritative and the younger brothers learn to accept their roles as subordinated. Through socialization, the hierarchy of relative age is internalized, and hence, naturalized.

A younger brother remains in a position with only limited influence in his natal House throughout his life. At the same time, due to his subordinate position he holds a peripheral position in terms of the future of the House. This peripheral position enables a simple partition from wedlock upon discontentment.96

The House is a socio-symbolic unit with which Tibetans identify meaning, rank and ritual significance. Its symbolism is expressed in architecture and the spatial organization of the house, but also in external unity. The socio-symbolic unity of the House is internal and external in the sense that members perceive themselves to constitute parts of a whole, on the one side, and others perceive the whole to be constituted by one part. Throughout this chapter concerning brothers as co-husbands, I have taken as the vantage point the encompassing character of the genshō and the subordinate position of the younger brothers. The eldest brother represents the centre for succession in the corporation, while the younger brothers are peripheral to the reproduction of the estate. Younger husbands share their non-influential positions with women of various categories, and in various life phases. The next chapter deals with gender and following the notions of centre and periphery in the social organization of polyandrous Houses, I shall discuss the analytical value of sameness in relations to hierarchical indigenous gender models.

96 Goldstein has pointed to the limited divorce from polyandrous marriages in traditional Tibet and argued that, due to the adjudication system, younger husbands were unable to part from a dissatisfactory marriage. The financial costs involved, he writes, made it close to impossible to pursue a case beyond the lord (Goldstein 1976). Today, this is indeed not the case.
The bottom line is clear. No Buddhist in her right mind desires a female body. (Gutschow 2004:17)

Discussions on polyandry have a tendency at some point to turn to into the question of cicisbeism, and the role of the woman in relation to her men. However, as I have noted earlier, polyandry is a marriage between a male sibling group and one woman, rather than between one woman and several men. As such, polyandry should not be considered as the opposite of concubinage – it is a male-initiated marital practice. The cultural logic of polyandry is based on a wish to secure the perpetuation of the patrilocal residence group. Within this logic, women have been described merely as objects of exchange that enable the human reproduction within a household, and analyses of polyandry have thus had a male vantage point (Goldstein 1971a, 1976; Levine 1988, with the exception of Schuler 1987; Childs 2001). Little attention has been given the women that are married to several husbands, and, although I do not wish to claim that polyandry is female-initiated, I hold
that the preference for polyandry is shared among men and women in Panam. 

Additionally, this chapter aims to provide an analysis of women’s roles in a community of normative polyandry. I shall argue that gender alone does not provide a sufficient frame for the analysis of women and polyandry and advocate a perspective that emphasizes modes of socialities rather than one gender model as such (Howell 1996). I suggest that gender and polyandry should be analysed within the frame of the socio-symbolic House, and that the roles and positions of women are best understood as particular parts of this particular social organization, in different phases of life. As argued in the previous chapter, these parts could be classified as central, and more and more peripheral, to the whole.

Underlying my analysis is the by now well-established perspective in anthropology of gender as being socially constructed and gender models contextual in their nature (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Moore 1994; Howell 1996). These perspectives recognise the multiplicity of gender discourses within a given community. In Tibet as elsewhere, the multiplicity of gender discourses is often contradictory, and should hence be understood as strongly contextual and dependent upon positioning and interpretation of roles.

Melhuus and Howell have pointed out the importance of focusing on conceptions of sameness as well as those of difference concerning gender issues (1993). Along the same lines, Moore (1994) and Howell (1996) have made the point that we should not privilege sexual difference over other more relevant forms of differences. As Howell concludes her article on gendered values among the Lio: ‘Having escaped from a

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97 As has been argued in critical kinship studies since the 1970s, such studies have tended to take a male ego as a vantage point for analytical concepts employed. In a new version, Blackwood puts forward a similar argument concerning marriage, when she notes that the heterosexual man constitutes the analytical ground in our general theories about family and household organization. She argues that an emphasis on women as powerful and central in domestic organizations underscores the importance of networks of kinswomen and focuses on the ‘missing men’ in these organizations (2005). One can make the comparison of the nama and her roles in domestic organizations founded in polyandrous marriage, as she has been largely overlooked in the theoretical perspectives developed on polyandry, both in Himalaya and elsewhere. In that sense the nama is like the famous ‘missing mother’ of Rosaldo and Collier’s work on hunters and gatherers, i.e. overlooked (1981).

98 As such my position within the discourses of feminism and kinship is that of siding with the anthropologists that precondition marriage to gender, rather than the opposite (see Yanagisako and Collier 1996; Borneman 1996).
previous gender blindness, we must not now become blinded by gender’ (1996:267). This, I find, is a well-made point that is significant also to the case of women and polyandry. In this chapter I focus primarily on in-married women and not on unmarried women that are House members by filiation. I argue that in polyandrous marriages namas are both fundamentally subordinated and at the same time hold a great potential for an individual consolidation of a strong position in the marriage and in the House. As such, I value the reminder by Howell (1996:254) that Parsonian notions of status and role might contribute to nuance gender models by pointing to the various roles (and thus life phases) that an individual plays throughout life. Along the same lines, Ardener writes: ‘All women, and all men belong to different sets, for each of which we may expect there to be different models’ (1992:7, quoted in Howell 1996:254). By emphasising sameness in addition to difference, I point to the structural similarities between a nama and the younger husbands in a polyandrous marriage. They are all potentially peripheral to the House as a social and symbolic institution in the village.

The overall argument in the chapter is that women’s positions in communities with normative polyandry should be understood within a frame of the socio-symbolic House and be analyzed in terms of central and peripheral roles within this particular social organization. This social organization is patrifocal,99 which is reflected particularly in male inheritance rights, post-marital patrilocal residence and patrilineal kinship ideology (although not practice). I argued in the previous chapter that the eldest husband is the epithet that encompasses his co-husbands and comes to symbolically stand for the House. As such, he represents the centre of the House both socially and symbolically, while his co-husbands, his younger brothers, are in increasingly peripheral roles depending upon age. Such a distribution of centredness is seen in the organization of daily, married life, in the distribution of authority in general, and in the handling of conflicts involving the eldest and younger husbands. I argue that women’s positions are

99 I do not agree with Blackwood’s argument that focality is a concept so loaded with heterosexual male biases that it should be avoided (2005). Rather, it is my contention that focality, like locality, should be prefixed by patri- or matri- i.e. patrifocality and matrifocality. However, I do not want to imply that a patrifocal organization is characterized by the absence of a mother; rather, I use the term to denote an ideological orientation towards the father(s) and their children in the polyandrous House.
best understood within the same frames of influence, that is, as more or less peripheral to
the social organization based on Houses. This perspective is concurrent with what Levine
argues in the article on differential childcare in three Nyinba communities (1987a).
There, she suggests that what seems to be a son preference, expressed by both men and
women, should rather be interpreted as the discrimination of not only daughters, but
‘against any less desirable child’ (ibid.:281). A perspective that goes beyond gender, she
holds, should be used to evaluate other relevant issues that inform a local understanding
of individual contribution to the collective tasks of the household.

By arguing for the analytical relevance of sameness across sexual differences, I
do not intend to disregard indigenous gender models of hierarchy altogether. Levine’s
findings from Nyinba show that although the roots of child discrimination are found
outside one gender model, it is a significant percentage of the neglected children that are
female. The same point, I hold, should be made regarding *namas* and their positions in
Panam. As shall become clear throughout this chapter, in Tibet women are structurally
subordinate to men. Women must, in a significantly different way than the youngest men,
depend upon personal attributes and inter-personal relations in order to gain a secure and
stable position within a House. Also, women’s work obligations are broad and substantial
in a context where continuous pregnancies and numerous childbirths provide only limited
restrictions on these obligations. As such, women’s burden is heavier than men’s. At the
same time, in the role of being the *nama* in a polyandrous marriage, a woman has the
potential to consolidate a very strong and powerful position throughout a lifetime. With a
strong position, she can, to a large extent, gain personal autonomy and take control of her
own daily life.

Subordination is particularly evident on an ideational level but is also seen in
daily marital practices and internal affairs of the House. Men and women express
polyandry to be an organization where women are structurally subordinate and
symbolically peripheral, and where certain male members constitute the central element.
This is found mostly in connection with the internal distribution of authority, but also in
terms of the perpetuation of the socio-symbolic House as such. In the symbolic realm the
nama is initially structurally peripheral and subordinate to her husbands, including the younger ones. With time, however, she might consolidate a central position in the House and then challenge this subordinate position compared to her younger husbands. It is important to keep in mind that an in-married woman cannot gain a structurally more central position than her eldest husband has in a House. As has been noted earlier, the male dominance and value are reflected in the local explanation of polyandry to which the maximization of male labour is a central feature. The dominant value given to men is very much connected to notions of what tasks are important in the household, on the one hand, and perceptions of gendered labour distribution, on the other.

As with most social analyses, we need to distinguish between notions and practices concerning gender relations. In Panam, there is a significant discrepancy found in the representations of women and women’s contributions to the collective, and the various practices found in daily life. This is not particular to the region but is a recognised pattern in gender studies universally (see Busby 2000 for an overview). At the same time, we find contradictions and discrepancies in both ideologies and practices. In gender models of Tibetan Buddhism, and with Hinduism as well, there are various opposing gender attitudes and gendered values, which can briefly be described as the ‘misogyny of Buddhist traditions, on the one hand, and the deification of a female principle in Buddhism, on the other’ (Gyatso 2003:89). In Sharlung, villagers do not make these ambivalent representations of women relevant in everyday life. However, generic attitudes about female and male qualities and women’s social positions reflect a structural subordination of women expressed by both men and women. At the same I argue that, while gender is made relevant in some contexts, kinship categories seem to constitute the basic reference in discussions concerning marriage. In other words, the fact that namas execute nama duties is more relevant than the fact that they are women when discussing marriage relations with local villagers,

Local explanations of the advantages of polyandry as a marital form reflect an underlying belief that males contribute more to the household production than women do. The wish to maximize male labour by keeping a set of brothers together in marriage
could be an indication of restricted labour divisions and limited chores defined as women’s work. This, I shall describe, is not the case in rural Tibet. On the contrary, as much literature from the Himalaya describes, women constitute an important part of the work force, not only inside the house, but also in agricultural work and off-farm activities. Knowing this, it becomes clear that the need for male labour cannot alone explain the arrangement of polyandrous marriages. These expressions of a higher valuation of men must not be overlooked as uninformed local explanations of a social phenomenon; they should, I believe, be interpreted as manifestations of cultural perceptions and folk models that are of substantial meaning to our understanding of social, and gendered relations. We need to focus beyond the associations of participation in work and social status in studies of gender in Tibet and look to what I have termed the question of centrality in the particular social organization.

In some Himalaya literature, gender ideologies are depicted as egalitarian philosophies founded in Buddhism (see e.g. Watkins 1996, as well as more esoteric scholars such as Simmer-Brown 2001). As I have found no indications if its relevance in everyday life, neither among village lay people, nor among local religious experts, I do not believe that an emphasis put on Buddhist egalitarianism is fruitful. Rather, towards the last part of this chapter I argue that although gender divisions are only contextually relevant in terms of work distribution, the underlying gender hierarchy is manifested in the question of gender manipulation. Gender categories in Tibet have a flexible character and gender manipulation is accepted. However, gender is only manipulated from female to male. The unidirectional process must, I hold, be understood as an indication of an underlying and encompassing gender model where women are understood as lower than men.

Although both men and women recognise polyandry as a marriage form dominated by men, in-married wives in this patrilocally organised community have substantial influence. This influence is not, I hold, only dependent upon sex but, more importantly, upon household composition, age, and the particular phase of the marriage.
WOMEN AS PERIPHERAL TO THE ORDER OF THINGS

Although women’s position in Tibetan societies generally is said to be higher than that of women in Hindu societies (Acharya and Bennett 1982), a son preference is readily observable on various levels in Tibet. This is also the case in Sharlung, where *namas* experience a strong pressure to give birth to at least two, and preferably three sons. Contrary to what Levine found among Nyinbas, in Sharlung daughters are wished for and seen to be important for old-age support of the parents. Yet, both men and women perceive sons to be more important for both the constitution, and perpetuation of the domestic group. However, gender is not the only crucial criterion for a child’s position in a House. As discussed in the previous chapter, relative age defines a strict hierarchy that informs the distribution of authority within a sibling group. The principles of relative age, gender hierarchy, and marital status form categories of statuses within a House. In the following I discuss gender issues in the broader context of principles and criteria for the positioning of the individual, and I argue that these criteria should be seen as part of the overall concern with the individual’s centrality in the perpetuation of the House. For in-married women, life cycle phases are of utmost importance for their position within a polyandrous marriage.

Levine holds that there is a concurrence between high frequency of polyandry and an explicit son preference. She describes that Nyinbas see no reasons for wanting a daughter, except in a sonless household (1987:286-287). In the context of expressed son preferences, Levine depicts a situation where children are systematically and openly discriminated, leading to very high numbers of child mortality. These children are perceived by both men and women to be less-valued in a more general way, and, they are often girls. While we find cases of aggressive neglect against daughters in Tibet’s surrounding areas of India, Nepal and China, Tibetans draw a strong moral distinction between aggressive neglect and infanticide, on the one side, and differential childcare, on the other. The latter is wide-spread and accepted, while the former is not. Approaching

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100 In a perhaps vague way, Levine’s point could be seen in relation to the earlier theorists’ suggestions that polyandry was to be found only in societies where female infanticides were accepted and practiced, hence resulting in a surplus of men (Rivers 1906).
the issue of differential childcare, Levine found four categories of children that risk negligent care among Nyinbas: girls, later-born boys with healthy brothers, children of unstable marriages, and illegitimate children (ibid.:293). The source and the logic of the valuation of children are, according to Levine, found in the household system and in the complex of ideas defining an individual’s ‘current, past, or expected future contributions to the household’ (ibid.:282). Hence, while sexual difference initially seems to be the dominant criterion when discussing childcare neglect in Nyinba society, Levine suggests instead that gender is a quantitative effect of the roots of valuation found in the fundamental social organization. Her conclusion is that these four categories of children are all peripheral to the collective endeavour of the household. I would add that they are also peripheral to the social reproduction of the House.

Schuler argues along the same lines in her study *The Other Side of Polyandry* (1987), focusing on the surplus of unmarried women among the Chumik, a Tibetan community in the Nepal Himalaya. While her interest is in women and non-marriage rather than gender models as such, she argues that a certain proportion of the community in Chumik can be characterised as peripheral to the social structure and organization. Individuals that could be classified into this category of peripheral beings are mostly, but not exclusively, unmarried women. Central to Schuler’s discussion is access to property and inheritance, and she argues convincingly for the contextual relevance of gender in processes of property transfer. It is my contention that the categories of peripheral persons are interesting in a stratified society where men are central to the social order of things.

An emphasis on the peripheral character of particular individuals within a social organization provides, I believe, an opportunity to develop a more complex understanding of motivations and effects of cultural preferences, including those of gendered expression. In rural Panam, women do not explicitly consider themselves as part of a group called ‘women’ (*kyeme*). Moving away from placing gender as the prime analytical frame corresponds to this lack of relevance and consciousness among Tibetan women in terms of belonging. Women (and men) differentiate women according to age,
marital status, and social standing of the House of belonging, and these differences are found to be more relevant to local women than the fact that they are all *kyeme*. Much the same could be said, I believe, about the category of men in Sharlung. Although I have not discussed gender issues with men to the extent that I have done with women, and therefore do not have sufficient material on men’s representation of maleness, I suggest that men are classified according to age as well as the social standing of the House of belonging. Following the argument in the previous chapter on the peripheral structural position of husbands according to relative age, I hold that in the context of marriage both men and women see themselves, and are seen by others, as part of a category based upon conjugal relations. Having said that, *kyeme* also denotes ‘wife’ in a general sense, which indicates an expectance that a woman will marry. I suggest that for a woman, it is her position in a House (as *nama* or daughter) that makes up the criterion for personal identity, while for a man, it is his position in an age hierarchy of brothers (and co-husbands) that represents the main source of classification and identity.101

In Sharlung, women share a preference for polyandry with men. At the same time, women (and men) describe polyandry as a male-initiated and male dominated institution, the same as any marriage in Panam. It is the sons of a House that are perceived to be the central elements, or, more precisely, the eldest son that encompasses the group of brothers and symbolically stands for the House. Despite the male dominance women do experience a process of ‘centrification’ (becoming central) in a marriage; this is dependent upon time, children born and affection established with husbands. As discussed in the previous chapter a polyandrous marriage is founded upon the principles of relative age and gender. Husbands of varying ages constitute more or less central positions, and in-married women in differing phases do the same. A *nama* can, if conflicts arise, be replaced without seriously harming the future of the House, and as such she is initially peripheral. However, a *nama*’s position changes with time, as she goes

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101 Although classification of different women and men is similar in terms of the significance of conjugal statuses, I believe that the degree to which classification and identity is informed by these kinship categories varies for men and women. While women’s daily life and position to a large extent is determined by structural position as being a *nama* or a daughter of the house of residence, the activities of men in an age hierarchy of co-husbands are to a lesser degree pre-determined by status.
from being loosely connected upon arrival, to slowly establishing a more central position by producing children (sons) and eventually taking over the role of nangma (female household leader).

In Levine’s article on differential childcare, she focuses on daughters and sons, in addition to other less-valued children. I believe that the broader perspective that she introduces is compatible to gender issues concerning wives and husbands of a House as well. Her argument is that those children, who in a lesser way are believed to contribute to the collective, are found to be of less value and eventually neglected. Along the same lines I hold that those individuals in a polyandrous marriage who are believed to contribute less to the collective, that being the perpetuation of the House, are found to be peripheral and of less value. These individuals are most likely to be the younger husbands in large marriages, the in-married wife in the initial period of the marriage, and the in-married wife in the cases of a strong the presence of a sister-in-law. In the following I shall focus on in-married wives in polyandry in particular, and emphasize the value of a life cycle perspective for gender issues in Tibet. The chapter has three main parts: the first deals with gender ideologies as found in Buddhism, on the one hand and in generic attitudes towards women as found in Sharlung, on the other. The second part presents women married to several men, and their concerns and experiences in such marriages. The third part turns to the issues of work and gender and discusses the alleged concurrence of interchangeable agricultural activities and the equal evaluation of gendered work. Underlying these parts are my main concerns, namely the positions of women in polyandrous marriages, and the relations between ideologies and gender models, on the one hand, and women’s individual practices and roles in these marriages, on the other.

GENDER IDEOLOGIES

Issues pertaining to women and gender models have only to a limited degree been dealt with in the literature on Tibet and the Himalaya. In texts depicting Tibetan society before the Chinese invasion, women are mentioned only in passing, and then as festive women
who drink and participate actively in the public sphere, showing no shyness compared to their sisters in the south (cf. Bell 1928:129ff.) In Buddhist studies some few scholars have focused explicitly on the position of women in various Buddhist traditions, particularly the Order of nuns (cf. Falk 1980). As far as Tibet is concerned, there has been a growing body of literature dealing with women and Buddhism during the last decade, most prominently represented by Havnevik (1989, 1999), Gyatso (1989, 1999, 2003), Makley (2005) and Gutschow (2004). While these studies have provided excellent accounts of female Buddhist practitioners, their interests have not been to develop a theoretical contribution on the position of the women in Tibetan culture. However, in 2005 Gyatso and Havnevik published an edited volume entitled *Women in Tibet* in which they discuss in detail various aspects of womanhood in Tibetan culture. Much of the debate in the following section is based on their work.

**Attitudes toward women in Buddhist literature**

Ambivalent attitudes toward women and the feminine are very clearly reflected in Buddhist literature. This has led to a variety of studies on female subordination, male dominance and misogynistic expressions. Characteristic for Buddhist texts concerning women and gender is the co-existence of contradictory views, which has lead to polemic debates between critics and advocates of Buddhism. Sponberg (1992), dealing primarily with early Buddhism, classifies four distinct attitudes in Buddhist literature that regard women and demonstrate the multivocality of Buddhist traditions. I list these here in order to establish the contradictory and ambivalent gender ideologies that not only are found in people’s interpretations of Buddhism and the difference of notions and practices but also in the Buddhist texts themselves. These differing textual attitudes also reflect the point often made by more recent gender theorists about the multiplicity of gender discourses in most communities (cf. Moore 1994; Howell 1996).

Sponberg argues that the variety of attitudes should be understood as ‘contending interests and concerns’ (1992:29) found within the different factions of the early Buddhist community. The first type of attitudes he terms ‘soteriological inclusiveness,’ by which
he refers to the original and fundamental idea of providing a path to liberation from suffering which was open to all. The early Buddhists made the explicit point that a person’s sex, caste or class should not represent a barrier to enlightenment.\textsuperscript{102} However, Sponberg points out that ‘inclusiveness asserts neither sameness nor a lack of hierarchical differentiation’ (1992:8), meaning that although women had equal access to dharma, the male sex was perceived to be superior also in terms of Buddhist practice.

The second attitude Sponberg describes as ‘institutional androcentrism,’ by which he refers to the later developments during which monastic institutions were being established and the view arose that women’s religious pursuits had to be controlled and regulated, not so much in terms of doctrinal interpretations but more in terms of social protections (against robbers and thieves). These regulations appeared in institutional structures that ‘preserve and reinforce the conventionally accepted social standards of male authority and female subordination’ (ibid.:13), and although institutional Buddhism was committed to soteriological inclusiveness, it did not challenge prevailing attitudes about gender roles in society.

Sponberg terms the third distinct attitude identified toward women and the feminine in early Buddhism as ‘ascetic misogyny,’ by which he refers to an even more negative attitude that was also often aggressively hostile in its expression. Despite co-existence, these attitudes contradict the soteriological inclusiveness and no longer recognise the spiritual capacity of women. Rather, women are portrayed as weaker human beings, and in some cases as ‘active agents of distraction and ruin’ (ibid.:19). Such misogyny seems to be founded in the pre-Buddhist notions of impurity related to female fecundity; this is opposed to the purity of male celibacy, reflecting the rise of asceticism within the early Buddhism.

According to Sponberg, these three attitudes developed side-by-side during the first centuries after the Buddha’s death and culminated in a controversy in the first century CE concerning the possibilities of reaching enlightenment in a woman’s body.

\textsuperscript{102} It should be noted here that groups considered to be polluted (rig tsokpa) in Tibet are banned from being ordained as monks or nuns, which violates this early soteriological inclusiveness on another ground than gender.
This question has never been resolved and is still discussed among Buddhist practitioners, and particularly among nuns as well as in the studies of nuns (see Gutschow 2004; Havnevik 1989; Gyaltsé and Havnevik 2005). However, in the sixth or seventh century, a new attitude emerged within the Mahayana tradition that involved a ‘dramatic revalorization of the feminine ...[as well as] a reevaluation of all those qualities and expectations culturally ascribed to male and female’ (Sponberg 1992:25). This process was closely connected to the Mahayana philosophy on the nature of emptiness. Sponberg calls this attitude ‘soteriological androgyny’ by which he means an actively positive stance toward sexual and gender differentiations pointing to the ultimate emptiness of such differences, on the one side, and recognizing gender differences as potentially powerful means of soteriological transformation, on the other side (ibid.). The feminine and the masculine are perceived to be dialectically and mutually complementary to the ideal state of human existence that can be termed androgynous integration. Such a dialectic perspective is most clearly expressed in later Tibetan Buddhism and manifests in the quintessential pair of ‘wisdom’ (feminine) and ‘skillful means’ (masculine); where the latter refers to compassion in action. The assertion that wisdom cannot be reached without inherent compassion is the most basic religious knowledge to Tibetans today. Yet, it seems that this spiritual recognition of value of the feminine principle has not empowered and does not empower Tibetan women in a significant way in their daily lives. Rather, as an ideological stance, androcentrism and the subordination of women remain the point of reference in discourses on women and gender differentiation today. The androcentrism, and at times misogynistic attitudes, found amongst both women and men in Tibet reflect perspectives on the afterlife rather than this present existence. Due to their ideological character, androcentrism and misogyny restrict lay women in their daily practices only in limited ways. Having said that, these ideological conceptions of women will be made relevant throughout the chapter, as reflected in local explanations of marriage and kinship.
Generic attitudes toward women

In Euro-American studies of Tibetan women, certain notions have been assumed. Most apparent is the idea that Tibetan women have enjoyed more freedom than women in other Asian countries. Further, and this is particularly noticeable in Buddhist studies, there is a widespread notion that models of female divinity in Tibetan religion have had a liberating effect on the social position of women (Gyatso and Havnevik 2005:1). Such suggestions are based on limited ethnographic data and focus on theoretical and doctrinal aspects of Buddhism rather than on practices. This is especially true for the idea of female divinity.

Gyatso and Havnevik (2005) delineate two generalized findings on the women’s positions in Tibetan societies that derive from the volume’s articles as well as from their previous readings of works. The first is the fact that individual Tibetan women have achieved prominence in Tibetan societies throughout history, in the areas traditionally dominated by men (see Havnevik 1999; Tashi Tsering 2005). The second is the fact that we easily find ‘enduring androcentrism and misogynistic gender tropes’ (Gyatso and Havnevik 2005:9) in Tibetan communities, but that these tend to vary according to geography and social status. As the former finding is of limited relevance here, I shall focus on the latter with particular emphasis on how these are conveyed in Sharlung.

In Tibet, people express many representations of women and women’s positions, as well as the relations between women and men. However, there is a shared general assumption among Tibetan men and women that women are born into a lower position than men. This is explained within the worldview of karma and reincarnation, in which a woman can pray to be reborn as a man in her next life. When talking to Tibetan women about gender issues, I often got the impression that women felt sorry for themselves for being born into a female body, often saying that there are obvious disadvantages to being a woman, such as a weaker body, childbirth, more sickness, as well as an emotional mind.103 When trying to explain why women experience a harder life than men, the Tibetan language itself is very often used to exemplify and provide the evidence. Indeed,

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103 Childs notes similar ideas in Nubri valley in Nepal Himalaya where, he writes: ‘Women are considered to be more intelligent than men, yet less able to control their passions and hence less suited for the life of contemplation’ (2004:62).
the most common word for woman itself, kyeme, translates as ‘low birth’ (skyes is birth and smad is low or poor), a point made explicit by Tibetans of all categories. Similarly, Gyatso and Havnevik point to the fact that androcentrism and misogynistic expressions are explained in the truism ‘that to be a woman is to have bad karma, low status and poor abilities’ (2005: 9).

In addition to the etymological meaning and its conscious place in common gender models, there are numerous Tibetan proverbs describing women as of lower birth and being subordinated men. One famous proverb describes the differences of nuns and monks saying that ‘If one wants a teacher, one makes a son a monk, and if one wants a servant, one makes a daughter a nun.’ Further, Gutschow writes that in Tibetan idiom, women are seven lifetimes behind men, and women must accumulate the merit of seven additional lifetimes before they can be reborn as men (2004: 16).

In explaining the poor abilities of women, people most often refer to the disadvantages of the female body. The female body is generically understood to be weak and inferior to the male body. For instance, this is shown in the fact that the female body is cursed by an extra thirty-two illnesses that men do not have (Martin 2005). According to Gyatso and Havnevik these perceptions are rooted in Tibetan medical texts (dated back to the 11th century), hence they should be understood as fundamental within the traditional medical system (sowa rigpa). Martin cites an early commentator, named Kunga, who concerns himself with writing down a message to the future generations of women, saying: ‘Women’s bodies are vessels of pain, and women’s minds are vessels of suffering’ (2005: 78). The strong relation between the weakness of the female body and the female mind is often emphasised by my informants; as one older woman told me

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104 After strong pressure from Tibet Women’s organizations in India, the exile government in Dharamsala has now suggested a new spelling for ‘woman’ kyeme, where kye is still spelled skye (birth) but where me is spelled sman meaning medicine, thus giving kyeme a new etymology meaning birth medicine (Tsomo Svenningsen, personal communication). Rumour has it that it was a Western ordained Tibetan Buddhist nun in Dharamsala that initiated this rewriting. I cannot confirm this.

105 see Lopez (1998: 211).

106 Gutschow further points out that there is a rather dubious logic to such a system, for if it always takes seven more rebirths, how can a woman ever be reborn as a man?

107 Gyatso and Havnevik speculate in that these thirty-two illnesses might reflect the negative counterpart of the thirty-two marks of the Buddha that women cannot have (2005).
‘women cry so easily because we cannot control our minds – with these strong emotions we cannot make good decisions because we are too attached to everything: to our children, to our natal home (nang ama – mother’s home)’.

My material leads me to believe that, on a fundamental level, Tibetan women perceive themselves to be of lower value and ability than men. That being said the women I talked to only to a limited degree reflect on these questions in their lives. This is not so much because they are uninterested in their own hardships and bad treatments but, as stated above, because they only to a limited extent conceptualise themselves as part of a group called ‘women.’

STRUCTURAL SUBORDINATION AND PROCESSUAL INCORPORATION

The underlying patri-dominance in the cultural logic of fraternal polyandry is seen in most aspects of local social organization, both in terms of the marriage arrangement where the initiative comes from the bridegrooms’ group, and in kinship organization where Houses are established around a set of people primarily related by patrilineation. Much literature dealing with polyandry has been concerned predominantly by the structural aspects of such marriage arrangements, thus focusing on the central role of men in this type of organization (see Goldstein 1971a, 1976; Levine 1988; Prince Peter 1963). Underlying these analyses is a concern that polyandry is a strain on the women involved, both emotionally and labour-wise and, as I discussed in the Introduction, a belief that if men and women could choose they would opt for alternatives to polyandry. Below I shall present some women who are polyandrously married, emphasising their notions of marriage types and arrangements, as well as their experience of being a nama to several men. I shall argue that within the context of marriage, gender is not of overarching significance, at least not as it is perceived and expressed by Tibetan women. Rather, I claim, it is the gendered roles that women gain in the particular households that determine their experience of subordination or not.
**Conceptualising ‘women’ and ‘married women’**

In our talks about gender and polyandry, my female informants were primarily concerned with the various *roles* that women have throughout their lives. Questions about the relations between women and men were often answered with considerations of the differences between the roles of *nama* and daughters of a House. These differences are perceived by women to be more relevant than the fact that *nama* and daughters are of the same sex. Married women see themselves as part of a category of ‘in-married women’ (*nama*) rather than the more general category of ‘women.’ This is evident in how women I talked to consider their own social reality. Both *nama* and daughters claim that those that remain as members of their natal House live an easier life because they stay with their close relatives (*pun nyebo*), one the one hand, and avoid numerous childbirths on the other. Further, many *nama* say it is the structural aspect of marriage, leading them to be sent to a new household, rather than the number of husbands that forms the basis of a common experience. In the cases of a *makpa* marriage, where the bridegroom moves uxorilocally after the wedding, the woman remains in her natal House and as such holds roles both as daughter and as the married woman of the House. As such, these women are in a significantly different situation than *nama*. Similarly, women in monogamous *khathugpa* marriages, where the couple have established a new household, are seen by my female informants to be in another situation. These married women are not referred to as *nama*, because they are not sent (*nama thang*) as a wife into a parents-arranged marriage. Hence, while women of *makpas* share one element of what is understood to be strenuous in a *nama*’s life, namely numerous childbirths, they do not experience the move into a new household. Similarly, the women in *khathugpa* marriages also give birth to many children, but they are not incorporated into an already established residence group. As such, they share only one of the two main criteria for the local classification into the same category of ‘in-married women’. In the following, *nama* in polyandrous marriages shall be the main focus.
Before pregnancy

Lobsang Drolma, the *nama* in the Tagrab House, was born into a wealthy and influential House in a village outside Gyantse, the second biggest city in Tsang. She grew up with three fathers and one mother, as well as her paternal grandparents. Her eldest father, *phala*, was the household leader, as well as the local village leader. At the age of seventeen, her *phala* started to receive inquiries about marriage, and although she, as a future *nama*, was not supposed to know about marriage plans, he told her about some the offers. She told me:

> We were three sisters, and because I was the oldest one, I was to be married first. I was dreading the day I had to leave my parents, and therefore I was listening to hear if they were talking out plans. Then phala told me that somebody had asked him about me. I was so nervous and said that I did not want to leave. But phala said that eventually I had to, and I knew it was true. He said that he wanted to ask me about my opinion on the offer that had been made, because it involved living in the city. A leader in Gyantse had asked for me to marry his son, another leader. They were very rich. But when my father said this I became scared because I did not know about life there, and I did not know how to live in the city with a leader. So I said that I did not want to marry him. Phala accepted this. ... Later he came with a new offer, this time from the village leader here in Sharlung. This was much better for me, and I agreed to move there.

As Lobsang Drolma had not mentioned the fact that moving to Sharlung involved marrying several brothers, I asked her if she had preferences in terms of numbers of husbands. She said:

> Most important for me was to live in a village, so that I could live the way I knew. I can only do farm work, not much else. So for me it doesn’t matter about the number of husbands. Even though moving to Gyantse would be easy concerning wealth and only one husband, I could not live there.
Lobsang Drolma and I often engaged in wishful thinking, trying to formulate the unimaginable. One of her favourite ideas was to send me as a nama to three brothers she knew in her natal village. She would laugh so hard when thinking about the looks on their faces when this strange woman with a daughter, and very limited spinning skills, appeared during the langchang. So in line with these conversations, I asked her - if she could choose - would she prefer to live with only one of her three husbands?

*Why? We would be so poor! Who wants that? It is very difficult to live re re (one to one) here, also for the nama. Being a nama is much work here, because we do shingle (agricultural work), domestic work, milk the animals, feed the babies and many other things. Then we have to take care of the husbands, and their parents. When we are more people it is less work - so zasum is good. The most important is to reduce the work, because it is so busy. But I think it is easier for the nama in a re re marriage because it is only one husband to take care of, and not so many to take care of. But if the marriage fails and some are unhappy, it is always blamed on the nama, right? She has to do good kora khor. If she cannot do this, then the husbands will be unhappy and maybe they will divide. That is in nobody’s interest.*

Lobsang Drolma’s reflections are, I argue, typical for many women’s ideas about marriage alternatives in Sharlung. Her concern is the amount and character of work, rather than the number of husbands, which reflects a rather pragmatic attitude toward marriage relations. Yet, she also recognises the increased emotional strain with more than one husband to care for. Still, she concludes that the advantages are greater with polyandry. Because of the need for a larger household in order to utilize the economic potentials in the area, a life in a polyandrously organized household involves less hardship than a monogamous one. This is an assumption shared by most villagers in Sharlung. As the Mola in Tagrab said: ‘Sometimes a boy makes a girl’s like him (gabo chewa) and then - khathugpa. This happens, but it is a pity, because they will have much hardship in life.’ This concern for hardship is not founded in the arrangement of the
marriage, but in the fact that *khathugpa* implies the establishment of a new household with a monogamous couple only.

*Namas* like to compare their own situation with other in-married women in the village, and many hours are spent talking and gossiping on related issues. These comparisons reflect a shared understanding among *namas* of the processual nature of incorporation into marriage and a new household on the one hand, and the advantage of more than one husband in terms of gaining influence and a stable position on the other. In this understanding, the emphasis on life cycle phases is widespread. Chökyi, a young mother of two, explained:

*It is the same for every *nama*. In the beginning, we don’t like to leave from our parents. When we come to a new place, we don’t know anybody. We are afraid that we will not work well enough and maybe the *sayön* will be angry and treat us badly. It is difficult and many cry.*

The initial period of a marriage is often depicted as the most strenuous, where the young women are outsiders with only formal, not yet emotional, relations to their husbands and other House members. Depending upon their place of origin, many do not have friendly relations to other *namas* or relatives in the village in this initial period. For *namas*, it is the individual relations gained in various phases of life that determine the quality of everyday life and, in these, their ability to consolidate a strong position. Chökyi, talking about her own entry into marriage with three brothers, further explained:

*After some time in the new house, I liked my husbands. First I became close to *genshö*. It is natural, because he is oldest. He was very nice to me, always looking after me. He helped me to fetch water many times. I liked him from the beginning. But I also tried to pay attention to the two others, because my mother had told me before the *langchang* that it is very important to be just and treat the husbands in an honest [drangbo, fair, just] way. It was only short time after the wedding that I felt good with *genshö*. Then it was easier to like to others also. *Achung* was young, much younger than me, but he is very*
kind. So I never said anything bad to him. Achok was also nice, but he was shyer. Also, he was often herding and not so much there.

How about the other persons in the household – how was your relation to them during the first period after the wedding, I asked.

In the beginning I was very shy with them, and also afraid, especially with the sayön. Longchang is a big house, so it is a lot of work for the nama. I tried to work hard so that mother (-in-law) should not complain. I was also afraid of Ani. She is almost my age, but still I did not dare to approach her. I thought that she was not so nice also, because she did not help me with work. In the beginning I spoke with genshö for the most, and then if I needed something from the elders, he asked his parents from me. Then, later, we had very good relations. They are nice people and always treated me well. Sometimes now I argue with Ani, but not so seriously.

The namas I spoke to often gave a similar impression of their initial period in a new household, namely that they focused on working hard and establishing good relations with their husbands. In the process, it is a clear pattern that the newly arrived nama associates herself with the eldest husband, as Chökyi says, because it is natural (cf. Chapter Seven). However, it is a newly-arrived nama’s overall concern to establish affectionate relations with all husbands as soon as possible. Conjugal relations are a nama’s introduction to a household, and throughout her life these form the basis of her alliances and support within the domestic group. These alliances develop throughout life and are of significance particularly with reference to a present spinster, such as the ani in Chökyi’s case. I shall return to the issue of excess unmarried women below.

Shortly after a nama has married and settled in a new house her position is vulnerable, and her work abilities and personality are under scrutiny by the parents-in-law in particular. Childs refers to a Tibetan saying: ‘However ferocious a warrior may be, a friend of valor he shall need. However pretty a wife may be, a son on her lap she will need’ (2004:106). Returning a nama is not unusual in Sharlung, and according to my
informants, this occurs for the most part when there are disagreements between parents-in-law and the nama. In these situations, the nama depends upon her conjugal relations for support. In a case that happened two months before my first arrival in Sharlung, the nama had not yet gained affectionate bonds to the husbands and thus, when her parents-in-law complained about her low skills, she had no internal support. Hence, she was returned to her natal House. I shall briefly describe the process of conflict that involved this young nama in order illustrate the processual aspect of women’s influence in polyandrous marriages, and the significance of conjugal ties.\textsuperscript{108}

The Lamnub House consists of an elderly couple and their eight children, out of which three are daughters and five are sons. One of the daughters is a nun in the local nunnery, while the two others are still young and live with their parents. The five sons vary in age from fourteen to thirty-one. In 2002 the parents decided to arrange a marriage for the five sons. They asked a family that they already knew from the neighbouring township who easily agreed that they would send one of their daughters. She was twenty-two years old at the time, which is an unusually low age compared to the eldest husband, but a common age for marriage. Lamnub Phola explained that her age was good, because, although her eldest husband was far older, she was more or less an average age compared to the husbands to be.\textsuperscript{109} Shortly after her arrival the difficulties started. Phola explains:

\textit{After the wedding was over she was very shy. This was not a problem, but then she did not want to work hard. She always complained about the work burden that came to her. She didn’t like to work, and did not pay attention to what we told her. She always argued back at us.}

I asked about his sons and their relation to the nama, and Phola continued:
This [the above mentioned] was one reason. But the most important reason was that they did not love her. One of the boys said that he wanted her to stay, but the others did not. They did not care about her. They did not love her because she did not want to listen to their parents.

After only four months, the *nama* left the Lamnub House. Her relations with the parents-in-law were poor, and with only one of the husbands to support her, she could not avoid being returned. Before then, Phola had asked her father to take her back, with compensation for her work. Similarly with the Norshôn conflict of the previous chapter, the *nama* was paid a compensation for her work in the household. Due to the limited time she had spent in Lamnub, she was only compensated with 200 jin (100 litres) of *chang*.\(^{110}\)

**Growing influence and the struggle for female headship**

If a *nama* stays beyond the initial phase, her possibilities to influence a polyandrous household are very good. According to both male and female villagers this initial phase is similar for all *nama*s, independent of polygamy or monogamy. The situation depends upon the *nama*’s relations to her parents-in-law, and also the very often present sister-in-law. However, there is a significant difference between monogamous and polyandrous *nama*s, for while a *nama* in a monogamous marriage bonds with her one husband, in a polyandrous marriage she has a broader source of influence by building alliances with her several husbands. In the conflict that I described in the previous chapter that involved the Norkhang House and which ended up in the establishment of the new Norshôn household, the *nama* had already well-developed ties with two of her three husbands. These were based both upon affection, and in her being the mother of their (at the time) one child.

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\(^{110}\) Being a returned *nama* is not uncomplicated. A later marriage is possible, and indeed most common, according to my informants; however, she cannot expect to settle in a prestigious House. A re-marrying woman contradicts marriage patterns by being sent to a household that is lower-ranked than her natal group. Hypergamy is thus the result of moral breaks. Re-marrying women are looked down upon and termed second hand, or used ‘*chelmo*’. However, after the re-marriage has been arranged, the *nama* seems to be treated properly. For the husbands, on the contrary, a new marriage would not lead to a decline in status.
Some women I talked to make the point that a *nama* in a polyandrous marriage can be very influential. This depends on her personal attributes and abilities to share affection and sexual access. Yangzom, a woman in the end of her 40s, explained:

*The nama is very important in a marriage, and especially in zasum. She is responsible for her husbands’ happiness, for working hard so the mother-in-law likes her, and for listening to and working hard for the sayön [household leader]. If she is a bad nama, she is blamed for the failure of the marriage, and then she is treated badly also. If she is a good nama, everybody in the house will treat her well. People see her as a good person because the marriage is good. Then, when her oldest husband (genshö) turns sayön, her influence is very strong, not only over the women in the household but also the men. Then, she has good relations with all her husbands, and her sons support her, and nobody can treat her badly [yakpo ma che wa].*

The presence of large sibling groups within one family distorts the power balance between those who gained their membership by other sources than filiation. As already described in Chapter Five, one of the demographic implications of high polyandry rates is a surplus of unmarried women residing in their natal Houses (Schuler 1987; Ben Jiao 2001). The presence of these women further strengthens the dominance of members by filiation within a House. At the same time, the presence of spinsters in the household reduces the work burden of the *nama* and enables women to participate in agricultural production to a larger degree. These structural implications of high polyandry rates are relevant to *namas* of all marital forms, not only polyandry.

Although consolidation of positions is complicated by the common presence of a spinster related to the group of husbands by filiation, a married woman in a polyandrous household holds a greater potential for influence than would be the case in a monogamous constellation. In Sharlung, the in-married women form alliances not with other women, but with related men, most importantly the husbands, thus forming an alliance of real influence within the household. This is similar to what Levine has noted from Nyinba households (1988). With such patterns of alliance formations, *namas* of
polyandrous marriage have more potential (male) allies in the new household. The level of success of these conjugal alliances depends to a large degree upon the woman’s ability to distribute affection in a way that is perceived to be fair and just.

We should, however, keep in mind the hard life of a young nama, and particularly the potentially inpenetrable alliance already formed by those related by filiation. The example below illustrates the lack of influence that an old nama might have due to the power that her spinster sister-in-law has been able to gain throughout the years of residing with her brothers’ family. I describe this relation between the nama and her sister-in-law in order to point to the significance of personal attributes for realizing the potential for influence.

The main negotiation between the nama and her unmarried sister-in-law is authority over the women and women’s work that is represented by the formal female headship in the household, often called nangma. While the sayön administers the male tasks of the household, the female head is responsible for the distribution of domestic tasks or what is seen to be women’s work, such as cooking, rearing the children, washing clothes, keeping the agricultural produce, weaving as well as doing some agricultural work (such as weeding).\footnote{The distribution of power between the male and the female head varies to a great extent, from activating a strict division between male and female work and leadership to an almost all compassing male leader who administers women, via the female head.} The ideal organization is that the male and female heads form a married couple; however, in the context of high incidents polyandry ideal power distributions are often challenged by the presence of a spinster.

The female headship (nangma) is transferred from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, in the same gradual way as the male headship is (cf. Chapter Five). The point of transference is therefore undefined, and, depending on the health, interest and the relation to the sayön, varies from some few years after the first children are born to the death of the nangma. In Sharlung, most of the nangma were the oldest woman (the mother-in-law), and the norm was to hold back the power transfer until the younger woman’s children were no longer dependent upon her, or until the older woman’s health was deteriorating in such a way that she was unable to perform her tasks. However, there are
some exceptions to this slow transfer, most commonly the death of the sayöön. Due to the ideal that the two leaders should be a conjugal couple, there is in some cases a pressure from the eldest son who is then the new sayöön to also transfer the female headship to his wife. Depending on the quality of the relation between mother and daughter-in-law, this occasionally leads to conflicts, which may not be resolved before one of the women dies.112

The presence of an unmarried woman in the household is indeed very common, both in Houses with monogamous and polygamous marriages (with the exception of khathugpa marriages). In Sharlung, there are cases of power struggles involving unmarried daughters of the House (of two generations) that have resulted in a draining of real power from the nangma position and a transfer of the actual leadership role to an unmarried daughter of the house. One of the well-known cases of distorted power distribution among women within the same generation but related to the House by filiation and by affinity is the long complicated history of the Darkhang where two generations of women have struggled for influence within similar contexts, however, with different results.

Darkhang is one of the poor but old Houses in Sharlung. Today, the household consists of a man and his wife (Yangdröl), his unmarried sister (Pemba), their two sons, one daughter-in-law (Nyima Tsering) and their three small children, and two unmarried daughters (Tsomo and Loyal (a nun)). Pemba, the spinster, of the eldest generation, was initially sent to reside in the local nunnery. As with the other former nuns of Resil and monks of Daching, she was forced to leave the nunnery when the new Chinese leaders closed all monastic institutions in the area in 1959. Putrung moved back to her natal home and has remained unmarried throughout her life. Darkhang is a female dominated household in terms of internal organization and power distribution. This, I suggest, is due

112 Murder of daughters-in-law, as known to happen in India, is unheard of in Tibet, although there has been one potential poisoning case among the baru (the corpse cutters) in Sachung in which a young woman accused her parents-in-law of molesting her, and trying to kill her. According to my informants in Sharlung this case is particular to baru, and similar cases are not known to have happened among villagers of common background.
to the presence of unmarried women related by patrifiliation and due to their strong personalities, especially in the older generation.

The *nama* of Pemba’s generation, Yangdröl, was the person entitled to inherit the female headship from her mother-in-law who was holding it at the time she entered the House. This, however, both happened and did not happen. In practice, Pemba and her mother held the actual female leadership, distributing the female tasks and controlling the agricultural produce, and little, if any, of that power was transferred to the daughter-in-law during the mother-in-law’s lifetime. Following the mother-in-law’s death, Yangdröl took the formal title of *nangma*, but it turned out that this title did not reflect the actual power distribution in the household. By that time, Pemba had, by years of co-operation with her mother, established herself as leader figure within the household. When Yangdröl tried to execute her power by taking charge of the cooking and serving (thus controlling the access to food for the other members of the household), she was simply disregarded, by not only Pemba but also by her husband and their children. As one of her sons says today, ‘Ama was not as strong as Ani [Pemba].’ Yangdröl tried actively to operate as the *nangma* in the sense of actual influence, but after a while she realized that not only did her husband (the *sayön*) relate to Pemba as the female leader, but so did the other House members. Gradually after that, Yangdröl says, she accepted her subordinate position.

When Yangdröl’s children reached marriageable age, a young *nama* was invited to wed her two sons. The *nama*, Nyima Tsering, was only two years older than the youngest daughter in the house, Tsomo, and a little younger than the nun daughter. The first years of marriage were amicable, with few conflicts in any of the new relations. Yangdröl at that time spent much time by herself, walking the fields and sitting around the hearth. Thus, Nyima Tsering, the new *nama*, related mostly to Pemba. The two developed a good relation, but it was still too early to share leadership of any kind. Nyima Tsering’s children were small and still depended on her, and she was only in the beginning of consolidating her position from an outsider to an insider. In this period she noted that her sister-in-law, Tsomo, worked more closely with Pemba than before and at
the same time, Tsomo, according to Nyima Tsering, treated her badly (*machewa*). Familiar with Yangdröl’s history, Nyima Tsering worried that her sister-in-law would actively work to marginalize her in a similar way. Thus, Nyima Tsering confronted Tsomo with the problem. The conflict escalated, and it took several years before it was resolved. In the meantime, the House members sided with either her or Tsomo.

Interestingly, today most of the people side with the *nama*, Nyima Tsering, although initially she was an outsider who gained membership by marriage, and not filiation. This, I suggest, should be seen as an indication of the significance of life phases, on the one side, and personal attributes and abilities to make alliances, on the other. When Nyima Tsering complained, and as such opened the conflict between herself and her sister-in-law, she was already well-established with three healthy sons. Her relationships with her two husbands, father-in-law and Pemba were characterized as solid and good. The first two critical phases of her marriage (pre-pregnancy and before having a healthy son) were over, and therefore she could risk bringing up a relational problem involving a member by filiation. The conflict was solved by sending the sister-in-law, Tsomo, to work in another household, i.e. not depriving her of membership in her natal House, but creating a distance between her and Nyima Tsering. By doing that, Nyima Tsering was recognised as the future *nangma* of Darkhang House, and she is consolidating a central and significant position.

**Polyandry as security**

The potential for influence should also be seen in relation to the question of security. Many women seem to consider polyandry a secure marriage, i.e. a marriage that puts the *nama* and children in a less vulnerable situation. As a young woman called Tsering told me:

> My grandfather died when he was young, and my grandmother had to feed my mother and her siblings alone. It was a very difficult life. Because she had no land, she had to take work as a carrier for big traders. Once a year she went with them to India, carrying their things for a small salary. Every time she was gone for maybe six months. Then my
mother was left alone with her siblings, and they worked with their maternal uncle (ashang). My mother has told me about this difficult time, and she said that there was no protection for them. I am thinking that this is different now with zasum, so the children have more than one father. Many things can happen; one can become sick and maybe die, and then it is easier for the wife to get help to the children. And if the mother dies, there might be an ani that can take care of the children also, especially if there are some bad relations between the nama and her parents-in-law.

With its harsh climate and foreign political power, Tibet provides a hard life for local farmers and pastoralists. Despite the recent years’ improvement in the socio-economic organization in general, and relations to land in particular, people are concerned with the possibly of impending dangers such as sickness and natural disasters. In rural Panam there is very little public social security initiative to provide sufficient help those who find themselves in a difficult situation. Household composition, then, is one of the most crucial strategies to secure the individual. Being part of a chief House and a large household, which very often include polyandrous marriage, is regarded as a safety net for the nama in particular, for as Tsering continues: ‘A nama is vulnerable and is easily put in a difficult situation if something happens to her one husband.’ In my material I do not have cases that illustrate processes where polyandry has served as a direct protection for a young woman (and her children) following the death of a father, for instance. However, I believe that these notions expressed by Tsering, indicate that the issue of security is a pertinent one when women evaluate the various marital forms and is part of the cultural logic of the preference of polyandry.

However, in order to realise a woman’s potential influence and protection by a polyandrous marriage, the marriage constellation must be successful. A successful marriage in Sharlung is one where, as Tagrab Mola so precisely said: ‘the husbands and the nama are all satisfied, and where they all work well together with the parents.’ The

113 Protection of the individual is secured in various ways, of course. In the following chapter I shall discuss the ritual aspects of protection and relate these to the house as a physical building, while in Chapter Nine I return to inter-House relations of assistance.
satisfaction of the marital partners is of great concern to the *namas* that I talked to, and central to this is the establishment of a *kora khor* that is found fair for those involved.

**Being sexually active with several husbands**

A point often made by both male and female informants is the responsibility that falls on the *nama* and her inter-personal skills in order to make a polyandrous marriage work. *Namas* often point to the importance of good abilities to do a fair *kora khor* (sexual rotation system). In the previous chapter I described some various solutions of the *kora khor*, pointing to the central role of the eldest husband in the daily organization of a plural marriage. Here I shall describe how women talk about the issue of *kora khor* and having a sexual relation with several husbands.

Despite the, in general, unproblematic attitudes expressed by these women toward polyandry as a marriage form, the fact that a woman has several sexual partners remains a topic discussed with some peculiarity and embarrassment, also for the polyandrously married women. There is a consciousness among some women about the fact that *zasum* is an unusual practice, and this is reflected in the extra giggling that arise in the talks about sexual practices. It is clear that some divorces have been grounded in a woman’s lack of will, or ability, to do *kora khor* in a way accepted by the husbands (and parents-in-law). As Chökyi said: ‘Not everybody is able to do *kora khor*. It depends on your personality.’

In one of our afternoons sitting in the open space of the living quarters, Pema, my nanny, and I asked Lobsang Drolma about affection and sexual practices. It was a quiet afternoon. Nobody else was in the house - Tashi-la had gone to visit relatives in Gangkar; her eldest husband had not yet returned from Ngari, Orgyen and Wangchuk were outside working, and Ani-la was in Gyantse to help her paternal aunt. Although Tibetan women

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114 When talking about issues related to sex, there is always a significant amount of giggling involved. However, I do believe that we managed to talk about these issues in a substantial way (see also the previous chapter on the varying practices of *kora khor* systems). Pema, my daughter’s nanny, was very curious about the sexual aspects of polyandry, and with her straightforward personality she started many discussions with the women of Sharlung, and particularly Lobsang Drolma in our House. These conversations are, however, characterised by many questions and only brief answers.
are not particularly embarrassed and shy concerning sexuality, these and other intimate issues should not be mentioned in the presence of male relatives. Lobsang Drolma told us that Namgyal Tsering, her eldest husband, was reportedly on his way home after five months away. Talking about him, she was smiling more than usual. I asked her if she was looking forward to seeing him again. She smiled a broad smile again and confirmed that she was very excited about seeing him. It occurred to me that she had a different expression when talking about him, than her two other younger husbands, so I asked if she had a very close relation with Namgyal Tsering. Lobsang Drolma explained: ‘No, no, I love all three just as much. This is the most important for a nama – to treat all equally.’ Pema, interrupting Lobsang Drolma, said that it must be very difficult to love three men at the same time. ‘I cannot do that!’ she claimed. Lobsang Drolma continued: ‘It is not so difficult for me. It is true. But Namgyal Tsering is different because he is the eldest, and most important to the family (nangmi).’

In daily life I found it difficult to notice expressions of affection between Lobsang Drolma and her two younger husbands. There seem to be a particularly distanced relationship between her and Wangchuk, the middle one (achok). Orgyen, the youngest husband, is often in the house playing and taking care of their children and occasionally helping Lobsang Drolma with cooking dinner. During the first period of my stay in Sharlung, I took this lack of signs of affection between the three to be a question of what is normative and accepted as expressions of intimacy in more general terms. However, after the return of Namgyal Tsering, I saw a different attitude and behaviour from Lobsang Drolma toward him, than what I had observed before. When he was around, Lobsang Drolma paid close attention to his doings and sayings, flirting and giggling at his small jokes. Her eyes followed him, and she was often physically close to him, touching his leg while laughing, and gently hitting him when he was teasing her. Namgyal Tsering was very busy visiting others upon his return and he often came home late, and rather intoxicated from chang. Lobsang Drolma often then waited for him to return, serving him chang before the end of the evening. Her behaviour towards Namgyal Tsering is, I believe, another indication of the special relation between the nama and the
eldest husband that was also discussed in the previous chapter. Lobsang Drolma continued about the return of her eldest husband: ‘When he comes home, I stay with him again. Because he has been away for a long time, I stay only with him for a long period. Then, I only visit the others occasionally.’

Pema, who is from a village in Dulong where very few marry polyandrously, tried to formulate a question in between all the laughter: ‘Do you have sex very often? Don’t you get tired?’ Lobsang Drolma started to giggle loudly, and moved her index finger back and forth on her cheek as to indicate that the questions made her embarrassed. She never answered the first question; however, concerning the second question, she explained: ‘No, no. But the pregnancies make me tired’. Lobsang Drolma was pregnant with her fourth child at the time, and often nauseous. She continued: ‘I get sick a lot. Still I have to work, and do kora khor in the same way. That is tiring.’ I asked her if the kora khor changes at some point.

It is the same most of the time. After a childbirth - then there is no kora khor in the first month. But after that it is the same. This is maybe a difference between a nama with one, and a nama with many husbands. With one husband it is easier to rest if needed. With many husbands it is difficult to change the kora khor, because maybe some will be upset.

Pema, still not convinced about the value of polyandry, continued: ‘But – what if you don’t like one of your husbands? What can you do?’ The issue of a fair distribution of sexual contact is generically seen to be of utmost importance for the success of a polyandrous marriage. Although in the cases of success the eldest husband is, together with the nama, praised for being a good person that is able to keep a marriage stable, it is the nama alone that is blamed in the cases of failure. Both women and men share this sense of distribution of responsibility. In Sharlung people gossip about namas and their abilities to love all husbands, and the interest is particularly strong when concerning marriages where the age difference between the nama and the youngest husbands is significant. Lobsang Drolma continued to say:
It is the responsibility of the nama to be fair. Sometimes the nama does not love one husband, but she has to try hard to visit him and show affection. And then, affection can change. This happened to the nama in the Sharlung House. At first she did not like the achok. She did not want to visit him often, and he was angry. The other [two] husbands were also upset, and told her to treat him well. So she included him into the kora khor. She told me that in the beginning she thought it was horrible, but after some time she was used to it, and now she likes him.

I asked Lobsang Drolma, why, she thinks, the nama suddenly liked him. She continued:

Sex makes them closer, isn’t it? That is why kora khor is important, because it makes people close by doing this. That’s is also the reason that the nama of zasum is in a stronger position, because she has these close bonds to more than one man, right?

When talking about polyandry, Tibetan women themselves seldom mention the emotional aspects arising out of sexual relations and a fondness between partners. This might be due to a strong sense of shyness (ngotsa). However, independent of marital form sex is considered a central aspect of marriage and of utmost importance in order to create bonds between the partners (cf. Levine 1988). Although it seems that many namas have a special relation with their eldest husband, it is in the interest of the nama to develop good relations with all husbands. A strong position enables the nama to develop stronger individual autonomy, i.e. to participate in the decision making on the use of her own time, on labour distribution, as well as potential off-farm activities such as pilgrimage trips and visits to her natal village.

Distribution of affection and sex does not seem to be of great concern for the namas that I talked to. Affection is founded in sexual contact, and, as such, affection is not understood to be a static condition that cannot be altered or manipulated. Rather, as Lobsang Drolma mentioned when talking about the nama of the Sharlung House, affection might grow after initial dislike. Having said that, the ability to conduct an elaborate kora khor is of concern when gossiping about other namas in the village. This
might indicate that polyandry is seen by women to be emotionally more strenuous than is
the case with monogamy, something that some women also claim. At the same time,
sexual distribution is only one of several aspects of a married life which is the namas’
concern. Interpreting the points raised by the women above, there are, I suggest, other
and more significant concerns regarding the different marriage forms. These primarily
concern a wish to reduce the burden of work, increase the potential for influence in a new
household, and secure the partners involved (especially children and the nama herself).
Hence, polyandry is perceived as a marriage arrangement and organization that has
economic benefits that also reflect back on the females of these marriages. These benefits
are to a large degree found in the household constellation following polyandry and, as
will become clear, in the local belief that men contribute more to the common endeavour
of the household.

**Female roles and subordination**
The emphasis that women put on female roles, and particularly the role as a nama, is
interesting in order to understand local perceptions of gender models. I noted earlier that
men and women share an understanding of female rebirth as lower-ranked, and less
fortunate, than a male rebirth. What follows is a shared notion of women being inferior
and less able than men, hence more positive attitudes towards men. This is also reflected
in the quote in the very beginning of the chapter. Underlying many of the concerns
uttered by namas above are implications of the post-marital residence pattern. For a nama
it is the initial phases of a marriage, when the woman has just left her natal home and
settled into her husbands’ household, that is found to be the most difficult and strenuous.
As such, the role of being the outsider is essential, however, not all-encompassing.
Makpas, the adopted bridegrooms, share the same position as namas in terms of coming
from outside to an established group. However, there is a fundamental difference between
makpas and namas, women say; this is found in fact that the expectations towards a
makpa are of another kind than those towards a nama, because the makpa will become
the sayôn. Further, I hold, gender constitutes a significant difference between these two categories, and reflects the expressed notions of female inferiority.

Despite the ideological subordination of women and the structural inferiority of namas in particular, women do not consider sexual differences to be of fundamental importance in their daily life. As such, a gender hierarchy is naturalized. In the following I shall discuss the contextual relevance of gender, and look further at gendered practices and, lastly, examine the very constitution of these gender categories as found in Sharlung.

In the following, I shall ask to what extent labour is gendered in practice, and further, discuss the local explanation of polyandry as expressed in the need for male labour in order to strengthen a household and the continuity of a House. My intention is to develop an alternative frame of analysis in order to understand the perceived need for labour and, in that perspective, different modes of socialities related to gender which constitute a central part.

POLYANDRY AND THE PREFERENCE FOR MALE LABOUR

Although gender ideology to some extent reflects women’s subordinate position in relation to men, we can see significant openings for female manoeuvring in daily life. This is particularly found in polyandrous marriages where the wife develops affectionate bonds to several men in the household. Rather than to focus on the ideological subordination of women as such, I shall, in line with more recent gender theories (Moore 1994; Gyatso 2003) describe the elasticity of gender categories and the opportunities for women to further stretch these boundaries.

Due to the fundamental importance of gendered labour to the practice of polyandry, expressed by both my male and female informants, I shall here take labour and labour distribution as a vantage point for a further discussion on women in polyandrous marriage. I do so for several reasons. Firstly, in Sharlung, gendered labour legitimizes and explains the generic notion of the women being less important to the household, and to the continuation of a House. Secondly, work is the core activity in daily life, thus being of utmost importance to female and male villagers and a central
arena in which to analyse modes of socialities and their gendered aspects. Thirdly, the literature that advocates a view of Tibetan societies as being founded on egalitarian principles often refers to women’s participation in the work sphere as a reflection of an ideological egalitarianism in which female and male labour is equally valued (see Watkins 1996; Berreman 1962).

I shall describe gendered the labour division as found in Sharlung, and discuss gendered aspects in terms of the categories and its boundaries, the possibilities of elasticizing or transgressing such boundaries, and lastly the valuation of variously defined work. By doing so, general gender relations in practice become apparent, indicating a significant role of women in polyandrous marriages in particular. However, the influence and power of women is to a large degree dependent on the life phases into which she finds herself, and should not, I hold, be seen as an indication of an egalitarian gender ideology.

**Gendered labour divisions in Tagrak**

As already mentioned, the underlying argument shall develop around the expressed belief that the need for male labour underlies local explanations of polyandrous marriages in Panam. We have seen that such a motivation was clearly expressed in Tashi-la’s narrative presented in Chapter Three, both when arranging a common marriage for their two sons and later for adding the third son to the same marriage. These preferences for male labour force must be understood beyond the organization of work and should include a reflection of gender ideologies and models. As such, I aim to note the various levels of explanations concerning gender, work and marriage: I argue that although work chores in practice are virtually inter-changeable, they are not equally valued.

In Panam, and similarly to what is found in other Tibetan communities, gender-based work categories are flexible; i.e. women may perform male tasks and men may engage in women’s tasks. Although such flexibility occurs, gender categories remain the fundamament for division of labour, and work is defined to be either male or female, or gender-irrelevant activities. In practice very little work outside the house is strictly
gender-based, and most of the activities are defined into the latter category of being gender-irrelevant. Gender categories are nevertheless clearly defined but, as such flexible practice might indicate, can be completely manipulated with work, clothes and other identity markers.

The various activities and tasks within a household are firstly distributed according gender and relative age, and to the structural position of the individual. Interpersonal relations within the household also influence the distribution. The main categories of work could be defined as agricultural work (*shingle*), herding (*trogle*), domestic work (*nangle*), ritual work (*chôle*), public work (*chile*) and wage labour (*mila*). While some of the tasks within these categories are gender-based; most are not.

The Tagrab women share the domestic work burden, although not equally. Mola, being the female household leader (*nangma*) and old, have delegated much of the chores to Lobsang Drolma, her daughter-in-law. As her daughter, the Ani also resides at home, she participates as an assistant to her mother, but do not hold prime responsibility for particular chores due to her nun status. In practice, Ani also assists the *nama* in her work as their relation is good in Tagrab. Domestic work includes most of the daily tasks performed within the stonewall that surrounds the house: such as to milk the cows, churn butter, fetch water, make tea and soups (or daily dinner), nurse and take care of the children, spin and weave wool, and make tools from hay (such as brooms, etc.). These are all defined as female tasks, but can, and are done by men as well. Milking is the only strict exception to sharing labour, villagers say. In pastoral areas men can, if needed, milk, and, although I have never seen a man milking in farming areas, people say that they could in times of crisis.115

In the Tagrab House, Tashi-la, being the household leader, is responsible for the agricultural work. As a general division of labour Urgyen (the youngest son) is engaged in agricultural work, Wangchuk (the middle son) is herding the animals, and Namgyal Tsering (the eldest) is engaged in off-farm activities. Although being the responsibility of

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115 Defining milking as a female chore is, in practice, the main reason that younger women very seldom travel outside the farm. Milking is the prime responsibility of the youngest wife, the *nama*, enabling travel for the elder women and also for the residing spinster.
Tashi-la and his youngest son, Urgyen, all household members participates in agricultural work; women and men, young and old, high and low ranked, married and unmarried, lay or clergy (all nuns, and some monks from poor households). The harvest is the most intense work period in the yearly cycle, and during crucial these weeks women and men perform overlapping task: cutting, the tying of the barley into bundles, the transportation to the threshing area, and clearing the fields for leftovers. More than harvesting, the threshing is to a large degree distributed along the lines of gender, as Urgyen and Wangchuk drive the draft animals or the tractors used for the initial periods, while Lobsang Drolma and Ani continue the following periods of the threshing. Threshing is considered to be male work due to the need for physical strength, but can be performed by women in times of male absence. Women living without adult men in their households (unmarried women living alone or married women with a husband working outside the village) arrange for help to plough and harrow in particular, and also rent draft animals and a ‘driver’ when needed.

Observing the harvest activities, work is clearly defined along gender lines but it is also apparent that there are not strict labour divisions that cannot be challenged and that, in times of need, men and women alternate their labour performances independent of gender. Public work (participation in mandatory community work, chile) and wage labour (mila) are not gender specific, hence, all household members can participate these important activities. Moreover, ritual work (chôle) is not gender specific as a whole, but some of the offering activities should be performed by women only.

Some labour distribution is not challenged; to plough and to harrow are male activities that are not open to exception. There is a negative rationale to this; men must plough and harrow because women cannot. Due to women’s innate ability to bring pollution to the fields it is sinful (dikpa) for them to plough. Despite the fact that women’s restriction from ploughing in Himalayan societies has been mentioned in much of the ethnographic literature (Levine 1988; Watkins 1996; Vinding 1998; Gutschow 2004), there are few attempts to explain such restrictions. Carrasco, for instance, simply states that women occasionally can plough (1959:48), but he does not suggest
circumstances for such occasions. One exception is Vinding, who claims that no ethnic
groups or castes in Nepal allow women to plough, and suggests that ploughing is sinful
because it involves killing of worms (1998:211, 32n). Gutschow, writing from Zangskar
in northern India, links the prohibition to the defilement of the female body and its ability
to pollute the fields (2004:69-70), an explanation similar to those found among my
informants.

In general then, although work is defined along gender lines, women and men
perform overlapping tasks in Panam, with the exception of the female responsibility for
the milking of animal, and the strictly male performance of ploughing and harrowing. At
the same time, women and men in Sharlung share the perception that most important for
the success of a household is a large male labour force, and which, I believe, cannot be
explained in terms of practical work only. The value of male and female labour is a
debated theme in Himalayan studies, and it is often related to the more general question
of women’s statuses and positions and to the degree of equality between men and
women. Since Rosaldo, already in 1974, suggested that subordination of women could be
explained by their lack of participation in the public domain, division of labour has been
a continuous focus in the study of gender.

**Women and work in Himalayan societies**

Women in Tibetan societies are significant contributors to subsistence and economic
production in general (Carrasco 1959; Levine 1988; Berreman 1962; Aziz 1978a).

Women participate not only in the domestic domain, but they account for a large part of
the labour force in agricultural production, as well as the increasingly important off-farm
activities. Some scholars have noted, in line with Berreman’s description (1980:381),
from the Indian Himalaya that ‘the labour of men and women is equally valued and

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116 Gutschow refers a local proverb that indicates the strictness of the restriction against ploughing (and in
Zangskar, weaving) for women: ‘If women were to weave or plow, the mountains would fall down’
(ibid.:69).

117 Women’s strong participation in household production indicates that Heath’s suggestion that polyandry
would be practiced only in societies where women make only an insignificant contribution to subsistence is
inadequate (1955).
equally productive. In fact, their agricultural activities are virtually interchangeable…’ (see also Watkins 1996:36; Schuler 1987:151). Such claims of flexibility and even interchangeability are commonly accepted in the literature not only on Tibetan-speaking peoples, but also of mountainous regions in general. Orlove and Guillet, in a comparative study of peoples of the Andes and the Himalayas, argue that common to most production strategies found in high mountainous communities is a fairly minimal sexual division of labour (1985).

According to the argument of Watkins and others, this should indicate a high degree of gender equality in mountainous regions. This is, of course, a very general suggestion; however, what seems to be clear, is that in the Himalayas women have considerable autonomy in their marital homes, and they do enjoy a significantly less constrained position compared to their Hindu sisters to the South, both in terms of ability to control their own lives (marriage and divorce particularly) and in terms of participation in decision making in the daily life of the household (Acharya and Bennett 1982; Levine 1987a; Aziz 1989; see also Taring 1973; Yuthog 1993).

Watkins argues that within the Tibetan cultural realm ‘Buddhist hegemony is largely responsible for the egalitarian gender configurations that are present’ (1996:48). Such an inter-connection, she argues, is found in moral perspectives on work and personhood, listing the two main Buddhist tasks, ‘avoiding sinful behaviour … and bringing the mind under control’ (ibid.:45) to be of fundamental relevance. Perceptions of work, male or female, are informed by prevailing Buddhist ethic, which values similar qualities in men and women. This leads to ‘relatively egalitarian gender relations’ (ibid: 52), and despite the fact that work organization is sharply divided according to gender, male and female work is equally valued, Watkins claims.

The assertion that Buddhism as an ideology can explain (egalitarian) gender relations among villagers reflects, I would claim, a limited understanding of folk religion in Tibetan societies today. It remains, I hold, an open question as to whether Buddhist
concepts of inclusion and equality empower women, also in Panam. The apparent differences in gender relations between the areas of Hindu or Buddhist hegemonies might be connected to the stronger focus on egalitarianism (on an ideological level) found in Buddhist philosophy; however, when looking at local practices on a village level, only very few people, if any, are able to describe such practices in elaborate Buddhist terms. As seen above, attitudes towards women and the feminine in Buddhist texts are multiple and contradictory, reflecting inclusive and exclusive, as well as misogynistic views. These gender models could all be made to operate on a village level; however, my material indicates that the dominating gender model in Panam is that reflecting a subordination of women to men. Such generic subordination is legitimized in karma ideology and proven, rather tautologically, by the hardships experienced by women and the way of describing women (kyeme). The legitimization is thus only partially based in Buddhist wording. I never came across villagers who refered to egalitarianism found in Buddhist philosophy when talking about women; however this was a topic frequently mentioned when discussing low-ranked and polluted groups.

Buddhist principles of equality have, as many scholars have pointed out, a limited influence on the social realities of women. Klein writes that ‘The lack of widespread social egalitarianism suggests the extent to which the major principle of Buddhism can be lost…’ (1985:132). I do not find Buddhist ideology alone to be enlightening for an understanding of women and gendered relations in Sharlung. Following Howell (1996), I shall emphasis the contextual difference of gender relevance and focus on the context of marriage and work in order to analyse in which ways gender is determinant for inclusion and influence. Howell argues that we need to look at modes of socialities rather than one gender model. Through showing the contextual relevance of gender compared to other

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118 In Tibet, as in neighbouring areas such as Mongolia, the balancing of feminine and masculine aspects is of crucial importance in symbolic representation of the landscape and the lived-in-world. Such focus on egalitarian symbolic does not, however, exclude a ranking of the two gender aspects (cf. Needham 1975).
119 Additionally, in Panam, people relate actively to folk religious practices and modes of realities that only to a limited degree involve Buddhist philosophies (see Chapter Nine).
120 The low rank of certain local groups is often explained as contrary to Buddhism and is concluded to be a cultural import from India that is contra-Buddhist. My informants never raised similar notions with regards to the low rank of women.
socio-cultural group criteria, she concludes that we must remain open to the subordinate importance of gender in certain social and cultural contexts. I agree, and I would add that the levels of ideology and practice must remain in the forefront of a discussion on the relevance of gender to the organization of daily life.

While Watkins argues that although work is organised according to sharply defined gender categories, male and female work is equally valued, Berreman’s note above goes further with his claim that not only are agricultural activities inter-changeable between men and women, but gendered work is equally valued in Himalayan societies (1980). My material from Panam indicates that although labour division is flexible, clear gender based categories organise work both on the level of ideology and in practice. These categories are nevertheless not equally valued, and labour division should not be understood as expressions of egalitarianism. Rather, these should be seen as two distinct categories embedded with valued meaning within which male labour is regarded as being of highest importance, both by men and women. The gendered categories that organise work are well-defined in Panam, based on two sex categories, ‘men’ and ‘women’. These categories are restricted, and these restrictions are reflected in both the constitution of personhood and the expected and prescribed acts and activities of a person. These gender-based categories of work that are rather clearly defined and ranked are subject to manipulation and stretching that challenges not only principles of gendered labour division, but also the mere constitution of gender.

Below I shall present a local villager called Phuntsok, who, although being classified and conceptualized to be a woman, is acting as a man. Her ways of behaviour and her engagement in male activities are not in any way expressed to be problematic among her fellow villagers. As such, s/he illustrates a successful gender manipulation process, sharing characteristics of processes described in queer theories in recent years (see Butler 1990). It is important here to note that although gender manipulation is possible, it is rare in Tibet. Still, I believe that the case of Phuntsok, together with the following description of the local perception of sex change during childbirth, serves well to illustrate the elasticity of gender categories, on the one side, as well as the hierarchical
nature of local gender models, on the other. Due to the uni-directionality of gender manipulation, it does not, I hold, challenge the hierarchical relation between the category men and women.

**STRETCHING GENDER BOUNDARIES**

Phuntsok is fifty years old and lives in her natal house, Norlho, together with her elder sister and her family. Her appearance is like that of a man. In rural areas such as Panam, for men and women, clothes are very clearly defined and because most people use traditional clothes, gender recognition is easy. Women wear dresses (married women wear the same dresses with an apron) and have long braided hair. They wear traditional boots (*lham*) with women’s patterns and colour. Phuntsok, by contrast, wears trousers, jacket and male boots; her hair is cut short, and she smokes cigarettes, all indicating that she is a man. Upon meeting her for the first time it is not obvious that she was born a woman. Her male appearance concurs with the work she conducts; she is responsible for the male chores in the Norkhang house, as she operates the draft animals and ploughs and harrows. She also makes shoes; an activity usually restricted to men. In Sharlung, villagers seem to have an unproblematic relation to the gender of Phuntsok. I have heard no condescending or stigmatizing attitudes towards her, and through her work, she co-operates with men in the village.

Phuntsok’s biography is interesting, as it illustrates the coming of a new gender identity, not only for Phuntsok herself, but also for her co-villagers who had no previous experience with women acting as men, or men acting as women. The history below is a combination of what Phuntsok and her brother-in-law told me, as well as Tagrab Mola’s later comments on the story. Phuntsok’s parents had six daughters and no sons; therefore, when the daughters became of marriageable age, they decided to invite a *makpa* (adopted bridegroom) for one of them.\(^{121}\) In such situation with several daughters living at home, one could expect a polygynous marriage to be arranged, based on similar values as

\(^{121}\) The Norkhang House was described in some detail in Chapter Six. The *makpa* invited is Dawa Tsering-la who later became the *sayón* of Norkhang and central in the conflict that led to the establishment of Norshôn.
polyandry, i.e. keeping the siblings together and securing labour within the household. This, however, happens only in very few cases and was not considered for the Norkhang sisters. Rather, one of the daughters married the makpa, four were sent as namas to other villages, and Phuntsok has remained a spinster in her natal House. When asked about marriage, she laughs and says that she has never been interested in living a married life. Her parents accepted her wish to remain unmarried, and she has (apparently) lived in celibacy throughout her life.

Phuntsok says that she has had a male appearance for ‘as long as I remember,’ which is also confirmed by other villagers. Because she had no brothers, and because her father was physically weak from illness, Phuntsok made a decision and pronounced to the rest of the members of the House, that from then on she would do the male chores of the household. She was at that time around twelve years old. She cut her hair short and has since that day worn trousers. During Phuntsok’s childhood, she assisted her father and learned all the male skills, including the ploughing and harrowing which are considered the heaviest work. Throughout her adult life, she has ‘been like a man (pumo pu trawa),’ villagers say. In terms of organization of work, her life history is identical to most men in Sharlung: when she was younger she helped herding smaller animals; in her adult life she was responsible for the draft animals; while now, as her hair is turning white, she is involved in less tiring, but still male, activities, such as making boots.\footnote{Making shoes, both the sole and the woollen boot, is defined as men’s work, and in Sharlung no women, except for Phuntsok, know how to produce these traditional boots. Women, on the other hand, often spin the wool and make the frieze that is used as the main material for the boots (and clothes).} Her sewing skills are well-known throughout the valley, and she has numerous customers from the surrounding villages. As other men, and women, Phuntsok is now spending more time on religious practices, preparing for her old age and focusing on a the securing of a good death and rebirth.

As mentioned above women in Tibet are restricted from ploughing. It seems that in order for women to be able to perform such task, they will have to mark some alteration of gender identity. The same, I believe, is the case for women doing other male chores such as sewing shoes and operating draft animals. Phuntsok, being the only person

\footnote{Making shoes, both the sole and the woollen boot, is defined as men’s work, and in Sharlung no women, except for Phuntsok, know how to produce these traditional boots. Women, on the other hand, often spin the wool and make the frieze that is used as the main material for the boots (and clothes).}
born as a woman that ploughs in Sharlung (and according to informants, in the neighbouring villages), does indeed not appear to be a ‘woman’ in common terms; rather, she has the appearance of a man. Interestingly, Watkins notes from her study amongst the Tibetan-speaking Nyeshang in Nepal that some women there disregard these cultural restrictions that keep women from conducting men’s work, and they simply dress in men’s clothing whenever ploughing their fields (1996:49). Carole McGranahan also notes in an unpublished paper on women’s participation in the Khampa guerrilla movement that women performed as soldiers, but that they did so dressed in drag (2005). These brief notes about cross-dressing as a way to stretch gender borders is interesting also in terms of what seems to be Phuntsok’s unproblematic gender alteration in Sharlung.

In local understanding, Phuntsok could be seen as someone who, although being born as a woman, has transformed herself into a man, and hence, is in a position where performing male tasks is unproblematic, even natural. In such a perspective she would be a transsexual, a person who has not only stretched gender boundaries but who has changed her/his sex permanently. This, I believe, is not the case. Rather, I would suggest that Phuntsok’s male appearance does not alter people’s conception of her as a woman, albeit being ‘like a man.’ When people refer to Phunstog her gender is not made clear as her name is gender neutral, as many Tibetan personal names, and as people use khong, a gender neutral term that denotes both ‘she’ and ‘he’. However, Tagrab Mola said that ‘Phuntsok is not a man: she (mo) is a woman. But a special woman. Like a man.’

Phuntsok’s transformation of appearance are best understood, I argue, to be a stretching of gender categories and the expectations of gendered division of labour; this does not challenge the established boundaries by establishing a third gender category but rather confirms the two existing categories of ‘men’ and ‘women.’ Importantly, the unproblematic handling of Phuntsok being ‘like a man’ is an indication of gender categories being flexible.

In the excellent article ‘One plus one makes three’ (2003), Gyatso discusses a third sex (overlapping, she suggests, with a third gender) category mentioned in Indian
and Tibetan medical texts, as well as in the Vinaya (2003). Although in Panam I found no indications of people relating to a possible third sex, I find this discussion interesting in terms of characterising the existing sex and gender categories of Tibetan cultural history, and particularly the flexibility and ambivalence of these categories. Gyatso points out that while such third sex (pandaka, S., ma ning) is an ambivalent category often associated with negativity, danger and exclusion in texts on Buddhist monasticism, Tibetan medical texts note that ma ning ‘actually mirrors virtues that Buddhism extols’ (ibid.:100). These texts discern ma ning in a positive gloss based particularly on its middleness, which is associated with the esteemed Middle Way in Buddhism, and its connotations with well-balanced substances in Tibetan medicine. Gyatso further states that ‘to recognize a middle term, with its ability to breach gaps, to connect, and to transform, is to illustrate by its very mucosity … the impossibility of any definitive demarcation, least of all exclusion’ (ibid.:104).

I do not argue that Phuntsok manifests a third sex, as described by Gyatso. However, by emphasising the ‘mucosity’ of gender categories, i.e. seeing ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as a continuum with blurred demarcation rather than bipolar extremes, I suggest that we can easier understand how people in Sharlung explain that Phuntsok is ‘just like a man’. Such explanation recognises a significant difference of sex and gender in local terms, which, according to Gyatso, is also found in some medical commentary. Very useful to the case of Phuntsok is, I believe, an analysis that Gyatso describes, made by one of the most influential medical commentators called Zur mkar ba Blo gros rGyal bo (sixteenth century). He suggests that there might be a deviance between a fixed sex and what he terms a mind-continuum (sem gyud, similar to personality). By separating sex and mind, he points to the difference in permanence, and argues that while the latter can

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123 The third sex is described in various ways in the Indian and Tibetan texts, but the Tibetan texts seem to include at least three subtypes; asexual neuters, hermaphrodites, and those changing sex every half month (Gyatso 2003:97).  
124 Ma ning is also used in Tibetan grammar connoting neuter gender of words, i.e. word classified as neither masculine nor feminine (Rinchen Targyal, personal communication).  
125 The physical explanation given in the medical texts for ma ning is an equal contribution from father’s and mother’s substances in child’s constitution.  
126 According to Gyatso, Luce Iraray developed the notion of ‘mucosity’ in ‘Sexual Difference’ (1991).
change during a lifetime, the first cannot. He concludes that ‘there can be a woman who possesses a man’s mind-continuum, but that does not automatically mean that she has actually become a man’ (cited in Gyatso 2003:106). These observations enlighten the local notions of Phuntsok’s sex and gender characteristics. With these considerations from Tibetan medicine, we may conclude that Phuntsok could well be seen as an example of the possibilities for a manipulation of gendered labour division on the one side, but also pointing to the strict conditions for such manipulation on the other.

If gender categories are open to manipulation and their borders are not strictly defined, do we see a gender egalitarianism in which the gender identification is one of individual choice of the men and women involved, and where men, as well as women engage in transgressing the borders of sex and gender? Obviously not. Gender manipulation is not only very rare, but more importantly, it is clearly a one-way process, in which women aspire to be men. Within Tibetan cultural logic, the opposite is considered absurd.

**The unequal value of men and women**

According to Lhasa friends, there is a group of male transvestites performing in one of their favourite *nangma* (nightclub). Their womanish appearance is a theme of great amusement, and it seems that their performance is entertainment, rather than daily life appearance. Apart from the *nangma* drag performers, I have not found examples of men appearing as women. When talking with people in Sharlung about Phuntsok, I asked if they had heard about a reversed process where a man lived and performed as an unmarried woman. I could not get an answer to this, because, I believe, of the absurdity of the question.127

Confirming the uni-directionality of gender manipulation is a phenomenon called *lunglo*. This is a widely shared idea in Tibet of a baby changing sex during labour, i.e.

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127 In neighbouring areas to Tibet, such as Mongolia and Nepal, there are known ritualized inversions where men act as women, and women act as men (Lindskog 2000). These inversions are commonly explained in the literature as ‘reversed rituals’ (as Gluckman once described it) that confirm the social order by reversing it in bounded ritual contexts. In Sharlung I was not able to find examples of such reversing practices.
from the moment of still being inside the womb to the moment of appearing to the labour assistants (see also Levine 1987a:290). Lunglo is a rather common incident that is seen as a result of harm (nöba) caused by ghosts or bad spirits (döntri) during the course of the labour.\footnote{In early Buddhist texts the sex of a person is described as something that can change within one life, as well as between lives. In the Vinaya, rather than being results of spirit attacks these changes are referred to as being karmic in nature. Apparently the Buddha himself accepted sex change, both from woman to man, and from man to woman, as is described in the Vinaya to have happened with a monk and a nun. Further, in the Dhammapada commentary, sex change is not seen to limit the spiritual potential of the person (Harvey 2000:Ch. 10).} In the Tagrab House, lunglo has happened to the two youngest of the three girls. Nöba from a döntri is very common during birth, and most women will seek protection from lamas or other local religious experts during pregnancy in order to resist such forces. According to Lobsang Drolma, the mother of the girls who changed sex, a döntri can cause three degrees of harm during labour: the first and most serious is the death of both mother and child; the second is the death of the mother or the child; and the third is the change of sex of the child. Lunglo is seen to be a physical process, involving a substitution of genital organs, which can be partly observed by the labour assistant(s) present. The mother, on the other hand, will never be able to see the actual transformation. There are some general indications of lunglo that also the mother might observe, the most important being that blood appears before the child, and often in two phases. During the birth of Lobsang Drolma’s youngest daughter, both Tashi-la and Orgyen (her youngest husband) were present and claim to have seen the baby’s penis disintegrate (mepa cheba).\footnote{It is interesting to note that the word used to describe the change from a penis to a vagina, mepa che, does not imply a transformation of something to something else but, rather, something dissolving into nothing. One can only speculate, but this might indicate a perception that men and women share certain underlying features, and that men have an additional organ in the penis.} Both cases of lunglo are talked about as unfortunate occurrences.

Interestingly, there are no known incidents of a reverse process, that is, a baby girl turning into a baby boy during labour. In fact, such question is met with a similar sense of absurdity as the question of gender manipulation from man to woman among my informants. As Lobsang Drolma said: ‘I don’t think it is possible to change from girl to boy, I have never heard about this. Maybe if you are very lucky! But, nöba (harm) could...
not bring that.’ Lunglo is caused by harm, and it is an incident producing unwanted results, while the change from a girl to a boy would appear to be a positive and fortunate incident. Lunglo can be characterised as a process of downward gender mobility. Similarly, but reversed, gendered labour categories are manipulated only by women performing as men, in a process of upward gender mobility. Both these processes reflect gender norms involving a hierarchical relation of women being subordinated and of lower value than men.

WOMAN AS INITIALLY PERIPHERAL AND PROCESSUALLY INFLUENTIAL

My intention with this chapter was to discuss aspects of gender and marriage in Sharlung. The main concern has been to analyse roles and positions of women in polyandrous marriages, in the context of broader gender models. In doing so, it has become apparent that concerning women in Tibetan societies, there is a significant discrepancy between ideology and practice, on the one hand, and between the different ideological perceptions, on the other. In Buddhist ideologies we find both misogynic attitudes and a deification of the female principle. Of these, I have pointed out, only the former is made relevant in people’s daily life in Sharlung. The ideological subordination of women is reflected in the generic attitudes shared by both men and women when depicting women as inferior to men. Further, the notion of women as less-valued beings is found to be underlying the one-way processes of stretching gender boundaries.

Having said that, this chapter has aimed to describe more nuanced gender relations as manifested in daily life, both in terms of marriage relations and distribution of work within the household. In practice, then, we see less rigid gender opposition. Women, and particularly namas, convey their situation to be one of a potentially strong influence. Through alliances with their several husbands, namas in polyandrous marriages gain central positions in a household and a House throughout their lifetime. The potential for an influential position in the household is greater, I have argued, for women married polyandrously than for those married monogamously as the former have more husbands with whom to build a close and supportive relation.
Looking at how *namas* describe their own situation as influential, their preference for polyandry, and their contribution in the common economic endeavour of household, it is problematic to solely focus on one hierarchical gender model in order to explain women’s positions in polyandry. As an alternative, I have suggested to expand Levine and Schuler’s ideas of certain individuals being peripheral to the social order of things. I have argued that when comparing *namas* with the younger husbands in a polyandrous marriage, a clear similarity becomes apparent, namely the peripheral roles that these manifest. The degree of periphery varies with life phases, and for the *nama*, roles can develop from peripheral to central, depending upon the number of children she has born into the House, and her relations to the other House members. With time, then, *namas* might become the female head of the household and, hence, occupying a central position in the House. A perspective focusing on periphery and centrality to the social order of things, that is, the perpetuation of the House enables us to combine gender and relative age as important criteria for rank and positions, the latter discussed in the previous chapter.

There is one crucial difference between a *nama* and the younger husbands, namely the process of establishing a secure position in the social group. While the peripheral husbands are ascribed their positions, *namas* achieve hers by personal abilities to form alliances and affectionate bonds. As such, their positions are more vulnerable than those of their younger husbands. At the same time, most *namas* has the opportunity to establish a leading position within the House. This is only very seldom a possibility for younger husbands. In other words, the *nama* should not only be seen as structurally subordinate; rather, her position should be understood as one of greater potential in terms of becoming central to the social order of things.

As with many peoples around the world, women in Tibet have particular responsibility for the activities in the domestic sphere. This sphere is the space for production and reproduction. However, it is also the space for ritual activities that concern not only the individual members of the House, but also the residence group as a corporate unit. Similar to what is known from South Asia, many of these domestic ritual
activities are conducted by women (cf. Bennett 1983). In the following chapter, I turn to the house as a bounded ritual space. The house, I shall show, is more than a physical building and the manifestation of a social group, it is also a ritual space that offers protection to its members. The wish to secure a strong and powerful enclosed house should also be understood in relation to folk religion, and the elaborated beliefs in the co-existence of humans, animals and spiritual beings. Further, the various ways of guarding a house reflect central social and cultural values such as centripetality and verticality. This, I shall argue, are found also in marital preferences and practices.
9. The lhakhang on the upper floor.

10. The yangkhang with the namo of the middle floor.

11. The lukhang with theumo in the lowest floor.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE POWERFUL FORTESS:
Enclosure of ritual space

Every morning, just after ten, I could hear Mola’s whispering chants. When the sun started to warm up the air, and people were already busy with the chores of the day, she lit the bowl of incense (sang) and slowly said her om mani padme hum prayers. With repeated whispers and the juniper smell of burning sang she walked through the spaces of the house. Starting in the room of the hearth she encircled the water reservoir and waved the incense into all four corners. She left the first room and carefully blew the sang towards the stone hearth where the much appreciated barley beer was boiling. Approaching my room, Mola greeted me smilingly while she continued to mumble her prayers, and let the sang spread itself out into the corners, around the sitting and sleeping section and the door. She continued into the neighbouring ‘precious room’ (yangkhang) and dispersed the sweet smell around the grain and to the shrine of the House protector. Following this, she entered the ‘room of religion’ (chökhang) and continued there, making sure that the sang still burned and the smoke spread out into the air. After this round she climbed the ladder to the roof and let the smoke transport itself with the wind. Coming down again, she smiled and said: ‘Now, the house is clean (khangba tsangma sō tsar).’
Throughout the previous chapters, I have mostly dealt with marriage preferences and practices, and analysed crucial aspects of polyandrous marriage arrangements as found in Sharlung. In these analyses I have described the polyandrous House as a socio-symbolic institution that the eldest son comes symbolically to represent, and within which his younger brothers and their wife are more or less peripheral to the fundamental order of things. Within this order of things, I have emphasized the possibilities of individual manipulation in the process of consolidating positions within such House-oriented social organization. The previous chapters have been placed within the House-debate in anthropology by pointing to the significance of putting emphasis on the conceptual constitution of the local domestic group as a socio-symbolic institution in order to develop an analysis of changing marriage practices. This present chapter turns towards the physical aspects of houses, and seeks to establish some common values of social, symbolic and spatial organization as these relate to rise of polyandrous Houses.

In order to analyse my informants’ expressed wish to strengthen the residence group (khyimtshang) it is crucial to investigate not only the social and economic aspects, but also, I suggest, the inherent symbolic meanings of this group. This chapter deals with the house as a physical building and focuses on its internal spatio-symbolic organization. My intention is two-folded; first, to describe the spatial organisation of an inward focused character seen primarily in architectural features; second, to see the house as a symbolic space in which the cosmological order unfolds. The house in which people live their daily lives and to which their sense of belonging is strongest, is also a symbolic unit that not only reconfirms a cosmic order, but also places the individual, as inhabitant of the house, in its proper place within the same cosmology. Moreover, the house is a bounded ritual space from which the individual inhabitant gains crucial protection. This chapter focuses on the protective character of the houses and argues that the symbolic, cosmological and ritual aspects are inherent to the value of the khyimtshang, and to the cultural meaning embedded in this social unit. Hence, in order to develop a broader understanding of the inter-relations between the social transformations of the residence group and the increasing practices of polyandrous marriages, I shall below describe these elements and put emphasis the house as a bounded ritual space. Much of the terminology and analysis
of the various forms of house protection and the process of reinforcing a bounded ritual space is taken from Mills (1997).

Much of the anthropological literature that concerns the house and its architectural and symbolic forms have tended to be excessively coherent analyses within which all parts are found to fit perfectly into a structured whole (see Cunningham 1964; Schulte Nordholt (1971) writing on the Atoni; and Forth (1981)). Structuralist perspectives have dominated the earlier writings on spatio-symbolic organizations of dwelling places and continue to bear influence on more recent work as well, although in moderated versions (see Waterson 1991; Sparkes and Howell 2001; Howell 1995). Critical voices have pointed to the contextuality of symbolism, emphasising the significance of co-existing, often contradictory, symbolic domains rather than the presence of one symbolic code to be cracked (Ellen 1986). I sympathize with Ellen’s warning against an ethnographic search for a stringent symbolic order which underlies all spheres and domains, and with his concern with the prevalence of differing symbolic orders, to different people, at different times (ibid.:4). However, I believe that only very few scholars that write on the House today would oppose such contextual perspective on the construence of symbolic meaning. The question seems to be to which extent contextuality is given preference in the analytical projects. In Sharlung the relations between the physical house and other collective representations make apparent significant symbolic values, and the perceptions of these symbolic concurrences are to a large extent shared by those inhabiting the house. Hence, in the following, I do not argue for a complete contextual perspective on symbolism. Rather, I hold that the overall spatial structure of the interior house is a microcosmic representation that divides space into three levels and these three levels constitute a fundamental and non-contextual world order. In the detailed spatial organization within the three-tiered arrangement of space, however, the contextuality of symbolic domains is highly relevant. My concern here is the overall symbolic structures and the underlying spatial principles and values.

Central to earlier studies vernacular architecture is the representation of the house as a book ‘in which the order of [the] world is recorded’ (Schulte Nordholt 1971:432, in Waterson 1991:xvii). Bourdieu’s writings on the Berber house (1977) also suggest that
the house is an embodiment of cultural messages.\textsuperscript{130} Here, Bourdieu starts the turn from structuralism to praxis theory. Although he describes the Berber house in structuralist terms emphasizing oppositions in the spatial-symbolic arrangements, his main interest seems to be the internalization of the cultural messages in these structures. He finds the answers in bodily movements within the house and points out that the children read the house ‘book’ with their bodies, ‘in and through the movements and displacements which make the space within which they are enacted as much as they are made by it’ (Bourdieu in Waterson 1991:xviii). The body, he writes, embodies the structures of the world in inhabited space (1977:89). My interest here lies not so much in the socialisation of the individual, but rather in the ‘cultural messages’ expressed in a house. As such, I lean on structuralist approaches. However, I do not claim that the messages apparent in a house are reflections of an external structure that constitutes an objective and permanent cosmology. Rather, my interest is to investigate the interior spatial symbolism of the house, and its concurrence with cosmological elements in order to delineate conceptual distribution of the cultural values of centripetality, verticality and enclosure relevant to social processes also found outside the house. These, I believe, can inform our understanding of social processes, such as marriage and kinship. The house then is primarily as an introduction to cultural ideas and values, rather than a reflection of a world order (which it can also be) as such.

It will become clear through this chapter that the house in Tibet is by no means a randomly organised place. It is spatially structured in layers (and to a certain degree cardinal directions) that to a large extent concur with central elements of the local cosmology. These layers are also reflected in the perceptions of the body. Further, and this is my main interest here, the house is a bounded ritual space that secures protection of the individual as a member of the residence group. As such, for the individual the house is an extra layer of skin (cf. Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:2). Just as the openings of the body are associated with ambivalence and are carefully protected (Desjarlais 1992:45), so are openings of the house.

\textsuperscript{130} Commonly, the allegory of a house and a book has been used on societies without writing traditions (Bourdieu 1977; Schulte Nordholt 1971), however, I believe that as a metaphor the house has a broader relevance.
A FORTRESS-LIKE ARCHITECTURE
Tibetan vernacular architecture has, at large, been overlooked in the development of Tibetan studies. Although sacred architecture has been an established topic for a long time (Tucci 1961; Paul 1976; Khosla 1975; Chayet 1988) this is not the case for lay buildings. With the exceptions of Pommaret-Imaeda’s brief description of Ladakhi construction techniques (1978), Diemberger and Schicklgruber’s preliminary notes on Khumbo architecture (1988) Toffin’s edited volume on *Man and his House in the Himalaya* (1991), as well as the elaborate Lhasa Atlas by Larsen and Sinding-Larsen (2003), little has been published on dwelling places as found among common farmers and pastoralists in Tibetan. Such dominant emphasis on monumental and formal buildings is found in most architectural studies, not only in Asia but world-wide (Waterson 1991). However, in more recent studies, there has been a renewed interest in vernacular architecture, seen particularly in Southeast Asia (Waterson 1991; Fox 1993).

Oliver points out that ‘dwelling’ has a double significance in that it is both a process and an artefact. It is this doubleness which encompasses the ‘manifold cultural and material aspects of domestic habitation’ (1987:7), he claims. Likewise, Waterson notes that the study of houses as inhabited space that is constructed and used in daily life can provide us with a method to study the social world of the houses’ creators, as well as cultures of which they are parts (1991:xv). Vernacular architecture in Tibet reflects the social and cultural world that people inhabit, not only in terms of cosmological elements of the interior symbolic organization of the house, but also in terms of underlying values of social organization.

Scholars have seen Tibetan dwelling places as spatial reflections relevant to the symbolic representation of social organization. Stein notes that early sources depicting Tibetan society and dwelling places describe these as tents that were organised into concentrically enclosed camps. This, he argues, can reflect the many mobile warrior horsemen of the Tibetan kingdom, as well as a necessity for the king to travel in order to keep the country under control (1972:118). At the same time, a strong principle of basing one’s power in an estate defended by a fortified castle existed along with the extreme mobility of the tents, particularly for the warring aristocracy. The fortified castles in questions were often nine-storied houses and defence towers (see also Amundsen 2003...
for a study of similar fortresses in Bhutan), that only to a limited degree are found in Central Tibet today. However, as Stein notes ‘even the dwelling-houses are fortress-like.’ From the thirteenth century, Stein writes, ‘a family was defined as a house’ (Stein 1972:120), which included domestic animals and fields. Hence, the house, rather than the tent, became the metaphor of the basic social group.

While houses in other parts of the world are extraordinary in terms of architectural elaboration, or special in terms of simplicity or impermanence, Tibetan vernacular houses are perhaps neither. They are nevertheless perfectly adapted to the difficult natural environment of the Tibetan plateau, where wood is scarce and material alternatives are meagre, but where the cold and windy climate strengthens the needs for solid houses. However, as Humphrey points out, ‘the structures and forms of dwellings do not just reflect some ill-defined adaptation to the environment. They have purpose and intention’ (1988:17).

The houses in Sharlung provide individuals with, as Maréchaux notes from the Indian Himalaya, a ‘profound sense of security’ (Maréchaux 1991:224). Physically they protect against fierce winds and cold climate, and ritually, they protect against misfortune, harm and pollution (see photo 5 and 6). The houses in Sharlung are for the most two-storied rectangular buildings made of stones, dried mud-bricks and the bare minimum of wood. Their architectural expression varies both in terms of size, paint, use of windows, elaboration in decorative work and ritual protection. Many of these building processes reflect the socio-economic position of the household involved. There is, however, not a 1:1 relation between the architectural elaboration and the social standing of the House. In the village, there are newly-built large and extensively decorated houses corresponding to the rank of the House (Dagpo, see below), older less elaborate houses hosting high ranked Houses (Lungko and Shamshar in particular), and architecturally grand houses of low ranked Houses (particularly the artisans). According to the villagers some of the houses are more than 100 years old. These days, people are eager to rebuild their houses; in fact, villagers told me that people from this particular area of Panam are

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131 The Yumbu lhakhang in Yarlung Valley is a famous example of the royal families’ castles.
132 Stein also notes that architectural elements of the house expressed kinship structures, such as the word for beam (gdung) that also denotes pedigree (1972).
well known for their investments not in offerings to monasteries, but in the rebuilding of houses.

Upon approaching a house, a tall stonewall meets the visitor, framing the gate that consists of either two solid doors or, in the simpler constructions, one of less solid character. This gate is called *chigo*, meaning the ‘outside’ (*chi*) door (*go*), and it marks the entrance to the house. Entrance through the gate is restricted, and but with well-established relations to those living there, a visitor can enter the courtyard. However, an outsider should not enter the house itself without an invitation. The many beggars (*longkhen*) living in the neighbour village often visit houses in Sharlung in order to ask for food. When the beggars approach a house they do not touch the gate, but conscientiously keep a distance and wait for House members to come outside. As such, the beggars observe the strictest rules for approaching a physical house. Upon one of these visits by beggars to the Tagrab House, Mola explained that they always give something to the *longkhen*. This, she said, is because ‘if we don’t give them what they ask for, they might come inside.’ As the *longkhen* are perceived to be ‘dirty’ (*tsokpa*), their presence, inside a house and inside a courtyard, pollutes the physical building and threatens the well-being of the House. Widely distributed local norms inform how a particular person in Sharlung should approach a particular courtyard and house, and these norms depend on the nature of social relations and the degree of distance of those relations.

The courtyards vary in size and also in use, but they should at least shelter the draft animals, such as the cows, the *dzo* and the horses when they are not grazing in the mountains or in the cleared fields, as well as the young calves, lambs and kids in the period when they need extra care. Also, the much-feared watchdogs are chained in the courtyard, and spend all their life there. Depending on size, people use the courtyards for

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133 See Chapter Nine for details on *longkhen*, concept of pollution (*drip/ drip tsok*) and social exclusion.
134 Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) mention that, in Andean communities, the implicit rules concerning the approach of visitors to the space surrounding a house is reminiscent of Hall’s classic cultural analysis on proxemics. Hall introduces the terms ‘intimate space’, where only the closest friends and intimates can enter, ‘social and consultative space’, where routine social interactions with acquaintances as well as strangers occur, and ‘public space’, where interactions are perceived as impersonal and relatively anonymous (1966). In such a perspective, the courtyard inside the outer door (*chigo*) is part of the intimate space and illustrates the extensions of the house.
additional needs, and some cultivate potatoes or labu (white turnip) in small fields, while others build shelters for tractors and other mechanical equipment.

Despite the architectural variations, landed Tibetans share aesthetic ideals in vernacular architecture, independent of financial means and social background. The differences in the architectural forms found in Sharlung, in terms of physical size, decorative and protective elaboration are consequences of the economy of each particular household. In terms of shared values in the shaping of physical houses, the variations are, I suggest, superficial.

Located close to the chörten of the village, the Sobnub house is a rather typical architectural example of a household with only limited means, although they are not amongst the extremely poor in the village. The house has two stories, where the ground floor hosts the two cows, while the people reside on the first floor. The house itself is small (some 70 square meters of which only two rooms are roofed), and the courtyard in the southern side is only barely large enough for the tractor parked there. Both the stone fence and the walls of the house are without paint, which reflects the lack of means to provide the white lime used by others in the village. Compared to its neighbours, the small, dried mud-coloured building does not loom as a massive fortress in the landscape, but appears as a modest place. The stone fence is not very tall, and as the building itself is small, the one big window in the first floor dominates the front of the house and gives a rather open impression.135

Enclosure is a shared value that is architecturally enabled by increased economic means, which is seen in the wealthy and influential Houses that dominate the village both visually and socio-politically. The Dagpo house illustrates the massive building styles of those with financial means, and represents the fine architecture of farmhouses in Tsang. The house was rebuilt four years ago after a flood damaged the previous building. Close by, the ruins of the old house are still visible, showing a smaller version of today’s Dagpo. According to my informants in Sharlung, Dagpo is seen as the most beautiful house in the village and represents the ideal architectural style in the valley. Upon our arrival in Sharlung, we were often told that we should visit Dagpo to see their beautiful

135 Large windows are becoming increasingly popular in Panam, and most new houses have at least one big window in the main room (tabshang).
house. The Dagpo covers an area of some 200 m², and the courtyard appears exceptionally large compared to other village houses. The house is a two-storied rectangular building built in a North-South axis; the entrance faces the East, as is common in Tibetan vernacular architecture (as opposed to sacred architecture where the entrance is placed to the South; see below). Wide walls form the basis for the mud-brick constituents and support the heavy weight above them, and the heavy burden gives a heavy-bottom look. The massive walls rise tall, with only small window openings in the ground floor. The walls are painted white, and the large windows of the southern and eastern side of the first floor dominate the upper part of the house with their surrounding broad black paint to attract the warmth of the sun. With its massive size and style, Dagpo indeed appears as a fortress-like building to which access is limited and enclosure is the ideal.

According to my informants, there have been only limited architectural changes in the village during the last decades and centuries. However, today there are more houses in the village than ever before, and many of these seems to be built according to the traditional architectural styles of the former upper classes (see Fjeld (2005) for similar observations in Lhasa). Recent houses are generally bigger; that is, they are expanded horizontally, but not vertically. The windows tend to be made larger and the roofs are decorated with a black line of paint covering the mud bricks around the house, which was traditionally an indication of a high ranked House. These architectural changes reflect a general process of increased social status for many farmers (see Chapter Nine), and access to cash due to off-farm activities enabling the purchase of expensive wood. Further, I suggest, these architectural ideals that are found in the former trelpa houses, such as the Dagpo, and could be seen as part of the same process of ‘trelpaification,’ in which farmers establish domestic groups of corporate nature by the arrangement of polyandry and the incorporation of other trelpa practices.

THE SPATIAL AND SYMBOLIC ORGANIZATION OF THE INTERIOR HOUSE
House construction in Tibet clearly links ritual principles and activities to cosmology; it is the place within which cosmology unfolds. The relations between the spatial and
symbolic aspects of a house and cosmology are universally widespread, and should likewise not be ignored in the Tibetan case. Although Amundsen is not entirely right when she claims that there is a complete lack of studies focusing on ‘internal distribution of space’ (2003:209), the studies found are few and from the periphery of the Tibetan ethnographic region, such as Ladakh (Murdoch 1991) and Gyalthang (Corlin 1980). In the last decade there have been an increasing number of pastoral studies in Tibetan areas, and although it seems that the mobile lifestyle of the pastoralists is central to the scholarly interest, very little attention has been given the tent (dranak) as a dwelling space with embedded cultural meaning (Manderscheid 2001 is an exception).

Much in the same way that has been shown from around the Tibetan ethnographic region (Mills 1997; Toffin 1991; Samuel 1993), the houses in Sharlung are constituted by three conceptual levels. This three-tiered arrangement of space and its inherent cosmological reflection is the most visible principle of a house’s interior.136 A house hence consists of the upper (thog), the middle (bar) and the lower (‘og) floors, arranged by the principle of downward verticality. Inherent in this vertical axis are notions of purity and impurity and the conceptual significance of upper – lower. In this symbolic axis the upper level is purest; with proper treatment, this level has encompassing qualities that might incorporate the impure, a point I will return to.

Each level of a house is inhabited by different beings, seen in the localisation of the different types of shrines. In Tibetan popular cosmology the landscape has three levels, and these correspond with the three-tiered organization of the house interior: the realm of the gods (the non-corporeal deities with wide-ranging powers, such as the yul lha and the pho lha); the realm of humans (and animals, and numerous spirits, such as the sadag (lord of the earth), the tab lha (god of the stove), the chu lha (god of water), as well as demons (döntri) and evil spirits (dü)); and the underworld which is the realm of the serpentine spirit (called lumo in Sharlung). 137

136 For instance, Jest notes that the text used by people of Dolpo in Nepal when they build their houses describes the order of the world in three levels (1991).

137 Among other Tibeto-Burman peoples the tripartite world order is termed lha yul (land of gods), mi yul (land of people), and dmyal ba (hell) (Dejarlais 1992:43).
**Cardinal directions and the upper – lower rationale**

As a general pattern Tibetan farmers’ houses are built facing the east, reflecting to some extent the value of cardinal directionality, but more importantly an upper – lower rationale. Typically, the northern part of the house is designated to ritual activities while social activities take place in the southern part, because, as Tashi-la explains: ‘It is light and the furthest away from the North.’

Manderscheid (2001), in an article on the distribution of ‘the black tents’ from Persia to Tibet, points to the symbolic and pragmatic dualism of the interior of Tibetan pastoralist tents (*dranak*). She holds that the left side of the centrally placed stove is the seating and sleeping area for women and children, as well as the storage room for the equipment needed for female chores. The right side is the place for men and guests, as well as the implements operated by men, such as weapons and equipment for the larger animals. At the rear, she writes, ‘is the sitting place of honor and the family shrine’ (ibid.:162), as well as the storage room for religious objects and excess butter. Mandelscheid points to the similarity between the spatial organizations of the *dranak* in Tibet and the Mongolian *ger* (Tibetan: *gur*).

Manderscheid does not clarify the directional pegging of the Tibetan tents. The non-mention of cardinal directions has some implications for the understanding of spatial and symbolic organization. In Mongolia, the tent is placed on a north – south axis, where the rear of the tent always faces the north; that is, the opening of the tent faces south (Lindskog 2000). According to Jest (1991) the Tibetan tent is erected somewhat differently so that the entrance faces towards the east. Despite its difference in terms of directionality, the Mongolian and Tibetan pastoralist tents share the fundamental organization based upon the value of upper versus lower. The rear of the tent, whether found in the north or west, is perceived to be the sacred space, that is, highest on the symbolic axis of pure – impure. It is the location of the Buddhist and ancestor shrines. Opposite, the entrance is seen to be ‘down’, hence the impure space. The up – down rationale is also found in the sleeping patterns in a tent, where people should keep their heads positioned upwards towards the shrine, and the feet downward towards the opening (Lindskog 2000; Jest 1991; Manderscheid 2001). Hence, the perceptions of the body reflect the value of verticality and the conceptual concurrence of high and pure.
The value of verticality is hence represented in a horizontally laid out Tibetan tent, but also reflects the three-tiered levels of symbolic space. The rear of the tent is the upper level; the right, masculine side is the middle level, while the lower level is the left, feminine side. As found in Tibetan house as well, this tripartite is reflected by the location of the shrines. Jest (1991) describes from Dolpo that, while the rear of the tent is the place of what they call the phug lha (god of ancestors), a dedication to the bcan (tsen) deities is placed on the male side, and an offering to the lu (lumo) is located in the female side.

In the houses in Sharlung the cardinal directions are of guiding importance, although these do not constitute a rigid formalism to the houses’ layout. As Tashi-la noted above, the main place for socialization (the tabtshang) is located to the south due to its maximum distance from the north. His explanation indicates that polluting human activities, represented by the hearth (tab), should be separated from the pure area of religion and sacred offerings. As found in the tent, the underlying spatial organization of a house is based in a vertical symbolic axis in which pure: impure :: high: low :: upper: lower. While in Mongolia, these pairs of oppositions also correspond to the directions of north: south (Lindskog 2000), in the Sharlung houses this is not the case.

The entrance of the houses, as in the Tibetan tents, most often lies to the east and is regarded as being ‘down’. The furthest point away from the entrance (‘down’) lies in the north (‘up’). There are exceptions to the directional placement of an entrance, but the alternative is, as far as I have been able to observe, only to be found in placing the entrance in the south, never to the north or west. In the houses I have observed in Sharlung, the ‘room for religion’ (chökhang) and the shrines of the House protector are located towards the north. Hence, the axis of upper – lower seems to be more fundamental to the spatio-symbolic organization of the house than the cardinal directions as such. At the same time, the North, as the upper point in the horizontal layout of symbolic verticality, constitutes the pure ritual space to be protected against the impure activities of the area ‘underneath’ (‘og lo), both among Mongolian pastoralists and Sharlung farmers and, as such, should be seen as being of another character than other cardinal directions. In the following I shall describe the three levels of Sharlung houses, examplified by the layout of the Tagrab house. The distribution of pure and impure space
and the protection of the former, shall illustrate the value of verticality and the symbolism of enclosure.

**The uppermost floor (thog lo)**

In a corollary, the symbolic levels are placed on top of each others, reflecting the level of pollution associated with the different floors. The highest floor (thog lo), that is, the uppermost point of the house, is the place of limited activities. It is regarded as the purest place in the house and, although accessed only seldom, it is an important part of the house. The roof is connected to the first floor by a permanent wooden ladder, and is open to all House members, independent of age or gender. The cardinal directions on the roof are marked by small offerings consisting of collections of *soma* (hay), *datar* (ceremonial arrows with flags), stones, as well as yak horns\(^\text{138}\) and offer barley. When I asked about the recipients of these offerings, people answered in differing ways, mostly saying that ‘We do so that good luck will come (yang len).’

Typically, in the Tagrab house, the roof is decorated with various offerings. In the northeast corner is an elaborated collection of *ushing* (twigs) with white flags, surrounded by white round stones, a yak horn and empty bottles.\(^\text{139}\) These offerings mark the northeast corner as an auspicious place. Two *ushing* with flags are placed above the entrance to the house, that is, half way in between the southern and eastern point of the roof. In the southeast corner an additional *ushing* is placed, together with only one large white stone with *soma* underneath. Stones holding down the *soma* are placed around the whole roof area, albeit only one in the south, one in the southwest corner, and one in the west near the southwest corner. There is a cumulative increase of *soma* and stones as one approaches the northern side of the roof. In the west, close to the northwest corner, three stones are located. One bigger stone marks the actual northwest corner, while eight stones are spread out on the northern side of the roof. The ritual importance of the north, and particularly the northeast, is clearly apparent on this roof.

\(^{138}\) Yak horns are commonly used as offerings, symbolising *yang*, that is, everything prosperous. They can be presented either with or without the scull. In the latter case, the inside is filled with *ne*, *tsampa* and rice. According to Jampa, yak horns placed on the roof are offerings to the *lha*, while the horns on the ground floor are to the *lu*.

\(^{139}\) According to Tashi-la the bottles were placed there only because he liked them. I do not know what they might represent beyond that, but due to the limited access to bottles (of beer for the most) it might be a general offering of something seen to be precious.
More important than the *soma* offerings is the *lhakhang* (the house of god), located in the middle of the northern part of the roof. It is a small square house resembling the residence of the *yul lha* or other local *lhas*, built with mud-bricks and dirt and decorated with various offerings (see photo 9). Similar to lay houses, the *lhakhang* has its front towards the east. In the front, a small square hole with a black-painted frame resembles the windows of the lay houses. Inside this hole is the incense (*sang*) already offered and burnt. Pierced through the middle of the small house construction is a wooden stick surrounded by three *ushings* with white flags. The roof of the *lhakhang* is decorated in similar ways as the lay house, with stones and *soma* in the four corners. Further, a yak horn and a *khatag* are placed on the northern side of the *lhakhang* roof. The *lhakhang* is painted white, with a red line in the upper part of the wall. The red colour indicates that it is the house of a *tsen*, that is, a deceased non-ordained relative. Other houses have white-painted *lhakhangs* indicating that it is the house of a *gyebo*, that is, a deceased ordained relative. According to Tagrab Mola they built this *lhakhang* at the same time as the house itself, because the *tsen* had insisted (through the *lhaba*) that he would follow them into the new building. Also, she said, ‘He has lived with us for a long time now. We wanted him to have a house so that he would not be angry.’

The *tsen* and *gyebo* spatio-symbolically correspond to the *lha* that resides in the upper regions of the landscape. These are powerful deities (*lha*) that need to be pleased by regular offerings and should not reside among polluting humans (living on the first floor). However, while the *lha* that resides in the high mountains are benevolent primarily, the *tsen* and *gyebo* are not. In wealthier areas of the Tibetan ethnographic region, most houses have built a smaller second floor hosting the *chökhang* alone and then the *lhakhang* is typically built on its roof (Mills 1997:124). In Sharlung, however, the *chökhang* is always located on the first floor. In the first floor, it is located in the northern part.

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140 For more information on *tsen* and *gyebo*, see Samuel (1993:162).
The middle floor (*bar thog*)

Under the highest floor is the level inhabited by humans. This level is associated with household activities; human and social reproduction, social activities (between the residents) and hospitality (towards guests). One enters the first floor by a ladder placed towards the eastern wall. The ladder leads to the open space central in the house, that is, the uncovered area surrounded by roofed rooms. The middle floor is separated into the lower and upper areas, which in Tagrab’s case correspond to the southern and the northern parts, where the former is the place of the *tabtshang* and the latter constitutes the sacred space.

The *tabtshang* is where the hearth (*tab*) is placed, where the women prepare the daily cooking and all those sharing meals gather in the evening. It is the space for the water reservoir (with the *chu lha*), all kitchen equipment and for the valuables that belong to the House as a unit.141 Moreover, the *tabtshang* is the sleeping room for the grandparents, unmarried members of the house, and the children that are no longer nursing; that is, those who are not in the reproductive phase.142 In Tagrab, as in most well-off Houses, the *tabtshang* is a large room, decorated with white auspicious patterns (*kartsi*) on the wall, offering seating arrangement for some fifteen people. The *tabtshang* is the heart of social life in a house; it is the prime site for producing (socialization of children) and reproducing (daily interaction) a sense of belonging and relations of relatedness.143

In addition to the *tabtshang*, there are six other doors leading into the seven rooms on the middle floor; in addition to the toilet on the western side, there is an offering room (*chökhang*), a treasure room (*yangkhang or norkhang*) that consists of two smaller rooms,

141 Most important are the books for happiness (*karto*) and suffering (*nakto*), i.e. the lists where the help received and offered from one House to another is registered (see Chapter Nine).

142 Being reproductively active is a significant distinction made in Tibetan household organisation also elsewhere. As already mentioned in Chapter Four, Mills (1997, 2001) describe the two different houses in Ladakh as those of the reproductive couples (*khangchen*) and the non-reproductive members residing in the offshoot houses (*khangbu*). In Sharlung, the distinction is made in the internal spatial distribution rather than in external arrangement. The *tabtshang* differs from the *khangbu* in many ways, as it is the main room of the house where all House members eat together and where the guests are entertained, hence, it is the space for socialization and hospitality.

143 Also located in the lower part of the house is the stone *tab*, on which women boil water and *chang*. In Tagrab, this *tab* is placed outside the *tabtshang*, in a corner of a small in-between space protected against the wind by a roof and tarpaulin. The *tab lha* is not a receiver of elaborate offerings, but is merely included in the quotidian *sang* offerings (described in the opening of this chapter). This traditional stove is the residence of the important *tab lha*, one of the gods that follows a House upon moving (see below).
two bedrooms, as well as an extra room that is still not completed with a roof due to lack of wood. On the southern side of the house, lies the small bedroom usually used by the nama and her eldest husband when he returns from his travels. The two bedrooms are used interchangeably by the two husbands. These rooms host human activities of all sorts and, together with the tabtshang, constitute the lower part of the middle floor.

Independent of cardinal directions; higher is the opposite of lower. While the lower part includes the southern, eastern and western parts of the house, the upper part is, in Tagrab, the north and northeast only. The northern part of the middle floor is the location of two significant rooms: the chökhang and the yangkhang. These are the main offering sites in the house; connecting production, prosperity and religious activities. The chökhang is said to be an important room as it is where the Buddhist shrine with statues, religious texts, photos of religious experts, and other Buddhist items are placed. A large shrine is located against the wall on the northern side of the room, that is, the farthest away from the entrance door. The activities in the chökhang are restricted, however the room is not completely closed to outsiders. On the contrary, people’s chökhang is often a source of pride. First of all, the chökhang is the room for visiting monks performing House rituals, such as chölog (the reading of religious texts) or purifying rituals. It is the location of the ritual activities and where the monks sleep if an overnight stay is needed. Further, if one of the House members is a nun (or a monk), she (or he) will have her room in the chökhang. In exceptional situations other people seen to be morally righteous might stay there, but this is very seldom. The restrictions of the use of the chökhang are founded in a wish to keep the room clean. As Mola says: ‘People are dirty. And their acts bring dritsok (dirt [pollution]).’ Certain human activities produce pollution of various kinds and to various degrees. Sexual activities are strongly prohibited in a chökhang, while other bodily activities such as washing, cooking, spilling used washing water, and spitting should also be avoided. Every morning during Samdrup’s stay in the chökhang, Mola was careful to clean the room with sang, hence keeping the space as pure as possible.

144 As mentioned in Chapter One, my co-researcher was offered to sleep in the chökhang during our stay in the Tagrab House. This was because of his knowledge of Buddhism, and later, his righteous behaviour.
The yangkhang is the second place of ritual significance on the middle floor. The wealth of a House is closely dependent upon its ability to secure agricultural production, and the relation between the House protector (*namo*, also called *norlha*) and material wealth (*yang* or *nor*) is of major concern to the House members. The yangkhang is the main storage room, where the year’s production of grain is kept in large, hand-made woolen bags. The yangkhang contains two smaller rooms, where the inner room can also be used as a bedroom for House members only. In the first room, where mundane human activities should not be conducted, is the location of the *namo* shrine (the House protector; see photo 10). She resides in the northeast corner, up on the wall, overlooking the crops. Access to the *namo* shrine is restricted, and non-members of the House should not enter the room.

Hence, although the chökhang and the *namo* technically are located on the middle level of the house, these are withdrawn from the household activities of this middle floor; they are outside the human realm. The beings inhabiting these rooms, and the activities associated with these symbolically place these areas as part of the upper floor. As with the pastoralist tents, the upper – lower rationale does not presuppose a technical vertical lay out, but is also found in a horizontal organization involving directionality and the symbolic concurrence of ‘north’ and ‘up’. It is important to note in the case of built houses that the relations of up – down should not be seen as a homology to north – south, because the cardinal direction of ‘down’ varies according to pragmatic concerns.

**The ground floor (wokhang)**

The entrance of the house itself (*nanggo*) leads to the ground floor. In some houses, one has to walk through parts of the basement in order to reach the first floor, but in most places the basement is avoided upon entrance. The ground floor is where the animals are kept at night and where mostly women work (milking, assisting animal birth, keeping the animals in general). The basement of the Tagrab house is organised horizontally into storage rooms for hay, places designed for milking of cows and protection rooms for lambs and kids. Surrounding the northwest corner is the storage room where hay and farming implements are kept. Opposite, in the southeast corner is the room for newborn lambs and kids. Walking into the main area of the ground floor, we reach the brighter
spot, where the roof opening lets the sunlight onto the milking place. Animals are tethered both in the north and in the south sides of the room. Walls are built in all corners of the floor, providing various storage spaces for all kinds of objects, such as an old and useless bicycle, a broken kerosene lamp and empty boxes to be used later.

In symbolic terms, the most important object in the ground floor is located on the northern side, highest up under the roof in the corner where the north wall meets the storage room in the northeast corner. This is the location of the *lu* (*lumo*), an underground serpentine spirit found either in water, earth or trees (see photo 11). The *lumo* can be vindictive when disturbed, causing illness in both people and animals. Located below the shrine of the *namo*, she has powers that primarily influence production and is closely associated particularly with milk. The women of the House (usually the *nama* in the reproductive phase) are responsible for quotidian offerings to the *lumo*, and this, Lobsang Drolma explained, is because ‘If we don’t offer the cows will give less and less milk.’ Later when discussing the offering rhythms of the various supernatural beings in the house, Tashi-la pointed out that it is only the *nama* that can offer to the *lumo*, because ‘She needs breast milk’. When I asked Lobsang Drolma about how and when she makes the offerings, she explained:

*I have to go on auspicious days. We look in the [astrological] calendar and find the Palden days. On some of the Palden days I offer three times. Some times I have to wait for a long period. I have to put different things into the container (pumba); I put three sorts of agricultural produce (shing), a few lungta, and grain blessed in the monastery, and some flowers from the fields. Lumo likes flowers, and we try to find tsanga metok since she prefers that. These things should always be there. Then I take pangbô [a small plant that grows in the high mountains], dry it and crumble it into small pieces and put it into the pumba. In one side I put the pangbô, and in the other side I put tsampa and sugar and make fire. Then I make the offering.*

In Sharlung, there are two types of *lumo*: one with a kind personality that influences the milk production, and another who is easily angered and who causes great harm to people and animals. The latter lives in the earth, and ‘If they get dirty they turn angry and cause
illnesses.\textsuperscript{145} Attacks are usually caused by unknown lumos that have been disturbed in their dwelling place and therefore try to force people to build a shrine for them to reside in. To humans a lumo can obstruct the flow of blood in the veins (tsa) causing great pain. These attacks are often recognised by swollen limbs and skin rashes that make the arms and legs resemble snakeskin, people say. She can also harm animals, particularly sheep and goats, whose eyes then grow out of proportion, and, in severe cases, fall out. Lumo-related illnesses are cured primarily by building a new shrine and, through the guide of the medium, inviting the lumo to stay. In severe cases where this strategy is found ineffective, people consult the ngagpa in Gangkar who is known for his effective healing by blowing (pug gyeba) on the affected areas.

Not all houses in Sharlung host a lumo, and it seems that it is only the more recent houses that do not (yet) accommodate one. In the older Houses, however, and in particular the ones with a very long history, three or four lumos co-reside. Independently of the presence of a lumo, the ground floor is regarded to be a feminine place. It is the potential place for the serpentine deities and it is the place of the female household tasks. It is also the dirtiest (tsokpa) place,\textsuperscript{146} at the bottom of a pure – impure axis pinned through the house. As such the ground floor symbolically corresponds to the underworld. The lumo rules the space under the earth and, with the establishment of a lumo shrine, the ground floor is established as an area removed from human social activities.\textsuperscript{147}

The local cosmological tripartite is hence reflected in the shrines of the house: the lhakhang on the roof, the shrine for the namo in the first floor and the lukhang in the basement. These shrines manifest the levelled spaces as the designated realms of existence, where lhas inhabits the upper level, humans inhabit the middle level, and the serpentine deities reside in the lowest level. Moreover, particular activities are associated with these three levels; these are offering, socialisation and hospitality, and production. The four beams running through the floors might be said to manifest the verticality,

\textsuperscript{145} One of the reasons that toilets are built inside the houses is, according to some of my informants, to avoid polluting the ground and hence upsetting the lumos.
\textsuperscript{146} As discussed in the previous chapter, pollution is closely connected to women in a very general way.
\textsuperscript{147} Only in exceptional cases do people reside in the ground floor. Some local nuns, who refused to live as a householder after the political closing of the local nunnery in 1960, for instance, chose to reside in the ground floor. By doing this, they marked avoidance from the activities of the first floor associated with production and reproduction and established a semi-ordained environment in the ground floor.
where the highest level of purity has a potentially encompassing quality (see the cleansing rituals below).

Much the same as what Mills describes from Ladakh, the spatio-symbolic organization of the Tagrab house can be drawn out in this way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Inhabitants</th>
<th>Shrines</th>
<th>Realms</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper floor</td>
<td>Gods</td>
<td><em>Lhakhang</em></td>
<td>God realm</td>
<td>Offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Toglo</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>(including chökhang and the namo)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle floor</td>
<td>Humans</td>
<td><em>Tab lha</em> and <em>namo</em> (House protector)</td>
<td>Human realm</td>
<td>Household activities: reproduction and social reproduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bar thog</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower floor</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td><em>Lukhang</em> (shrine for the lumo)</td>
<td>Underworld</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wokhang</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: The interior of the house with its physical, social and cosmological elements (cf. Mills 1997).

**The house as microcosm**

In the literature on dwelling places in the Tibetan ethnographic region, scholars eagerly apply the concept of ‘microcosm’ to describe the spatio-symbolic interior of a house (Jest 1991; Mills 1997; Corlin 1980; Ramble 1996; Amundsen 2003). However, throughout the literature the implication of the application of such a term remains somewhat unclear. As Lindskog (2000) points out in her study of Mongolian *ger*, the very term ‘cosmos’ denotes an idea of an ordered whole. She argues that in order to operate the dichotomy microcosm and macrocosm, ‘one must seek out whether these relationships are imaged as comprehensive, ordered wholes or only as parts, that is, as spatially manifested complex of symbols reflecting cosmological values …’ (ibid.:93). I agree that we need to
analytically separate a house as a microcosm from a house constituted by parts that spatially manifest cosmological values. The difference lies in two aspects: whether the parts constitute an ordered whole, and whether such ordered whole is reflected, or reflects an exterior whole. In the Tibetan case, I hold that the interior of a house could be seen as a microcosm, by which I mean a structured whole manifesting hierarchical cosmological values found in the exterior environments.

Anthropologists dealing with the symbolic organization of lived-in structures have for the mostly sought to find a concordance between the house and other collective representations, rather than simply to claim microcosmic status for the house (Ellen 1986). Cunningham’s classical analysis regarding the order in the Atoni house, for instance, illustrates an additional perspective to the conceptual understanding of the house as microcosm. He points out that the Atoni house is not simply analogous to cosmos, but it is integrated within it (1964:50). I believe that his point about dwelling places being designated parts of a world order is still important to make. Most likely this is true in cases where the house has cosmological elements; as there will always be a human realm within a cosmology, and in this realm, humans dwell in their houses. Similarly in Sharlung, the house is built in the middle level of the world order, in the human realm, and the spatio-symbolic organization of the house reflects this world order as well as reproducing it. As Phylactou (1989:67) writing from Ladakh: ‘Lived space simultaneously constitutes one of the spatial divisions described, and also reproduces these hierarchies within its boundaries’ (quoted in Mills 1997:115).

Critical scholars have pointed to the connotations that the concepts micro- and macrocosm have in terms of representing ‘frozen’ and statically ordered wholes. Underlying is an implicit assumption that the symbolism of the house is somewhat like a puzzle where the pieces could be fitted into one ‘correct’ pattern (Ellen 1986:4). It is not my contention that the hierarchically ordered cosmological values in a Sharlung house can only be understood as structurally ordered in the presented way. Rather, this perspective is one among others. However, as already mentioned, I suggest that the underlying tripartite is a fundamental spatio-symbolic structure that is contested to only a very limited degree, if at all, among Tibetans in Central Tibet. Here, the main point that I make in the application of microcosm is the importance put on the enclosure of the ritual
space that the house constitutes. In the ritual processes to be described below, the House is re-established as a symbolic whole within which the underlying principle of vertical purity is re-confirmed.

The vertical axis of the spatial organization of the house can hence be seen as a reflection of a verticality found in a cosmological order exterior to the borders of the house. Dollfus points to the fact that the notion of height and elevation are highly esteemed in the Tibetan world in general and links this notion to the creation of a hierarchy of space and man, where the high is pure and the low is impure and to be despised (1996). In addition to cosmology, the value of verticality is also found in local perceptions of the body, of nature and popular celebrations of geography, and as Ramble has pointed out, in time (1996, 1999).

Although the human body is inherently impure, it is so to a varying degree. An important criterion for the evaluation of bodily purity is verticality. The perception of the foot sole as the dirtiest place of a body is perhaps universally recognised. In Tibet, numerous proverbs and rules for proper behaviour illustrate the dirt of the foot sole and the lower part of the body.148 In the Tibetan ethnographic world, the body, the house and the village are seen to be autonomous wholes joined together and symbolically organised in concentric circles. The symbolic correlations between houses and bodies have been found in various societies worldwide (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 2) and these do not only refer to local anthropomorphic representations of houses, but also to notions of symbolic similarities. As the upper point of a body and a house consists of (more) pure space and the lower point of a body and a house is less pure, the body and the house become reflections of the other.

The notion of bodily pollution is gendered, as the male body is perceived to be less impure than the female body. The interconnection of male:high:pure, on the one side and low:female:impure, on the other is seen in classification of male and female parts in the spatio-symbolic organization of Mongolian and Tibetan nomads’ tents. These symbolic interconnections are reflected in sacred geography in which the high mountains are male (yab) and the rivers and lakes are female (yum). Although these ideas of yab

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148 One proverb I was told concerns the need to prevent children from crawling under somebody’s knees or feet due to the serious implications: ‘When being stepped over the body will not grow.’
yum relations in the landscape are complementary in character, the mountains peaks are always higher than water which, according to local understanding, as here represented by Lobsang Drolma in the Tagrab House, shows that ‘men are more important than women.’ Although I did not find indications of male and female parts of the house, I hold that the gender models reflecting the vertical distribution of the male and the female as these are represented in sacred landscape and elsewhere also inform the vertical character of interior houses. The value of verticality in Tibeto-Burmese cultures could be seen as ‘downward-bearing verticality’, as suggested by Ramble (1999:151). This, he argues, is found for instance, in the vertical dimension in Tibetan notions of time. The concepts of upper (stod) and lower (smad) also denote the earlier and later periods of a chronological sequence. These terms inherently represent a process from earlier: upper to later: lower, which can also be found in popular representations of elevated landscape that ‘commonly begin at the top and work down’ (op.cit). I shall return to the issue of downward bearing verticality towards the end of this chapter.

The House, as a dwelling place for humans and supernatural beings, has a designated place within this cosmology; hence, the House is one part of the whole. At the same time, the House mirrors the whole, and as such it is a microcosmic representation in spatio-symbolic organization. These cosmological aspects of houses should not be overlooked, not only because they constitute the immediate world for the individuals residing there, but also because they are connected to architecture and the elaboration of built space. Shared architectural ideals in Sharlung value the large fortress-like houses; large, inaccessible and protective. The house constitutes the enclosed ritual space within which the individual member gains not only a designated place within a cosmological order, but also an extra layer of protective skin between the individual body and the communal village.

PROTECTIVE HOUSES
For Tibetans, the world is a place of danger, and many activities evolve around finding protection from these various dangers. Central to both the perception of danger and the possibilities of protection is the co-existence between humans and supernatural beings in the samsaric world. Humans and animals live amidst capricious local gods, hot-tempered
spirits of the ground, and numerous ghosts and demons that influence health, fertility and
the weather (Tucci 1980; Samuel 1993; Mills 1997; Lichter and Epstein 1983). In
Sharlung, as in other Tibetan communities, people rarely regard misfortune as accidental
or coincidental. Rather occurrences (positive and negative) are seen to be results of
material circumstances often found in the relations between humans and the supernatural
beings of this world. Explanations of misfortunes have several levels, the most
fundamental being karmic retribution (le). Yet, according to the villagers with whom I
discussed these issues, people make little effort to determine an actual cause of a karmic
retribution. Rather, other sources of mischief and harm were sought. Of these harm
brought by demons (trimön) and spirits (dü) is regarded as most common. These spirit
attacks could take a number of forms and include the wrath of a tsen or a gyebo. While
the former is the fierce spirit of a former male House member who has not been able to
reincarnate and leave this worldly realm, the latter is a former ordained House member
suffering the same fate. Further, two types of women are perceived to attack and bring
harm: shintre, who is the female version of a tsen, and söntrema, who is an aggressive
and jealous woman that is alive. Mischief is also commonly brought by ritual pollution
(drip), which is particularly strong in relation to birth and death, as well as in the post-
harvest period (see below). While karmic retribution is found to be individual, spirit
attacks are very often communal; that is, they harm a group of people whether these
belong to a House, a village or potentially a nation state.

The prevalence of demonological thought is relevant to the various ritual practices
found in Sharlung, both on the village level and, most importantly here, concerning the
House as a bounded ritual space. As shall be discussed in the sections below, a significant
aspect of the house as a physical and symbolic building is its ability to provide security to
the individual members of the social group identified with the building. There are
numerous methods to stop harm (nöba gag), as well as numerous contexts where
protection acts are needed. Although villagers regard the yul lha (god of the place) of
Sharlung to be particularly powerful, he cannot reach the individual Houses directly.

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149 These are the explanations given by my informants. However, Samuel, citing Cornu (1990), gives a
different description, writing that tsen are ‘red spirits who live in the rocks. They are all male, and are the
spirits of past monks who have rejected their vows’. About gyebo, he writes: ‘The gyelpo or “king-spirits”
are said to be the spirits of evil kings or of high lamas who have failed their vows’ (1993:162).
Therefore, a House needs its own protection. The physical house is a vulnerable building that is under continuous potential attack, as a manifestation of a social group, as a producing household, and as the dwelling place of people. The protectors of the House provide security to the people living there and, importantly, to the House as a corporate group.

The relation between local numina and Buddhist deities of Tibetan folk religion is an issue of great concern within the established Buddhist discourses (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956; Ramble 1996; Karmay 1996; Samuel 1993; Tucci 1980). The major protectors (chökyong shungma) are connected to both Buddhism and Bön religion, but Tibetan folk practices are characterized by being strongly based in localities and often contradictory to both of these textual religions (Ramble 1996). In their daily life, my informants relate to the local deities, and they define these as being more closely associated to Sharlung as a place, although they recognise that these deities are in some cases contradictory to Buddhist soteriology.\footnote{The contradictory practices towards local numina and Buddhist deities are returning topics raised by visiting lamas to the valley. During the teachings given by Tulku Rinpoche, the sponsor the local nunnery, the villagers were told repeatedly that they should stop offering to the ‘gods of this world’, due to their limited power, and concentrate upon Buddhist protectors. Afterwards, people I talked to just smiled and said they knew that the local lha provide help for them.}

Protection against misfortune takes various forms depending on the defined cause. Mills define two main forms: the static protection placed on the building itself and the episodical purification of ritual pollution involving Buddhist protectors and local deities. Both forms reconfirm boundaries of the House and re-establish the House as a ritual space separate from the surrounding natural and social landscape; establishment of purified and bounded ritual space crucial to the protection against harm.

**Static protection: protecting the openings**

In most Tibetan houses we find strategies for protecting the physical openings of both the outer (chigo) and the inner door (nanggo). While talismans empowered by a local religious expert often protect the inner doors, sigils, in the forms scorpions or auspicious signs such as the eternal dot, are often placed on the outer door. The latter does not involve religious experts; it is rather placed on the initiative of the inhabitants.
A house is filled with protective items and representations, and people in Sharlung are, as are most Tibetans, concerned with rituals and acts of protection as inherent parts of daily life inside, as well as outside, the house. As Mills (1997) notes on Ladakhi houses, the exterior and static forms of protections do not primarily involve ritual cleansing, but rather concern boundary maintenance of the house. Much in the same way, ritual protection of the houses’ insides and the outsides as performed in Sharlung concern the demarcation of the house borders and the continuous reproduction of the cohabitants as a restricted social group in the village context.

The inside – outside opposition, and its related values, can be seen in various cultural and social contexts in Tibetan communities. Desjarlais writes from his work with the Tibeto-Burman Yolmo in north-central Nepal: ‘Motifs of inner and outer, depth and surface, and openings and closures pervade Yolmo understanding of psychology, knowledge, and medicine’ (1992:45). The concerns with what is inner/inside and what is outer/outside are, as noted earlier, reflected in perceptions of the body, the house and the village, as well as religious companions. In Sharlung, as elsewhere in the Tibetan ethnographic region, people use the term nang, meaning ‘inside’ and ‘home’ (Goldstein 2001:604), in various combinations and with various meanings. Nang in its various combinations often refers to those being ‘insiders’, that is those who constitute a group sharing significant internal characteristics and, most importantly, having common external borders. Most commonly, nang is used in the words denoting ‘Buddhists’ (as nangba), and family (nangmi). Here, my interest is found in the latter, nangmi, and its symbolic reference to those residing inside the walls of the same house. The nangmi, usually translated as ‘family members’ (Goldstein 2001:607) are, according to Tsering, a young man in Sharlung, ‘the people you live together with.’ Crucial to the value of living together is to be protected by the same physical and symbolic walls.

When entering a house’s inner door (nanggo), one meets the first empowered protection force of the house itself, a talisman called nöba gagya (‘harm stopper’). The nöba gagya is empowered by a lha (god) through the lhapa (the medium) and is a collection of various auspicious objects. Blessed and donated by the local medium, it was

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151 Nangba is also used to denote the Tibetan nationality, although there are well-established groups of people that practice Bön and Islam and who are still considered by local Buddhists to be Tibetans.
given as a response to a problem of the particular house. Hence, not all houses have this protector, although most do. The nöba gagya contains Tibetan calendars, khatag (ceremonial scarf), animal feet and small animal bodies, eggs and yak hair, and protects the house from harm caused by various sources, most often referred to as demons (döntri) (see photo 12). As already mentioned, in Sharlung the döntris are mostly individuals who have been unable to reincarnate and thus remain in this world as supernatural beings with power to bring mischief. The most powerful beings are the tsen (a former relative), gyebo (a former monk relative), shintre (or tremo, deceased unrelated or related women), and local demon spirits such as a döntri or even the otherwise peaceful sadag.

Walking around the Tagrab house with Mola, I asked about the history of the nöba gagya hanging above the entrance of the inner door. She explained:

> We’ve had it for many years. It was also in the old house. After we built this new house, we had some problems with the animals. Many got sick. Also, our daughter got sick. So we asked the Chunup lhaba what to do. We thought that it was an angry lumo. But the lhaba said that we had to bring the nöba gagya from the old house to stop ghosts (döntri) and ‘jealous women’ (shintre). They were causing the mischief to come (nöba yong), he said.

The contents of the nöba gagya have been collected through many years. Initially it was a protection against one particular ghost that was harming the House; this the lhaba controlled by attaching blessed khatags above the inner door. In the years following, the lhaba recommended a continued protection of the entrance and provided additional blessed objects. The nöba gagya, as other static protections, are perceived to physically hinder the entrance into a house. Rather than to remove the bad spirits, the lhaba’s blessings subdue these so that they no longer wish to harm the house.

Independent of social status, Tibetans guard the openings of their houses. The symbolic harm stoppers in the outer and inner gates mark the protected physical and symbolic building to which people identify themselves and are identified by others, and they restrict the entrance into its inner areas. Common to these houses is the resemblance that they bear with the historical fortress of the Tibetan ethnographic region. At the same time, the fortress-like architecture varies in degree in Sharlung, indicating a connection
between social status and the ability and need to protect. The unnamed houses very often lack the static protection of nöba gagya or sigils on the door. This may be due both to the short biography of the household, in which protection devices have not yet been employed, and to the limited economic means of these households, which make it impossible to build large, fortress-like houses.

**Protecting beings and their entrance into a house**

A house is not protective entity in itself; they must be filled with protective forces. The House protector, the *namo*, is connected to both the physical and the social house, and upon rebuilding, much effort is put into her transference into the new house. The House protector (*namo*) has often resided in the same House for a very long time and, people say, is often unwilling to move. Much concern is put into the actual moving, as many of the *namos* are seen to have strong personalities that easily get upset. Below I shall describe in some detail the process when a House moves into a new house. I do this in order to illustrate the symbolic nature of the interior space of a house, and to point to the association between houses and bodies.

After a new house has been built, that is, after the roof has been successfully put into place and properly celebrated (*togchang*), the moving process can start. Moving involves people, animals, practical and symbolic objects, and spirits and deities. In the moving process the new house is transformed from a physical house (*khang*) to a socio-symbolic House (*khyimtshang*). The main symbolic act is to move the House protector, the *namo*, and when she accepts the invitation to enter and settle in the new house, the building is invested with new symbolic meaning. Inherent in this meaning production is the biography and social status of the House under protection, and as such the *namo* is a representation of a House as a socio-symbolic institution in time and space.

The *namo* is not the first thing to be transferred to the new house; rather her move completes the establishment of ritual space. First, the house is filled with objects that symbolically represent household activities. Tashi-la explained:
The first we have to bring is the dojung, a mortar. Dojung has the similar sound as the pecha – the tenjur – so when we bring the dojung into the house it brings luck [yang].\footnote{The significance of the mortar, primarily symbolically, reflects the power of naming. A mortar is pronounced dojung, however spelled sgog bdrung, and, according the Tashi-la, the pronunciation bears resemblance to tengyur, the sacred commentaries of the Buddhist scriptures.} So it is most important to move the dojung first. After that we move the tsala [a traditional heating device that is no longer used for cooking, see photo 15].

The dojung and the tsala practically and symbolically initiate the process of moving, transferring the hearth that unites the household. Following the process of emptying the old house and transferring the mortar and the tsala, the people move into the new house. This, I was told, takes around three days. After the transfer of the symbolic household items, people start to prepare for the closing phase of the move, namely the transfer of the supernatural beings of the House and, most importantly, the House protector (namo).

The namo of Tagrab is very powerful. She protects not only the individual member but also the House as a whole, and has several names that for the most refer to motherhood, such as ama namo-la, ‘the honary mother protector.’ Lobsang Drolma explained: ‘She is the mother of the House [kyimtshang kyi ama]. Namo is very powerful, and she is easily upset. We have to treat her carefully and give her the offerings she needs; otherwise she might be angry and nöba thang [bring harm].’ The namo is talked about as a person with particular characteristics known to the people through the spirit medium (lhaba). During the yearly trips to the medium in the neighbouring township, Tashi-la asks the namo how they can please her and make her continue to protect them. The namo communicates through the lhaba and as Tashi-la said: ‘She easily gets angry [lung tsabo]. When we come to the lhaba she is angry and says that “I don’t get anything from you, just a little tsampa and just a little sang.” So she says that we should make more offerings.’

The namo is also associated with material wealth (yang). As already mentioned, her shrine is usually placed in the yangkhang, and she is also often called nor lha (nor meaning ‘jewel’, i.e. ‘the god of the precious’). The shrine consists of branches of trees called ushing. The offerings mainly consist of chang, tsampa, wheat, salt, hay, as well as dried meat called yang sha, symbolising the wealth in animals. The responsibility to
perform the offering is held by the female head of the House, although occasionally the 
nama offers before having gained headship. Offerings should be done on Saturdays or 
according to the lhaba’s advice, that is, at a different time than the other regular offering 
made inside the house.

The transfer of the namo is very much ritualized and structured by prescribed 
rules, and although monks should preferably lead the process, no Buddhist texts are 
recited or in any ways consulted. As such, it is an example of rituals that although being 
performed by monks, have a clear folk-religious meaning (see Ramble 1996; Mills 1997). 
Tashi-la pointed to the importance of creating the best contexts for the transfer of the 
namo, pointing to the hot temper of these numina. He said: ‘The time of the transfer is 
very, very important.’ I asked if they consult an astrological calculation, but he shook his 
hand in a way refuting that.

A transfer should only happen when it is dark, maybe after ten in the evening. Silence is 
very important. It should not be windy, and there should not be any sounds. This is very 
difficult, especially because of the many dogs that bark continuously. So we need much 
help to calm the dogs during the time of transfer.

I asked: Who participates in the transfer?

Only two people should participate, because it should be quiet. One of them should be a 
woman that lives there. The second could be anyone really, it is not important. But it is 
most important that the two persons are clean. They must wash their bodies and hair and 
wear clean or, preferably, new clothes.

The symbolic connection between the body and the house is again apparent, as the state 
of the body should reflect the state of the house; clean, and preferable new. The issue of 
dirt or pollution is also important in terms of providing a good environment for the 
transfer of the easily upset namo. Dadul holds that the second person to participate is not 
randomly chosen but is preferably a monk from Daching as they are not ‘dirty (tsokpa).’ 
Common to several of the local deities in Sharlung is the fact that they are easily upset by 
uncleanliness, and this is also true for the namo. Tashi-la continued:
The two participants are needed in order to carry the two items: one basket with food and offerings that the namo likes, and one large bowl of incense. The basket (potsi) should contain chang, tea, cookies, kambu (dried fruit), and ja mar thug (tea, butter and thugpa) and then be covered by a new apron. Then, small branches of trees, with colourful flags attached (datar) representing the five elements, are put into the basket. Namo-la likes these things; therefore we show these to her so she can follow the smells she likes. It is always difficult to know whether namo –la wants to leave or not.

I asked: Do you go to the lhaba and consult the namo about moving beforehand?

He continued:

No. No. If we ask her, she will say no. So we bring the baskets to lure the namo out of the old house. The two people whisper ‘please come, please come’ (pe ro nang, pe ro nang) and start to walk slowly towards the new house. They find the shortest way and do not stop along the way. When they approach the new house, they continue to whisper and hope that the namo has arrived.

A new shrine is not necessarily built immediately. According to my informants, people often wait until the spring to prepare a shrine, because the namo is thought to be fond of flowers available only at that time of the year.

After the namo is transferred, the house is regarded as safe. However, because a house has other supernatural beings that reside there as well, these should also be moved. The god of water (chu lha) and the god of the stove (tab lha) are represented by ushering and simply carried to the new house without ritual specifications. Except for the serpentine deities residing in the ground floor (lumo), the numina of the House do not need active ritualized transfer.\footnote{An angry lumo might cause hindrances to the people and animals that have moved. Hence, a lhaba is often consulted concerning the possible transfer of a resident lumo and, according to Tashi-la, most lumu shrines are brought to a newly built house. Further, in some cases, malevolent luminos take up residence in a newly built house. Then, the lhaba can lure the lumo to a different place, most often a beautiful place, for instance to a flowery meadow; however, this often turns out to be a complicated process of much repetition. A benevolent lumo will normally follow easily to a new house. On some occasions, of which the}
When totally new houses – that is houses that are not yet Houses – are built, the transfer processes for local numina are very limited, if held at all. Most new houses do not have a namo beforehand, and the serpentine deities have not yet established themselves there. Hence, the moving process is less elaborate in terms of ritual performance. Some named Houses remain without a namo for years. This is the case of Norshön, which upon the partition from Norkhang did not build a shrine for the protector. As Norshön Migmar said: ‘We have not experienced any problems yet, but if harm comes, we should seek advice from the lhaba.’ In the meantime, the individual members perform ‘long distance offerings’ to their natal protectors (kye lha).

When describing the process of house building, Tashi-la emphasized the celebration aspect of completing the house and the moving process that follows, in which the transfer of the namo holds a significant part. The house, then, is not only the physical building in which people perform their household activities; it can also be the residence of numerous numina that are intimately connected with the people, as well as the animals of the house. Further, as I have described above, the house is a symbolic representation of the world order within which humans and other supernatural beings live their lives.

Episodical protection: the exorcizing of demons

As we have seen in the former part of this chapter, the exterior protections of the openings in a house mark the boundaries between what is perceived as inside (nang) and outside (chilo). Further, we find in the openings items that protect and control the entering into the inside. These, I have said, are static protections that do not concern pollution directly; rather, they are ‘stoppers’ (gag) of harm and mischief caused by demons and evil spirits. These ritual activities, I suggest, confirm the house as a social unit and, more importantly, as a bounded pure ritual space, since they mark the House as a whole. Above I have mainly described the multifaceted House with its many inhabitants and protective forces. In what follows, I shall turn to yet another significant aspect of the

154 Gradually, supernatural beings will move into a totally new house, and the people residing there might build shrines upon the advice of the lhaba.
House, namely that of being the object for purification in cases when pollution has affected all the individual members.

I have already mentioned to fundamental causes of mischief can be delineated in a Tibetan worldview, namely karmic retribution and pollution. While karmic retribution is primarily individual, pollution, although produced individually, affects communally. A third concern is that of spirit attacks. As already described in the previous chapter, spirit attacks can cause illness and even death, and they can cause both harm both on individual and group level. The House space is continuously cleansed by incense, as Mola’s daily offerings described in the beginning of this chapter illustrate. However, more powerful purifications occasionally become necessary. These purification rituals are led by ordained monks from Daching monastery; they are primarily arranged when the House has been symbolically opened: either upon the birth or death of its members; upon the inclusion of new members by marriage or, also, upon bringing the harvest produce inside the house.

After the harvest was completed in the Tagrab House, Tashi-la had decided that they should invite monks to perform ritual activities that cleansed the House of potentially present demons and bad spirits. In the Tibetan cosmology, the dü represent some of the most harmful of the evil spirits, and the ritual to be performed concerned the exorcism of the dü. Sharnyi dütog translates as ‘the exorcizing of the demon by the essence of wisdom’ and is found in differing forms throughout the Tibetan ethnographic region. Common to these rites is that they are performed by at least four monks preferably in an established shrine-room (most often the chökhang), either in a monastery, in a house or in a designated sacred space for the village. According to the monks in Daching monastry, they are complicated and demanding rituals performed in order to remove obstacles and expel negativity.

For the ritual, the four monks arrived on the tenth day of the second tenth month of the Tibetan calendar.\(^{155}\) They settled in the chökhang (the religion room), and while Tashi-la and his nun daughter were serving tea. During the ritual, the sponsors provide food for the monks but, apart from that, their participation is limited until the very end.

\(^{155}\) According to Tashi-la, this date was earlier than usual. As I was leaving the village the day after, he decided to arrange the ritual before my departure,
Still, there is some excitement connected to the event, and the inhabitants pay close attention to the progress of the ritual.

The ritual has four main phases: the preparation and cleansing; the making of the representations and offerings; the offering; and, lastly, the exorcizing act. The *pecha* used during the ritual is of the same name as the ritual itself and it describes the procedures and prayers of the process. The tutelary deity of Daching monastery is Jikche, a wrathful manifestation of Jampayang, and the monks start by reciting prayers to him. During this initial phase the officiating monk is perceived to be transformed into Jikche, and thus made able to subdue the spirits and deities that shall be called upon thereafter. Following the Jikche recitation is the reading of Lama Chöba prayer. Then, the monks start to cleanse the House, that is, the first floor and the roof. They walk through all the rooms while they burn incense (*sang*) and offer barley, as well as sprinkle water (*chaptru*) from the ritual vase with the peacock feathers.

The second phase consists of the making of a new shrine to be placed in the centre of the *chökhang*. The monks construct figures of butter and *tsampa* dough, printing the animal patterns on the dough by using a traditional wood block. These are arranged on four trays that contain identical figures in identical numbers and are presented as offerings to the *dü* throughout the ritual. According to Tashi-la and the officiating monk, the *dü*, being an evil spirit and a type of demon, 156 expects animal sacrifice, and the *tsampa* figures offered represent these slaughtered animals traditionally offered in the ancient Bön religion. In addition to the *tsampa* animal offerings, the monks make two detailed figures of dough representing the *dü* itself and its protector. The larger *dü* figure is called *nedag* (owner of illness) or *yamdag* (owner of infection), while his guardian is simply termed *ngarmi* (strong person) (see photo 14).

When the *nedag* and the *ngarmi* are placed in the middle of the four trays the monks start to lure the *dü* to enter, initiating the third phase of the ritual. The monks recite the *pecha* at various lengths, and in this day in Tagrab they recited a shorter version lasting three hours only. When the *dü* is believed to be present the monks make the

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156 Goldstein translates *bdud* as ‘devil, demon, monster’ (2001:563), while Das writes: ‘the chief devil or antagonist of religion; the personified evil principle; the evil one’ (1902:666).
offering of the big torma to the nedag. At this time, the nedag represents and manifests all the evil spirits and demons that afflict the house.

In the last phase the monks ask for assistance to remove the dü-manifested objects. Six people are needed: Lobsang Drolma to carry nedag and Ani to carry its guardian, and four helpers (from Houses with dependency relations with Tagrab) to carry the trays with the various offerings. The procession walks in line leaving through the main gate, and the offerings and the figures are placed in the cardinal directions. Carefully, the nedag is left in the western direction (away from the pure space of the north, and the potential entrance in the east and south) while its guardian is placed towards the east. A short time after the figures have been put on the ground, sheep have eaten the dough, leaving only the clothes on the ground.157

Carrying the nedag away from the house cleanses its interior by exorcizing all evils. It is so not important, then, to where the dü is carried, but from where it is leaving. Although the house is a bounded ritual space within which the protectors of various types protect the individual, it is not a statically protecting unit. The house must be reinforced as a place that provides profound security, this is particularly important after the opening the house. The static protectors of the houses concern the openings; they control what, and who, comes inside. In extraordinary events the house must be opened beyond control, however, and these occurrences must be ritually handled.

The harvest is not only a joyful time; it is also a potentially dangerous period that has some negative moral connotations. To plough and harrow are perceived by villagers to be particularly sinful (dikpa) activities, due to the unavoidable killings of a multitude of insects. Further, bringing the harvest produce into the house is a process in which the wrath of local deities and spirits might arise. By exorcizing the dü after the harvest the Tagrab house is renewed as a pure ritual space and its borders are re-marked and enclosure is again secured.

THE ENCLOSED RITUAL SPACE

The concern with demarcation and enclosure of the symbolic space of the house is seen in architecture, in the static protections and in exorcizing activities. These indicate

157 In Lhasa, one can often find boxes with dough figures placed in the middle of an intersection, or in a trafficked road. These are removed from a purified house through the same rituals.
particular care for the physical and symbolic openings of the house. By ritual activities
the house is reinforced as this bounded ritual space that not only protects the individual
and the group to which it belongs, but also reflects the cosmological order and its proper
place within.

Villagers in Sharlung hold that membership in a socially and symbolically
powerful House is the most significant criterion to live a good life. The House is not only
a jural-political institution, connecting the individual with the state, or a social institution
that relates individuals to each other; it also places the individual in a relation with the
local numina, that is, in its proper place in the local cosmology.

By pointing to the inwards-focused processes, I do not, however, wish to indicate
that people in Sharlung are without inter-House relations. On the contrary, people are part
of complex social networks defined both on an individual level and on a group level by
the virtue of membership in a House. These networks are not primarily based upon
marriage alliances. The following chapter concerns inter-House relations and the
processes in which new social hierarchies evolve, enabling some groups to engage in
upward mobility, and others to reproduce and solidify their positions as low ranked.
Within these low-ranked groups, we find only monogamous marriages.
12. The talisman above the inner door.

13. A newly built stove in which the tab lha resides.

14. The owner of illness (nedak) and his protector during an exorcism ritual in the Tagrab House.

15. The traditional stove, tsala, is one of the first things moved into a new house.
CHAPTER NINE

INTER-HOUSE RELATIONS:
MORAL NETWORKS,
SOCIAL MOBILITY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The Tibetan is apt to regard
his acquaintances and friends
as closer - and more to be
depended upon in times of crisis –
than his extended kin group.
(Miller 1956:169)

If significant networks of Houses are not constituted in kinship terms, then how are inter-
House relations defined and operated? As with most subsistence economies, many
productive units in Panam depend upon periodical external assistance in order to prepare
the fields and harvest the land. Further, every named and unnamed house depends upon
others to perform necessary activities and rites to establish and re-establish its social
meaning. Although people, of course, establish individual relations within the
community, crucial moral networks of mutual assistance and social control are
fundamentally founded on membership in a local House. These relations might be
individually contracted, but, once formalized into relations known as ganyi and kyidug
ngalag, they are transformed to be House-based. Hence, Houses cooperate with Houses,
and individuals assist other individuals as members of particular Houses. The
significance that these networks have in village life should not be underestimated, and I
suggest, the loss of what could be termed ‘moral networks’ upon exclusion from a House should be understood as yet another incentive for the younger generation to remain within their natal place. As such, the dynamics of inter-House relations inform the local rationale of polyandry within which the keeping of sons with their natal group remains central.

Desjarlais, among others, has pointed to the continuous tension between the two cultural values of autonomy and interdependency among Tibetan speaking groups in Nepal, and argues that these frictions seem to ‘derive from socio-cultural dynamics common to Tibeto-Burman peoples of the Himalaya region’ (1992:47).158 Indeed, throughout the previous chapters I have pointed to the fact that in Panam there is a strong emphasis put on the value of centripetality; found in marriage practices and reflected in architecture and domestic rituals. These socio-cultural processes and preferences could be seen as related to a local value of autonomy. At the same time, people show a great need and will to cooperate in Sharlung, which reflects what Desjarlais terms as ‘the value of interdependency’ (ibid.). While the previous chapters have dealt primarily with the autonomy of the individual House, I now turn to the interdependence of these, i.e. inter-House relations. I do so by focusing on two main issues: first, the networks of which the individual Houses constitute parts; and secondly, social mobility and limitations of such. Central to these discussions are, on the one hand, the issues of mutuality and dependency and, on the other, the issue of pollution and restrictions on certain forms of village cooperation between the traditional farmers and the traditional low-ranked, skilled workers, that is, the blacksmiths, butchers, baru and the beggars.

By focusing on the moral forces of various material transfers, this last chapter aims to provide an analysis of inter-House relations that illuminates social differentiation in Panam following the reform period. The connections with marriage practice and the increase in polyandry shall become clear. The process of ‘trelpaification’ is fundamentally one of social mobility, and one central mobility strategy is the arrangement of polyandrous marriages, not only because polyandry is closely associated with the

158 See also Ortner (1978) and Goldstein (1971b). Ortner argues rather problematically that, while Sherpa religious principles value closure and autonomy, social bonds such as those expressed in mutual-aid relations value openness (ibid.:56). Goldstein (1971b) points to the balance of centralization and decentralization in the political and village organisation of traditional Tibet.
traditional *trelpa* estates in the area, but also because with a large personnel a House is able to expand both economically and socio-symbolically by taking on elements of patronage in the village.

This chapter thus deals with political issues of local distributions of influence, rank and good reputation. The analyses are founded in Mauss’ classical writings on the morality of the gift. Mauss’ main concern was to describe the gift as total social fact, i.e. as a process of exchange that ‘constitutes social life or “society” most generally and philosophically.’ (Sykes 2005:4). I see material transmissions as fundamental to sociality, in general, and to the constitution and continuation of social relations, in particular. In *The Gift*, Mauss makes the general point that a (material or immaterial) gift must be returned, and if it is not returned immediately, the receiver finds himself (or his group) in a vaguely defined debt that must be returned in some ways (Mauss 1990 [1950]).\(^{159}\) A relation of ongoing gift exchange is thus an open relation. Differing somewhat from Mauss’ emphasis on the ‘power of the gift’, my concern will be the social relations and categories seen in their materialised form, rather than the value of the material transfer as such. As Strathern has pointed out, it is the relation and not the object itself that is the crucial point of analysis in terms of gift exchange (1995; see also Sneath 2006).

Inspired by the last decades’ writings on caste relations in India, I shall take village co-operation networks and the flow of values within these as a vantage point in order to discuss social formations and differentiations.\(^{160}\) By doing so I seek to emphasize the complementarity in locally structured relations and point to the processual formations of social categories, while at the same time defining borders and limits of these social interactions and forms.

\(^{159}\) *The Gift* is one of the most influential texts in anthropology (and perhaps also in sociology), and the points made by Mauss have been taken to support a wide range of later theoretical projects, including both formalist and substantialist perspectives on economy. Here, I shall use Mauss as a reference to the by now well-known fact that giving and receiving immaterial or material values produces and reproduces social bonds. Thus, I shall not discuss the analytical implications of Mauss’ project as such. Although I am sympathetic to the critics of a general use of *The Gift* without relating the main points to the underlying frame of thoughts (see Parry 1986, for instance), I do hold that the Maussian perspective on the morality of gift giving and receiving is adequate in itself.

\(^{160}\) Post-Dumontian studies of social organisation in India have to a large degree sought to nuance the colonial notions of castes as bordered, fixed entities of people with particular customs, and to investigate the contextual meanings of rank, local manifestations of power and influence, and the transactional nature of the jaimani system (Marriott 1959; Parry 1979; see Raheja 1988 for a thorough discussion on the issues of hierarchy and power in caste studies).
FORMALIZED MORAL NETWORKS
Tibetan village organization has been known for its intricate and elaborate mutual aid networks (Miller 1956; Aziz 1978b). These networks vary in their contextual relevance, in strength and moral character, in time span, and in spatial distribution. However, they all share the common characteristics of being well-developed and clearly outlined; most importantly, they operate by the principle of mutuality. The various exchange relations are activated in different spheres of life: some for agricultural production, some for travel assistance, some for building houses, and some for life cycle rituals. According to my informants, in Sharlung assistance and mutuality have been established practices for a very long time. When the collectives and brigades were introduced in Sharlung in the 1960s, the people were no strangers to the idea of co-operation. Having said that, there are significant characteristics of the practices and meanings of traditional aid networks that separate these from the collective era, and these concern mainly mutuality and moral obligations. The named relations and networks to be described in the following are, as we shall see, historical establishments of various length and content, activated in a manner that villagers perceive to be traditional and authentic.

Starting on the lowest level, an individual takes part in social networks of their common House members, friends (trokpo), relatives (pun) ganye, kyidug ngalag, co-villagers, and people from the region. Underlying these are various obligations and expectations; however, common to all is a sense of closeness that is made contextually relevant. Some of these relations are individual, and some are House-based. The long-term House-based relations manifest a morality of obligations, while individual relations to a larger extent involve a morality of expectations. In addition to these long-term social relations there are relations of labour exchange (lerog) and wage labour (mila) in the villages; these are contracted between individuals and households, but these should not be understood as House-based. I argue that, for the low-ranked groups in the village, all relations with the commoners take the forms of labour exchange (lerog) or wage labour (mila).
**Ganye – the dear and near of an individual and a House**

Ganye is a contraction of *dga’ po* and *nye bo*, meaning ‘likeable’ and ‘close.’\(^{161}\) The term denotes both a close and dear associate, on one level, and the particular ego-centric network of those defined as close and dear associates, on another level. Importantly, ganye relations are formed on the basis of House membership, i.e. a set of ganye follows upon inclusion into a House, and the same set remains within the House after exclusion (upon death or partition). Individuals might establish new ganye, but these relations then are consolidated between the two Houses. Thus, if a person moves out and becomes member of another House, that person loses all his or her original ganye, and gains a new complete set of ganye following membership into a new House.\(^{162}\) The term itself cannot be modified (close or distant ganye are not possible), it is a permanent relation that does not decrease or increase in quality or strength, although it has to be activated in the necessary situations and contexts. As mentioned in Chapter Six, ganye are activated as conflict mediators particularly in intra-House conflicts and contested inheritance claims.

In 1956 when Miller published a sociological article on mutual aid associations in Tibet and Tibetan communities in India, very little ethnographic material was available from Tibet to Western scholars, leaving these issues of rural organization and assistance outside the hegemonic scholarly focus on Tibetan history and religion. In 1978, however, Aziz continued Miller’s work, analysing a group of exile Tibetans from Tsang residing in India, and provides an excellent analysis of ganye relations as found amongst her informants. She argues that ganye networks were of crucial significance for cohesion and reciprocation, not only in the exile community of study but also in their place of origin in Tibet. Aziz defines ganye as a moral system that has a ‘particular nature, distinct from the moral systems that guide other social behaviour, e.g. family ties, economic choices, and piety’ (1978b:4). It is a wide social network, and a set of people (often known to each

\(^{161}\) Miller quotes her informants in Darjeeling and Sikkim and translates the meaning of ganye as ‘social friend’, ‘close friend’, or ‘neighbourhood friend’ (1956:158). Aziz notes that some of her informants from an exile community of refugees from South-Tibet claim that the origin of the term is not *dga, as in* being fond of’, but from *ikar*, meaning ‘white’. This, Aziz argues, should not be seen as contradictory, as both translations denote ‘the bond of closeness’ (1978b:6). In Panam ganye is pronounced *gani*, but often with a weak r, as in garni. However, my informants are convinced that *ga* is an abbreviation of *dga bo*.

\(^{162}\) Just as a nama receives the ganye of the House she moves into upon marriage, a makpa does the same in his wife’s House. However, those moving out in order to establish a new household start without any ganye and must initiate a new set. This is found to be a difficult and vulnerable situation for the new household.
other) forming an unbounded category with no corporate aspects in terms of common goals or functions.163

In Sharlung everyone I asked had a set of ganye relations, although I found great variations in the size of such networks. There is a clear concurrence between polyandrous Houses of some size and large sets of ganye. When visiting Norchen, one of the traditionally minor trelpa-Houses in Sharlung, I asked the leader to name their ganye in the village. He said: ‘We have many, many ganye. Norchen is old and has a long history of ganye. It is the same for all the khyimtshang- there are many ganye now.’ The same seems to be the case of the former yokpo households now establishing themselves as named Houses. Wangchö is an example of such an ongoing transformation and the simultaneous process of developing a large set of ganye. Wangchö is the House where Jampa, the old man who told his narrative of liberation in Chapter Two, lives. This House has risen to become an influential House after the Household Responsibility System, through a combination of strategies and constellations of people. As Jampa explained, before the Democratic Reforms he was a poor yokpo of Lungko House, but he has since then taken up political positions in the village, built a large building to reside in, chosen a marriage form that secures the transfer of intact land, and sent household members to school for later to take up leader positions around the valley.164 By doing so, Wangchö has become one of the wealthiest and most influential Houses in the village, and many people want to develop ganye relations with them, because, as one said, ‘they are important people.’ The size of the ganye set is an indication, not only of the history of a House but also of its social standing in present time.

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163 After the dispersal of Tibetans in exile, ganye relations have regained their importance in new contexts. One Tibetan woman who grew up in India, but now lives in Norway, told me that when she was planning a trip to New York, her stepfather in India gave her a name of his gabo nyebo (as he said) living in New York. He told her that she could contact him and ask for his assistance, because of this man’s ganye status (Tsomo Svenningsen, personal communication).

164 Jampa’s children married monogamously (in the 1970s), and, while he wanted to arrange polyandry for the next generation, he only had one grandson. Of Jampa’s sons, two are township leaders and one works for the post office another nearby township. Of these three, only one son is a member of the House and is entitled to inheritance of the House, and only his children are legitimate heirs. The two other sons do, however, contribute to their natal House as well.
The public handling of Mola’s death

Aziz argues that one of the core obligations of *ganye* relations is information exchange, i.e. securing the flow of relevant information from the community to the individual (or his/her House) and the other way around. Such an obligation is a moral one and concerns the reputation of the individual, on the one side, and his or her unproblematic participation in the community, on the other. Similar concerns are characteristic of *ganye* relations in Sharlung as well. In addition, I would add that *ganye* have a responsibility to protect an individual against emotionally painful situations. As such, *ganye* is like oil in social interaction, from individual to community level.

This concern with avoiding emotionally difficult situations became clear to me upon my return to Sharlung for the last trip. Upon my arrival in Lhasa, only two days passed before I received the tragic news about Tagrab Mola’s death. It was Samdrup, my co-researcher living in Lhasa, who told me. It seems that Rinzin, the village teacher, had taken upon himself the task to inform us, and he had done so at some cost. As Sharlung is without a telephone connection, Rinzin had hitchhiked to the county seat and made the phone call to Samdrup from there. The question of why Rinzin found it important to inform us about Mola’s death before we arrived in Sharlung and found out then, seemed to be relevant. There is obviously an emotional side to this for Rinzin knew that both Samdrup and I felt connected to Mola and appreciated knowing as soon as possible that she had passed away. However, more interesting in this context are the implications of Rinzin’s deeds when I arrived (without Samdrup) in Sharlung some months after her death. I asked Rinzin about the circumstances of his phone call to Lhasa, and about the possible role of Tashi-la. Rinzin strongly denied that Tashi-la had any role in this; in fact, he said, ‘I don’t think he knows that I called you. He was mourning then; he could not think about other things. I called because it is my obligation. We are *ganye*, right. That is what we have to do.’

Since I received the news of Mola’s death while still in Lhasa, I could make the proper preparations in order to enter the mourning Tagrab House. Upon my arrival in Sharlung, I could be careful not to mention Mola, by avoiding both the opening phrases on the health condition of all family members and refraining from talking about our previous experiences together. Mentioning a person that recently passed away is
considered improper, not so much because of ritual repercussions, but most importantly because it reminds those left behind about their loss and their sorrow. Further, a visitor arriving after a death should present monetary gifts and a *kathag* to the House, while uttering condolences. A House where a member has died within the last year is a mourning House, and certain taboos need to be observed. Not being able to observe these customary practices would be considered embarrassing and emotionally painful, not only for the residents but also the visitor. By making that phone call on his own initiative, Rinzin, the Tagrab House’s *ganye*, secured a socially controlled and emotionally smooth return by an outsider to the House.

Involving the corporate Houses, *ganye* relations are defined by long-term obligations to assist in particular contexts and with particular concerns. This obligation is based on the morality of mutuality and described within the idiom of reciprocity; more so than kin relations but in a less direct and strict sense than other mutual aid networks.

**Kyidug ngalag – in happy and sad times**

As with *ganye*, *kyidug* is an institution of some pride among Tibetans. In Sharlung, the two co-exist; although they occasionally overlap, they are distinct in terms of history, function, and meaning. While both are based upon mutuality, *ganye* is social and emotional, and *kyidug* is material and registered by written contracts. In their work, both Miller and Aziz describe reciprocation (*ngalag*) as fundamental to the *ganye* bond. Aziz writes that local concepts of reciprocation are connected to *ganye*, as *ganye ngalag*; this is a specific form of mutual return where the mutuality lies in the obligation to return in equal kind. In other words grain must be reciprocated with the equal amount of grain, while labour assistance of one person must be returned with exactly the same (1978b:17).

In Sharlung *ngalag* is also very important as part of the local networks of cooperation. However, *ngalag* is not connected to *ganye* (as described by Aziz), but to *kyidug*, often also termed *kyibö ngalag*. *Kyidug* is a contraction of the word *skyid po*, meaning ‘happy,’ and, *sdug cag* meaning ‘bad.’ *Ngalag* is a combination of *snga*, which indicates a previous action, and *lag pa* meaning ‘hand,’ hence *kyidug ngalag* can be

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165 These include the avoidance of singing and dancing, larger social gatherings in daily life, as well as limitations of some ritual activities, and expansions of others.
understood as ‘the return of a hand in good and bad times,’ that is, mutual assistance in
good and bad times. It seems that the function of the *kyidug ngalag* networks varies
throughout the Tibet ethnographic region, but in Panam these are networks of associated
Houses that are obliged to contribute to one another during the costly arrangements of life
cycle rituals. As an old man in Samchang explains: ‘*Kyibö ngalag* come for wedding
celebrations and funerals. These are very costly events – too expensive for one family. So
people bring *chang*, grain, butter and food. And money of course.’

Similar to what Aziz points out concerning *ganye* reciprocation, in Sharlung
*kyidug ngalag* is a reciprocal relation in which each House is obliged to return exactly the
same as received and registered, so that when a House receives butter from another
House for a wedding, they must return butter during the next wedding to take place in the
donor House. Each House keeps the record of these exchanges on a roll that is kept in the
main room of the house and opened in times of need; the roll recording happy events is
tied with a white thread or a *khatag* (and called *kartog*), while the roll for bad times is
knotted with a black thread (and called *nagtog*). Due to the relatively seldom occasions
that *kyidug* are mobilized, proper reciprocation depends upon consultations to these
books.

In the reciprocal relation it is crucial to increase the amount exchanged on each
particular occasion. Both Mauss and, later, Lévi-Strauss have pointed out that an increase
in the counter-prestations is fundamental to the continuation of an exchange relationship.
The dynamics of exchange are found exactly in the reinforcement of an increased return;
while Aziz notes that returns of the same kind ‘hold the relationship equal’ (1978b:17), it
is crucial to note that it is in fact the increase in the amount of the return that holds the
relation open. This openness, I suggest, is important when considering the role of *rig* in
the establishment of moral networks of mutual aid in rural Tibet.

*Kyidug ngalag* is financially demanding, and many of the poorer households do
not have the means to establish and maintain such relations. Upon a visit to Magnub, one
of the poorest Houses in Sharlung, we asked about the wedding of their two adoptees.166
The grandmother explained: ‘There was a small celebration. We are poor, and had little

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166 As described in Chapter Five, the married couple in Magnub was childless for a long time and adopted
three young adults, of which two married.
to offer.’ ‘How about kyidug – did somebody come with offerings for the wedding?’ I asked. She continued:

No. Kyidug did not come. Only some relatives came. Tsering’s [her adopted son] father came from [his natal village]; some came from Dagpo [her adopted daughter’s natal House]. That’s all. There was a celebration for two days, and we had enough food for those few who came. They brought a little chang and some tea, but not much. Kyidug is ngalag, isn’t it? But we are so few people, and too poor, so we cannot help others. … People know who made offerings, so they know that we have not given anything. … It is the same with the baby cleansing (pangsöl); only few relatives came. Sedön’s mother brought new clothes for her and the baby, that’s all.

Life-cycle events are usually large-scale celebrations that last from three to seven days and most of the village Houses send at least one representative to participate. As with ganye, a large set of kyidug is considered a sign of high social standing, and much village talk concerns the scale of the celebrations in the different Houses. Not being able to contribute to these celebrations not only reflects badly upon a poor House, it also limits the assistance to their own ritual arrangements. Moreover, poor named and unnamed Houses remain without elaborate kyidug networks, which also complicates and slows down a potential process of social mobility.

The significance of ganye and kyidug as relations of moral obligations should not be taken as an argument against a closeness of kin relations. Relatives outside the House, i.e. patri-relatives (phapun) and matri-relatives (mapun), are also perceived by individuals to be close associates who might provide material or immaterial assistance. In a recent article, Sneath points out that although many material transfers are reciprocal, that is, they precondition a direct or indirect return, all are not necessarily so. Writing on Mongolia, he mentions food supply (idesh) from pastoralists to their urbanite relatives as an example of substantial material transmissions so common and expected that ‘they can be seen as materialisations of the social relations themselves.’ (2006:96). Sneath suggests that such materialisations of social relations, or rather social statuses, could be termed ‘enactions’ and should be held separate from ‘acts of material transfer – transactions.’ (ibid.:90). The two could be seen as two ends of a moral continuum, in which hospitality
and sharing are placed in the one end, and instrumental, conditional and impersonal transfers are placed on the other. Sneath’s point is that rather than employing a reciprocity model, we need to focus on the idiom of obligations in social relation when analysing material flows. Although his argument for separating reciprocity and obligation appears somewhat vague, I find the separation of enactions from transactions useful when discussing differing moral networks and social relations in Panam. Relatives and close friends are expected to provide assistance to each others; material transfers should be seen as enactions of being kin or friends. Material and immaterial transfers in ganye and kyidug ngalag networks are also enactions of social statuses in the sense that these flows of values are materialisations of a defined ganye or kyidug relation. However, these manifest different expectations and obligations, and various degrees of reciprocal commitment. ‘Pun are like good friends,’ people often say. Pun are not, however, like ganye or kyidug, because a pun relation is characterized by an expectation for receiving and returning assistance but not an obligation to do so. In other words, the relation itself is not based upon a moral obligation of reciprocity. I suggest that an analytical separation of expectations from obligations further develops the analytical potential of enactions as different from transactions. Although many ganye and kyidug, or friends, are relatives as well, they are not necessarily so. What is important to point out is that while relatives are perceived to be close, relatedness does not define particular rights and duties. By contrast, ganye and kyidug do. As shall become clear below, there is a significant distinction drawn between material flows as enactions of social relations, such as ganye and kyidug, as well as labour exchange (lerog) on the one side, and material transactions, such as wage labour (mila). This distinction corresponds to social hierarchies based upon rig, and the few social relations across rig borders.

Both Miller and Aziz describe kyidug as a corporation conceived in economic and business terms only, and Aziz in particular argues that kyidug and ganye are two sets of relations never to be associated (1978b:27). The main difference between these two sets, she holds, is the lack of social and emotional elements in kyidug relations, on the one side, and the corporateness of its members, on the other. Further, while Miller claims that the kyidug is an urban phenomenon, Aziz holds that ganye and kyidug are both activated in rural and urban areas. However, the establishment of kyidug, she argues, depends upon
a certain degree of economic diversity in a rural setting. I have to agree with Aziz, as in the small village of Sharlung people are part of both *ganye* and *kyidug* networks. Moreover, my informants do separate between *ganye* and *kyidug* in terms of emotional involvement. However, contrary to Miller’s and Aziz’s findings, I have not found any evidence that *kyidug* is a corporate group in Panam. On the contrary, it seems that establishing *kyidug* is an ongoing process between many Houses, and that, similarly to the *ganye* set, these relations are ego-centric (the ego is then a House).

While villagers of all social backgrounds in Sharlung have had, albeit very limited, a set of *ganye* for as long as they can remember, *kyidug ngalag* is a more recent establishment. This could be an indication of what Aziz terms an economic diversity in a rural setting. At the same time, I suggest that the increase in the distribution of, and the local emphasis given to, formalized networks should be seen in a broader perspective, where changes in social organization are crucial. With processes of cultural incorporation manifesting itself after the Household Responsibility System, practices of life cycle rituals and celebrations, such as weddings, birth cleansings and funerals, have taken on a more elaborate form in which stronger participation and assistance from external relations become important. Further, in a social organization of strong autonomous residence groups, the establishment and continuation of formalized, long-term mutual aid networks not only secure significant village co-operation but also serve as both to differentiate between the groups and to form alliances between them.

**NEW RELATIONS OF DEPENDENCY**

Who, and for whom, are *ganye* and *kyidug* in Sharlung and its neighbouring villages? Studying the networks of the various Houses, three patterns stand out. First, there is a correlation between the social standing of a House and the size of its networks; second, there is a new social distribution of dependency between the Houses; and third, the traditional skilled workers do not participate in these moral networks. Before the Chinese takeover *trelpa* and, particularly, *genbo* estates were closely associated with large networks of *ganye* and *kyidug*. Today, a large *ganye* set represents social influence and high esteem, much in the same as was described by Aziz (1978b). In Sharlung, villagers are involved in ongoing processes of establishing new relations and reconfirming old
ones. In these processes, social status and influence are negotiated, and new constellations of networks are established.

With the implementation of the various Chinese reforms, Tibetans’ relations to land have been drastically altered; since 1980 land distribution has been based on terms of equality among co-villagers. The Household Responsibility System with its redistribution of land and the regained autonomy of the household has altered the fundamental criteria for social classification and differentiation in local village organization. As has been discussed throughout much of this thesis, the reform provided new opportunities for people of all social backgrounds, and as pointed out earlier, many have taken these opportunities to build socially and economically powerful Houses. With this process, traditional social hierarchies become blurred and new ones manifest. These co-existing social hierarchies reflect two underlying and contested criteria for rank among the lay population in Tibet, namely economy and, towards the lower end of a hierarchy, family background or rig.

The implementation of the Household Responsibility System and the local responses to the structures laid out by this reform have expanded the social category of named Houses. Today, many local groups could be included into this category, much depending upon the choice of marriage form. At the same time, some have not been able exploit the opportunities provided by the reform, and many of these have instigated dependency relations with other Houses. This dependency manifests the characteristics of patron-client relations, where the two parts involved share a flow of values based upon personal connections and a sense of reciprocity. Within this new social distribution of patronage and clientage in the villages, the recently established trelpa-like polyandrous Houses constitute the majority of the patrons with whom poorer households seek support. However, while the Household Responsibility System has blurred and redefined traditional socio-economic hierarchies by enabling all farmers to establish estates, it has, I argue, also reinforced classification and hierarchization by the second criterion for rank, namely family background (rig).

167 I use the term ‘equal’ here to indicate the distribution of a set amount of mu per capita in 1980. I am aware that coincidences in terms of household composition have left some households with more fields than members, and others with fever. Yet, the principle for division was equality amongst the co-villagers.
Patronage and dependency

Patron and client relations are not new to Tibetan village organization. As described in detail in Chapter Two, traditional Tibetan society was based upon a feudal-like hierarchy where some claimed the taxes, some extracted the taxes from the estates, and some conducted the work on the land. The latter were to a large extent dependent upon the landlords as sources of income and livelihood. Today, dependency has taken a different character, although these contemporary dependent houses share some features with the landless farmers in the traditional political organization. Locally, dependency relations are termed as ‘help’ (*rog, lerog* [work help]), a broad term that can refer to all relations of assistance. These are fundamental relations of dependency that constitute a distinct social dynamic that informs social interaction and organization after the de-collectivization in Panam.

Although, according to Goldstein et al. most people in the townships of Panam express that they are better off today than they were in the past, 31 percent of the villagers in the township are defined as poor, i.e. unable to feed themselves by their own fields or income (2003:769). Dependent upon the quality of each particular harvest, between nine and sixteen, out of forty-six, households in Sharlung depend upon external help to provide sufficient grain throughout the year. These first nine consider themselves and are considered by others to be very poor (*kyopo kyopo*), while the remaining seven are seen to be poor, but in a less permanent situation. Here I shall focus on the nine poorest households and their differing strategies for securing grain supply. Common to these is that those who can do establish dependency relations with wealthy Houses in the village. Depending upon household composition, closeness in neighbour or kin relations among others, they do so with varying degrees of success.

Sobnub is an ‘unnamed house’ neighbouring Tagrab towards the east. The household consists of Wangmo, her old mother, her husband (Palden) who settled with them as a *makpa*, and their two children aged seven and ten. During the land division only Wangmo and her mother lived together, and, because Palden did not inherit land as a *makpa*, they only have fields for two persons but need to feed three adults and three children today. Sobnub is amongst the poorest in the village, and every year they depend upon external help for sufficient grain. Moreover, they depend upon external help to be
able to pay for the now mandatory schooling of the three children, and they do not have the finances for extra activities, such as inviting religious expertise in times of need.

During my stays in the Tagrab, I noticed that people from Sobnub very often were in the house. However, they were not treated as guests in the sense of being seated down in the tabtshang and served chang or tea. Rather, they seemed busy planning and making practical arrangements. It turned out that Wangmo and Palden, as well as their three children, provide labour for the Tagrab in various contexts. Most commonly, they all provide labour for agricultural work. Further, Palden assists Tashi-la on his travels, either by driving the tractor or simply by keeping him company during the trips. Moreover, Palden works as a repairer of practical and technical problems. He also conducts religious offerings on behalf of the Tagrab in cases where the trip to the pilgrimage site is particularly hazardous or Tagrab members for other reasons cannot travel. In daily life, their daughter Beya often helps the women in Tagrab to fetch water, make wool, clear the courtyard, and boil chang among other things.  

When I asked Palden and Wangmo about their relations to Tagrab, Wangmo explained this way:

"Tashi-la is a very good man, very helpful. If we have difficult times we can ask him, and he never says no. When mother was ill, he gave some money so we could go to the county hospital and buy medicine. And he gave some money to buy our son’s school uniform. This was very expensive. It was indeed. We have good relations ... Our fields are not so many, you know. So, many years we do not have enough barley. Now, we can buy barley cheaper from the government, but it is not so cheap. It really isn’t. So, when we need barley, Tashi-la gives us. Tagrab has quite a lot of barley, so he is able to offer some to us. But then, he cannot sell it, you know."

I asked him whether Tagrab was their chindak, or patron. ‘Yes, yes, chindak, it is. He is very generous. We can ask for help.’ ‘But when you stay in the house, it seems that you also help Tagrab,’ I continued. Palden answered: ‘No, no, we don’t do much. Sometimes I travel together with Tashi-la, or sometimes I do something with the animals, but really –

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168 During our stay with the Tagrab, Sobnub members also took it upon themselves to care for our well-being. While Wangmo would bring us fresh butter and, occasionally, eggs, their son, developed a particular interest in, and sense of responsibility for, entertaining my daughter.
it is not so much.’ Such humbleness, I believe, reflects only one aspect of the power relation between the chindak and his client, namely a one directional flow of support from patron to client. When I talked to Tashi-la about their relation to Robnub, he explained in a different way:

*Sobnub are our helpers (rogpa). They help with many, many things. Sometimes I don’t know what they do [he laughs]. They just do it! I can’t say no when they come. This is the way. They come because we have good relations. But when they come it is often also very useful. Like last week, Palden went with Orgyen [the youngest son] to look after the dzo grazing. This was good for Orgyen.*

Discussing theories of patronage and brokerage in anthropology, Paine argues that the most salient place to search for ‘the diacritica of the roles of the patron and the client, respectively, [is] within patron-client transactions’ (1971:10, original emphasis). By doing so, he holds, we can establish a point of departure that enables us to see beyond the asymmetrical, and thus, unequal, power relations associated with dependency. What is at stake for Paine is the point that patron-client relations must be investigated empirically in order to determine the social dynamics of various elements within these transactions: mutuality, reciprocity, as well as power relations particularly concerning the definitional power of the flow of values. In the Tagrab-Sobnub relation the flow of values and resources is simple; Sobnub provides help in a general way, while Tagrab provides grain and occasionally money upon need. It is however Tashi-la, as a patron, who makes the decision on the amount of financial help, although he is informed by a moral obligation to be generous.169 Tashi-la makes the decision of how much grain to give to Sobnub, and Palden or Wangmo have no rights to challenge his authority. At the same time, Palden and Wangmo can, and do, increase their participation in Tagrab activities; this

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169 Because Tashi-la is the village leader, and thus the representative of the local government, he could be seen as both a patron and a broker. A broker, Paine writes, is the role of a person who purveys values that are not his/her own, while at the same time purposively makes changes of emphasis and/or content (1971:21). In practice, these two roles overlap in several contexts. However, in the case of Sobnub and Tagrab, I maintain that their roles are best explained in terms of patron and client. Tashi-la has relations to other houses, such as the Lungtse, that are better explained as brokerage, as Tashi-la gives them priority during the yearly distribution of subsidized government grain. However, Lungtse members have only limited personal relations of reciprocity with Tagrab, and Tashi-la does not have a moral obligation to protect Lungtse.
strengthens the moral obligation of Tashi-la to be generous and, hence, influences the amount of the counter-prestations. As Tashi-la said above ‘I can’t say no when they come. This is the way.’ Their relation is produced and re-produced by the manipulation of personal relationships of reciprocity. Throughout daily life, Palden provides his help and friendship to Tagrab members by simply initiating his own participation in Tagrab activities. In this case, the patron-client relation manifests a nuanced power hierarchy between the two parts in that it is also in the power of the inferior to instigate a flow of values and resources and to maintain this flow. At the same time, this complementary aspect should not blur the significance of the definitional power on the part of Tashi-la, as often manifested in the flow of value between the two parts. As such, definitional power is found with the patron.

Today, the establishment of what are perceived to be valuable relations is a constant concern for many household leaders seeking security and protection from both the traditionally, and the newly recognised, chief Houses. These relations of dependency and autonomy are not absolute or static. Rather, there is an ongoing process to initiate, negotiate, terminate, expand and renew relations of material transfers, within which people of most categories have the power to influence the character of these relations. As with the other poor houses in Sharlung, Robnub instigated their position as ‘helper’ to Tagrab by offering their labour during harvest. The harvest is therefore a time when social differentiation becomes apparent, not only in terms of the economic differences seen in the amount of harvest produce, but also in the distribution of labour and the clustering of helpers in the fields of the (potential) patrons.170

Although most of the nine poorest houses in Sharlung have lerog relations with wealthy Houses, some do not. Chagpa, for instance, has not been able to instigate and consolidate such relations and must depend upon occasional support from the village or township leaders, or friends and relatives. This is a small house located in the eastern part of the village, not far from the important Lungko and Nyikar Houses, with whom they are related. The house consists of Pempa, his wife and two young children, and his deceased 170 The landscape of the harvest illustrates the social dynamics of patrons and clients as wealthy Houses complete the harvest before the smaller ones, despite the fact that the larger Houses have many more fields to cut. Because members of smaller households are engaged in the harvest of others, they often postpone their own harvest, if possible.
mother’s nun sister who moved in when the local nunnery was closed in 1959. His wife explains why Chagpo does not have chindak relations with other Houses in the village:

Sometimes we ask for help from our neighbours, but they are not so wealthy. We don’t have good relations with our relatives. You know, Pempa is the illegitimate child (ngale) of Lungko achung [the youngest husband]. He never supported them, and now we have bad relations. So, they are wealthy, but we don’t have good relations.

I asked whether they could approach some of the wealthy Houses that are located in the other end of the village, and she continued:

Yes, yes, we can, but it is difficult. Anila’s health is not so good. She cannot work or look after the children. So I have to watch the children, and Pempa is often away working with the tractor [for income]. So who shall we send as helpers? If you want good relations and maybe to receive help later, you have to offer much help. Perhaps you have to come every day in the first year, or offer help often. We are too few people to be able to do that.

Chagpo’s problems reflect the underlying importance of having some defined connections before establishing dependency relations that involve long-term moralities of mutuality. In Sharlung these are usually connections of relatedness, of friendship, or of being neighbours. However, although these connections make it easier to instigate and consolidate long-term relations of dependency, they are not necessary for its establishment. More important is the household composition, I hold, and the ability to send helpers to a potential patron House for a sufficient amount of time. In relations of dependency, the advantage of polyandry in this context is again made clear, as a large household not only enables a group to diversify their economy but also, in cases of poverty and weak agricultural production, to send individuals to establish valuable relations on behalf of the House.

Beyond the issue of dependency and labour assistance (lerog), harvest practices also indicate a second significant aspect of social differentiation in village organization, namely that concerning the exclusion of those perceived to be unclean (tsokpa). Looking closer at the participation of ‘helpers’ in the fields of the wealthy Houses, it becomes
obvious that there are no representatives of either blacksmith, or corpse-cutter households in these fields.¹⁷¹

...AND OLD EXCLUSION

A complementary power perspective might indicate an underlying relativism in terms of authority and influence, but this, however, is not my intention. I have argued that in the present day relations of dependency those of a client character do have considerable possibilities to instigate, continue, and terminate a relation to a patron. However, I have also pointed to the definitional power of the patrons, i.e. their power to define the flow of values to the clients. As such, I argue for a complementarity within defined power models, much in the same way as I argued in terms of gender in Chapter Seven. More fundamental power structures are apparent in the local exclusion from moral networks of mutuality, and particularly in the lack of ganye and kyidug relations between common farmers and farmers with artisan background (menrig). A lack of long-term transfers between people of different rig, indicates, I suggest, both a distinction of social and ritual rank and, on a more general level, the intrinsic material aspects of social relations.

As I have described in some detail in Chapter Two, some categories of people in Panam are perceived as being inherently lower ranked than their co-villagers. These are the blacksmiths (gara), butchers (shemba), corpse-cutters (baru), and, in a distinct category of their own, the beggars (longkhen). These are defined and internally ranked by notions of pollution and termed the ‘lower kind’ (menrig), i.e. of a significantly different rig. Today, these traditional skilled workers conduct the same agricultural work as their co-villagers; therefore, they are in the same need of labour assistance as their co-villagers.¹⁷²

The hegemonic literature on Tibet depicts politico-economic settings, i.e. relations to land and control of political power, to be the foundation of social differentiation and position in traditional Tibetan society (see Carrasco 1959; Stein 1972). More recently, in one of the very few articles dealing explicitly with low ranking people in Tibet, Ugen

¹⁷¹ I was not able to observe and later enquire about harvest practices in Bargang where the butchers live. Hence, the empirical material is from in Sachung and Sharlung primarily. However, those I asked in Sharlung all claimed that butchers did not assist non-butchers during the harvest and threshing.
¹⁷² The beggars are an exception to this, as I discuss towards the end of the chapter.
Gombo strongly argues that in traditional Tibet there was an important correlation between what he calls ‘caste’ and the socio-economic position of a person. He argues that: ‘even vertical ritual (status) stratification in the Tibetan context can be seen as ultimately determined by socio-economic status’ (1983:50). Following Gombo’s argument, the implementation of the Household Responsibility System would lead to significant alteration in status and esteem for the lower stratum in Tibet, as the reform provided equal shares of land to all households, including the traditional skilled workers. Along the same lines, others have argued that the low rank of the skilled workers in Tibet should be understood as an implication of the different nature of their work, and hence, the formation of different work exchange networks (Mills, personal communication). Inclusion into these mutual aid networks is, as described, crucial for participation in rural life in Tibet. Because the skilled workers were not farmers but artisans for the most, Mills suggest that they were excluded from the significant networks of the farmers. How the change of livelihood has influenced the position of the former skilled workers in Tibetan villages has become a significant question. Contrary to what Gombo’s argument suggests, my material indicates that although access to land has led to a greater degree of equality in terms of socio-economic position, it has not led to a significant alteration of ‘ritual stratification’.

Economy is indeed crucial to a House’s social position in rural Tibet, and a House’s esteem depends upon their economic success. The recognition of economic success also applies to the traditional skilled workers, such as one of the corpse-cutter Houses in Sachung and one of the butcher Houses in Bargang which are amongst the wealthiest in the valley. Yet, high economic position does not in any way alter the low rank founded in a low (unclean) rig, and participation in village life remains restricted for menrig. The endogamous character of the low ranked groups in Tibet is well-known in the literature (Carrasco 1959; Gombo 1983; Kawaguchi 1995 [1909]; Passin 1955; Taring 1970; Yuthok 1990). In Panam the restrictions on inter-rig relations are clearly

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173 Butchers and blacksmiths are paid in cash or kind for their services, and while there is a decline in local iron production leading to less income for the blacksmiths, the services of the butchers are very much needed and secure a good income for these Houses. Moreover, the corpse-cutters (baru) are paid in kind and cash. In addition, the clothes and jewellery that accompany the deceased to the burial are seen to be the property of the baru after the ritual. These items are often sold and provide an extra income for the baru Houses.
apparent also in the context of marriage arrangements. In Bargang, for instance, some of
the wealthy butcher Houses did try to invite a nama of a clean rig, without success. To
my informants in Sharlung it is unthinkable to establish affinal ties with menrig Houses.
As already mentioned in Chapter Five, rig is the first issue to be dealt with in the search
for a marriage partner, and a high socio-economic position cannot change the exclusion
of menrig as potential partners.

While the exclusion of traditional skilled workers from marriage exchange
networks is a well-established knowledge in the earlier literature on Tibetan
communities, very little has been published on other aspects of inter-rig village relations.
Surprisingly, neither of the two mentioned wealthy menrig Houses, or other blacksmiths
and baru households, have established inter-House relations that involve a morality of
reciprocity and mutuality. Contrary to commoners, the traditional skilled workers depend
upon assistance from relatives and from commercial transactions where people provide
labour for payment.

**Individual friends (trokpo): inter-rig relations**

In order to discuss the constitution, and re-constitution, of sociality in general and inter-
House relations in particular, I find it important to include not only formalized inter-
House relations, such as ganye and kyidug, but also individual relations of a different
moral force than those based upon House membership. The villages in Kyiling are small,
both in layout and in population, and villagers find friends amongst their peers,
depending upon age, gender and social differentiation. While socio-economic position of
one’s House is of no importance for the establishment of friendships, ascribed
background is (rig). The difference between those of an unclean and a clean rig is
fundamental.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Sachung village is known for its many gara. Gara
is a condenscending term for blacksmith (chak soba) that also describes menrig in
general, i.e. blacksmiths, butchers, corpse-cutters (baru) and beggars. Further, Bargang is
known for its many butchers. Blacksmiths, butchers and baru are now farmers in the
same way as other villagers, however; in daily life it seems that villagers of unclean rig
interact only to a limited extent with their co-villagers of clean rig. When I asked
commoners about their relations to menrig, most answered that they could have had close relations, but, for reasons unclear to them, they have not. At the same time my informants are happy to use the services of the skilled workers, and when they do so they exchange payments with them.

During the initial meetings with menrig in Sachung, they told me that their relations with the local community were of the same kind and quality as those between the co-villagers. Yet, after spending some time in their houses, it became apparent that the relations of blacksmiths, baru and butchers to their neighbours and co-villagers are limited in extent and restricted in kind. The main obstacle in inter-rig relations seems to be the perceived pollution (drib or dribtsok) of menrig and the following potential of contamination. While contamination can be controlled by the observations of taboos (particularly of touching mouths and bodily substances, and the proper post-contact physical and ritual cleansing), few villagers of common rig find social interaction with skilled workers worthwhile.

In the villages of Sharlung, Gangkar and Sachung, I found only one person who visits a menrig house for sociable reasons. Rinzin, the local primary school teacher that I described as a ganye of the Tagrab House, told me that he has a menrig friend. His name is Lhakpa, and he is a baru from Sachung. The two are chang trok or beer-friends – they enjoy each others drinking company. This friendship, although being close per definition, has some restrictions, and these are related to the potential transfer of pollution (drib) from Lhakpa (and his House) to Rinzin (and his House). Most important, however drunk they get, they never share cups while drinking, which is otherwise an established practice between friends. Moreover, Rinzin does not sleep in Lhakpa’s house, because he would then have to use their bed covers in which drib might be transferred. Also, to avoid pollution, Rinzin explains that he performs certain purifying or cleansing rituals. After a visit, he takes the cup used by Lhakpa, turns it upside down and puts it aside in a low place in the shade for two to five days. This is done so that the cup is cooled, as ’nobody likes to touch a warm rig tsokpa [dirty rig] cup,’ and because the pollution is less potent when cooled. Also, when the cup is upside down, this signals to the children in the house that they should avoid it. This is an important point for Rinzin, because, he says, ’children are more open for drib than adults.’ After two to five days, he washes the cup in
a thorough manner, preferably with soap, always without sharing the water with other cups or utensils. When the washing is completed, he puts the cup outside for it to dry completely in the sun. After it has dried for a day in the sun, the family uses the cup again as any other utensil. Rinzin points out that he has never been contaminated by drib from his friend, precisely because he takes these precautions and performs the necessary cleansing procedures.

Had Rinzin not taken the cleansing precautions he described, he would have risked being contaminated by pollution. This pollution is of a ritual kind, and while in Lhasa people tend to separate drib (pollution) from tsokpa (dirt), in Panam the two terms are used interchangeably, and even combined (drihtsok). Drib is potentially everywhere, not only among the menrig; in fact, there are much more serious forms of pollution elsewhere (see for instance Lichter and Epstein 1983; Diemberger 1993; Schicklgruber 1992; Rosario and Samuel 2002). Even so, if one gets pollution from a menrig, it might result in physical illness, such as a sore throat, blisters and spots, or a swollen tongue, or in severe cases (usually caused by sexual intercourse) it might hinder a person’s rebirth. These beliefs vary to a great extent, but physical illness is by far the most common belief concerning the consequences or signs of such contamination.174

The other villagers talk about Rinzin and Lhakpa’s relation as a curious friendship that can be explained in terms of personality and morality. Lhakpa, being from a well-off baru House, is said to be a good person, despite his unclean background. The connection implied here between rig and personality is found in the fundamental constitution of a person, that is, in the substances of the body. Rig is inherited from the father’s sperm and materialises as the child’s bones (rü), which are the template of the body, and as such constitute a strong influence, not only on the child’s physical traits but also on their personality (see Chapter Five).175 Levine shows that the polysemantic concept rü denotes not only the physical bones and a group of people sharing the same bones (rüba), but also the ‘ranked hereditary social strata’ (Levine 1981:56). The interchangeability of rü and

174 See Fjeld (2005: 47-52) on notions of pollution and menrig in Lhasa. See Fjeld (forthcoming) for more details on the precautions taken in inter-rig social interaction.

175 As mentioned in Chapter Five, marriages among menrig categories are arranged endogamously, and even if they were not, all members of the menrig House would be perceived to be unclean due to the strong contamination effect of sexual intercourse. As such, a menrig House is a polluted House, and the pollution of the House encompasses all individual members.
\textit{rig} indicates the fundamental character that hereditary social status has for Tibetans, as the \textit{rig} is the bones that constitute the body and the mind. Being of a bad \textit{rig}, blacksmiths, butchers and \textit{baru} are perceived to be more likely to act immorally (cf. Fjeld 2005, forthcoming). These notions of moral inferiority also underlie \textit{menrig} participation, or lack of such, in those local networks of mutuality and obligations, particularly those called \textit{ganye}. Friendship amongst people of common \textit{rig} and unclean \textit{rig} seems to be possible by observing prescribed taboos. However, friendship is an individual relation that does not involve the particular Houses of belonging. Moreover, while friends expect loyalty and assistance from each other, they are not obliged to provide such. Contrary to these ‘loose’ expectations of individual assistance, \textit{ganye} relations are formalized relations between Houses in which the moral obligations to assist are fundamental and unbreakable. Within the context of formalized mutual aid, \textit{menrig} remains on the symbolic outskirts of rural village organization.

**Menrig and mutual aid**

When talking to villagers in Sharlung about \textit{menrig} and their participation in mutual aid networks, people often say like the Darkhang Mola: ‘They could have been our \textit{ganye}, that is not a problem. But we don’t.’ Of the forty-four households in Sharlung and the sixty-eight commoner households in neighbouring Sachung, none had mutual aid relations (neither \textit{ganye} nor \textit{kyidug} \textit{menrig}).

Due to the lack of participation in inter-House relations of long-term mutual aid, the Houses of Panam, although being under constant potential change in status, remain divided into two fundamental categories: those of common and those of unclean \textit{rig}. These two are fundamental in the sense that they cannot be negotiated or modified; that is, all Houses are clearly classified within either the clean or unclean category.\footnote{That does not mean that the strength of the pollution does not vary, it does; however, the main classification remains even when some groups are recognized as less polluted than others. I shall return to the unifying aspect of material transfers towards to end of the chapter.} The reason for not including those classified as ‘unclean’ in an exchange system is pragmatic, villagers say, and is connected to the distribution of food and drink to the helpers. In order to receive assistance of various sorts, the receiving House must contribute with quality food to those that arrive. Because of the strict observance of the practice of not
sharing food with the menrig, the food offered during the ceremonies and feasts to those of common rig would need to be separated from that which would be offered to the menrig. Thus, the help-receiving House would have to provide an extra cook (of menrig background) to make separate food for the low-ranked guests, because, as one old woman put it: ‘nobody wants to share food with low people.’ These practical requirements, people say, increase the burden on the receiving House. Yet, the practicalities of food are rendered unproblematic in other labour co-operations such as public work; hence, it seems that it is not the fear of sharing cutlery that limits the establishments of long-term inter-rig relations such as these. Rather, it is my contention that it is the nature of reciprocal relations, and particularly the openness of relations with delayed return, that makes common farmers unable to share with people of a different, and polluted, kind.

Being outside the exchange spheres that operate among the commoners, blacksmiths, and baru exchange labour and aid when needed, especially among their relatives.177 The butchers, on the other hand, invite relatives from further away when help is needed, which they claim is very seldom; having established large households, they have many labour resources among themselves. The beggars claim not to exchange either labour or aid. Without fields the beggars have no need for extra labour, and in times of weddings and funerals they have very limited rituals that do not demand substantial funds. Relatives participate in these rituals and bring gifts and food, but their presence is not defined as kyidug ngalag.

Similar to what commoners claim about the traditional skilled workers, members of blacksmith or baru Houses also hold that could have had a larger set of ganye or kyidug, but that they do not. They do not form mutual aid networks across the different menrig, many of the same reasons as commoners give above concerning the practicalities of food. Just as those of commoner rig avoid the mixing of mouths with menrig, internal differentiation of the menrig also implies restrictions on sharing cups amongst the blacksmiths, butchers, baru and beggars, and none of these share cutlery if not related

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177 In Sachung, for instance, the main blacksmith House is related to one of the corpse-cutter Houses there, and these two often assist each other.
The networks of the lower-ranked, then, consist to a large degree of relatives. Importantly, when the wealthy menrig Houses ask for labour assistance, they do so within the frames of what is termed mila, a commercial relation of exchange where the person assisting is paid immediately after the service is completed. As the nama of Dochang, a blacksmith House in Sachung, explains:

> We have many fields, but not enough people. So often we have to ask for help. We ask different people; it doesn’t matter because it is mila. Usually we have to pay ten yuan per person per day. Sometimes we pay more if they bring their own dzo. Other people can ask their relatives (pun) when they need help, but we do not have good relations with our pun. So, I send one daughter to Tromo to make salary, and then we can pay mila when we need help.

Some of the menrig offer skilled services to their co-villagers and others in the valley. These services, such as butchering, are paid for in money, or occasionally in kind (barley, or butter by the poorest ones). When I asked Rinzin, the village teacher mentioned above, whether the work of the smiths or the butchers could be seen as labour exchange (lerog), he explained:

> If you need something from a chak soba, let’s say new shoes for your horse - you go to ask him to make it for you. When he has made the shoes, and put them on your horse, you pay him his salary. After that, there is nothing more to say. This is mila; it is not lerog.

Mila then, is a commercial relation that involves immediate exchange of labour and salary. Contrary to lerog, ganye and kyidug, mila does not carry an obligation of a

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178 People of various menrig backgrounds share the perception that skilled workers (with the exception of their own category) are inherently polluted and look down upon these. The reason given by both is the same, namely fear of contamination from the other.
179 All butcher and all baru households still practice their traditional occupations. The two main baru Houses in Sachung have divided the township between them, where they conduct the sky-burials of one part each. Butchers have a less ordered service system and are called upon from different areas. Many blacksmiths, on the other hand, have stopped their production. This is mainly due to two factors: first, the increased iron (factory made) produce offered cheaply in the county market; and second, the increased iron production done by the longkhen in Gangkar village. These two processes leave the traditional blacksmiths without a market.
postponed return, and is completed upon payment.\textsuperscript{180} Mila is not an enaction of particular social relations; rather, it is a terminated material transaction. As such, mila could be seen as what Bloch and Parry, in their influential introduction to \textit{Money and the Morality of Exchange}, describe as a ‘cycle of short-term exchange which is the legitimate domain of the individual – often acquisitive – activity’ (Bloch and Parry 1989:2). They define two related but distinct transactional orders that, they hold, co-exist and that could be transgressed in any given society. These transactional orders are ‘on the one hand transactions concerned with the reproduction of social and cosmic order; on the other, a “sphere” of short-term transactions concerned with the arena of individual competition’ (ibid.:24). Crucial to such a divide are the separate moralities inherent in the two orders, where latter must be subordinate to the former, because the former is evaluated to reproduce social and cosmic order, while the latter is rendered irrelevant in a long-term perspective.\textsuperscript{181}

Bloch and Parry’s main concern is the flow of money within these two transactional orders and the processes of conversion between the two. I agree with their argument that with these conversions we see that there is in all economies an ideological space for individual acquisition where this type of activity is ‘consigned to a separate sphere which is ideologically articulated with, and subordinated to, a sphere of activity concerned with the cycle of long-term reproduction’ (ibid.:26). However, the point I want to make here does not relate to the flow of money or objects in the transaction but rather relates to the inherent moralities, i.e. the expectation and obligations, of the two transactional orders. Following Sneath’s division of material transmissions into transactions or enactions, the ‘cycle of long-term reproduction’ (op.cit.) could perhaps more accurately be termed as an enaction of social relations, rather than a ‘transactional order.’ In Panam, labour exchange relations between commoners and the low-ranked, traditional skilled workers take the form of short-term transactions between individuals, and not Houses. As such, the corporate groups to which the individuals belong are not

\textsuperscript{180} This lack of expectation of a return depicts quite the opposite of what Skar describes from inter-household co-operations in the Andes. There, she writes, the role of the money represents more a security than payment for the work done, and over a period of time such transactions pass back and forth between loosely associated working partners (1995).

\textsuperscript{181} Defining long-term transactions that reproduce social and cosmic order as morally superior to short-term transactions of individual competition is obviously tautological in nature, as the former is evaluated as more important to social and cosmic order precisely because it reproduces social and cosmic order.
defined as part of a social relation of some closeness; rather, the material transaction is
defined to be short-termed and to imply no obligations or expectations beyond the instant
payment. This must be seen as contrast to what is found among common farmers, who
consolidate rogpa, ganye and kyidug to be defined group relations that ideally last over
generations and as such reproduce social order. Labour exchange and mutual aid are
hence moral networks in which the material (and immaterial) flow of values must be seen
as enactments of the established social statuses of being a rogpa, a ganye, or a kyidug
ngalag partner from one House to another.

The lack of long-term household-based relations between commoners and
traditional skilled workers is also evident in the exceptional cases where menrig
participate in a ritual in a commoner House. In Sharlung, people could only remember
one event in recent times where a menrig attended a wedding, funeral or birth cleansing,
but the friendship of Rinzin and Lhakpa described above has generated such
participation. When Rinzin’s daughter was born, Lhakpa came to attend her birth
cleansing ceremony, as did Rinzin’s other friends, neighbours, relatives, and kyidug
ngalag relations. During the celebration there were only a few restrictions on Lhakpa’s
participation, and they all involved the avoidance of mixing of mouths. For example,
while other guests put a small piece of butter into the mouth of the child, Lhakpa’s
offering of butter did not touch the child’s mouth, because instead he gave the butter to
one of the parents for them to give to the child.

When I later asked Rinzin about the nature of Lhakpa’s participation in the birth
cleansing of his daughter, he explained: ‘He came as my chang trok [chang friend], that’s
all. I had not really invited him. I did not mind that he came. We just had to be careful.’
‘But when Lhakpa made offerings to the baby of Menshō, did he not also start a chain of
kyidug?’ I continued.

No, no. It is no like that. Lhakpa is only my friend. He has no connection to
Menshō [the name of Rinzin’s House], and we do not have that to Drachen
[Lhakpa’s House]. No, no. That would not be possible. It is not possible to have
that kind of long relationship with baru. They cannot have long relations with us
also - it is the same.
Significant here, I believe, is the emphasis Rinzin puts on time and more particularly continuance of time. Mauss has argued convincingly that a gift is an opening of a continuous relation within which the parties stand in a defined position towards each other through the time of the material or immaterial exchange, a time that might stretch over several generations depending upon the gift return. Importantly, for Mauss the gift that is transmitted is essential to sociality, and an emphasis on such transmission is fruitful as it describes the gift’s ability to materialize a social relation. Sykes notes that, to Mauss ‘[the] gift makes the ideal relationship a material fact because giving and receiving gifts creates and changes human relationships. The gift also makes the relation substantial’ (2005:60-61). On a fundamental level, then, the flow of what he calls prestations and counter-prestations produces social obligations and long-term bonds between the receiver and the giver.

With a material transfer, what Mauss terms ‘gift,’ the relations characterised by a morality of closeness and amicability are established and maintained. Independent of whether or not values are exchanged or given by obligations, a relation is open before the value has been returned. In Panam, villagers cannot share the morality inherent in long-term House-based relations of mutuality across rig differences. This does not mean that menrig people are not involved in individual relations of some closeness, or that menrig Houses do not have networks of assistance to cope with farm work and life cycle rituals. What it means, I suggest, is that these individual networks, if involving people of different rig, must only involve a short period of reciprocity, and preferably they take the form of commodity exchange where the process of interaction is short termed and therefore rapidly terminated. These exchange relations are typically seen as mila.

While long-term exchange relations mark a difference in the sense of ‘complementary within a hierarchy’, these also unmark differences and unite the participating parts into a unity of the same kind (rig chikpa). As Howell (1989) points out in an article on exchange amongst Lio in Flores, anthropologists have analysed reciprocity182 as in-between relations that perpetuate difference and opposition rather than

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182 My main concern here is not reciprocity, but relations characterized by the flow of immaterial and material values, and I do not intend to use exchange and reciprocity interchangeably. I do, nevertheless,
uniting the parties (as suggested by Sahlins (1972)). This is true also amongst Lio, and particularly seen in the relation between ‘wife-givers’ and ‘wife-takers’. Howell argues that reciprocal relations can not only perpetuate opposition, but also unite members into a higher unity, and she describes how among Lio both inter-House and inter-village exchanges negate internal differences by joining them in a common pursuit. In her analysis, she emphasizes Mauss’ point that the ‘unity of the whole is indeed more real than each of the parts’ (1989:435). Such double-implication of reciprocity is also apparent in Panam. The ongoing processes of establishing relations of dependency between unnamed and named Houses (as well as between minor and influential Houses) by the exchange of labour for security are relations that perpetuate opposition and manifest power relations that, although being contextually complementary, define one part as inferior to the other. At the same time these long-term exchange relations are manifestations wherein the involved parties constitute a unity in a moral whole. This shared morality, I maintain, is based upon mutuality and open relations, and can only be shared by people of the same fundamental and hereditary typology of rig. Those of menrig background are excluded from these moral relations, an exclusion that is legitimized in the practicalities of food, and founded in concerns of morality and pollution.

MARRIAGE, DEPENDENCY AND SOCIAL MOBILITY
Lévi-Strauss has pointed out that it is in the interactions with others that Houses are most visible (1987:178). Moreover, an emphasis on inter-House relations brings forward internal differentiations of the various local groups. Looking at these social relations of dependency in Sharlung and the neighbouring villages, there is an obvious concurrence between the rise of wealthy influential Houses with patron characteristics and the arrangement of polyandry, on the one side, and the status of dependents and monogamous marriages on the other. Out of the nine poorest households mentioned in Sharlung, none have arranged polyandrous marriages. Of those approached as potential
patrons, all either have, or have had, polyandrous marriages. Further, the Houses with elaborate *ganye* and *kyidug ngalag* relations have polyandrous marriages today.

The association between socio-economic success and plural marriage, and preferably polyandry, should not be underestimated in Tibet. The spread of polyandry in Panam today may be interpreted as a process of social mobility, whereby farmers of all backgrounds engage in strategies for improving their economic and, following from that, their social position in the village community. By doing so, they find strategies that seem viable and manageable. Not only does the consolidation of a strong House maximize the potential values of a household in rural Tsang today, it also enables a household to start a process of social climbing. By sending individuals to influential Houses as ‘helpers’ (*rogpa*), a poor household might establish a relation of mutual benefit with wealthy Houses. Being able to have spare labourers to send as assistants is one of the most important strategies for improving an economic and social position of a house. Yet, the establishment of such mutual relations preconditions the same *rig*, and hence, the process of social mobility is limited to those already classified as low-ranked.

I have argued throughout this thesis that, in Panam today, villagers are engaged in activities that seek to strengthen the already established residence groups, of which the arrangement of polyandrous marriages for their sons is one. Other spheres of village life indicate similar orientations, and this is apparent in the economic strategies that farmers chose in the post-reform era. As mentioned in Chapter One the local farmers in Panam show very limited interest in alternative economic possibilities, such as introduction of new crops, intensifying the production for cash cropping, or developing animal products for the market. Moreover, off-farm activities, such as menial labour work, are seen by the farmers to be complementary, not alternative, to the subsistence production of farm work and animal husbandry. Rather, the villagers engage in improving the traditional crops of the area, and their main ambition is to improve the subsistence economy.

Economists have pointed out similar observations in studies of rural economy in other parts of the Tibetan plateau. Andrew Fischer, in his forthcoming PhD dissertation on economic development in Amdo, points out that although Tibetans in the rural areas of the PRC are defined as the ‘most destitute in China’ in terms of income, their subsistence wealth is high. There, the farmers’ economic strategies, he argues, concern the
perpetuation of the family land and subsistence, i.e. their traditional livelihood strategies. Contrary to Chinese farmers, the Tibetan farmers and pastoralists ‘have the relative freedom to follow such household livelihood strategies’ (Fischer, forthcoming: Chapter 7:25). Other economists have also noticed Tibetans’ lack of participation in a commodification of the local economy. In the influential Chinese publication Poverty of Plenty, for instance, Wang and Bai argue that the retreating back to ‘natural economy’ in Tibetan areas reflect the inherent backwardness of the Tibetan people. According to Fisher, these Chinese economists hold that poverty in the minority regions prevails after the Household Responsibility System because of the farmers’ preference for traditional ways of exploiting the natural resources. Tibetans’ emphasis on strengthening the traditional livelihood strategies, Fisher suggests, could be understood as an involution (as described by Geertz on the wet-rice producers of Inner Indonesia (1963)) of the economy. Involution in Tibet is related to ‘the relative capacity of households to subsist, for generally the autonomy and embedded wealth of a subsistence livelihood is considered a richer and more dignified option than livelihood derived through low-wage ‘free’ co-operative labour’ (Fisher forthcoming, Chapter 7:25).

This description of economic strategies in Amdo is valid, I believe, also for agricultural Panam, although perhaps to a lesser extent. Local farmers in Panam do engage in off-farm activities involving low-wage menial work, however they do so as part of a traditional livelihood in the area. The process of involution and, in that, the expressed emphasis put by farmers on subsistence wealth could be seen in association with the preference for polyandrous marriage arrangements in Panam.

As discussed in Chapter Three economic analyses have constituted a central element in studies of polyandry. My concern has rather been with the social implications of economic organization and, in that, particularly the role of the household. It is interesting to note, though, that other studies of the relations between wealth and polyandry also have pointed to the significance of a diversified household economy for the practice of polyandry, and further, as one study shows, for the stability of such marriages. Haddix, in an article published in Evolution and Human Behaviour in 2001, concludes her multivariable analysis of partitions from polyandrous marriages in Humla (Nepal) with a claim that it is not the amount of wealth, but the type of wealth, and the
extent to which it is diversified, that matters for the potential stability of a polyandrous marriage. She writes that it is the least likely that a polyandrously married man in a poor, but highly economically diversified, household wants to move out from the unit. It is most likely, she holds, that a man of a wealthy, and highly specialized, household should wish to move. Haddix’ findings are a reminder of the important connections between economic organization and marriage patterns in Tibetan communities.

**Polyandry and economic rationality**

Within the process of economic involution and the wish to secure the perpetuation of the established House, polyandry is perceived by the Panam farmers to be a rational, and a highly valued, choice. The questions of morality and rationality are crucial in establishing a social position of a House and, further, consolidating or improving that position with time. The significance of economic rationality is seen particularly in the widespread stigmatization of the local beggars (*longkhen*). Common farmers, as well as blacksmiths, butchers and corpse-cutters, legitimize such stigmatization with, in addition to the pollution of the beggars’ *rig* and the polluting nature of their work, the beggars’ economic choice to refrain from agricultural production, on the one hand, and to avoid polyandrous marriages, on the other. As one young woman said: ‘Beggars were given the same possibilities in the village, but they did not want to take them.’ After the implementation of the Household Responsibility System, when the blacksmiths, the corpse-cutters and the butchers engaged in farming in the same way as the rest of the population, the beggars chose to lease out the land and slaughtered, or sold, the animals provided by in the reform. The income from the out-leased land is not sufficient to feed the families throughout the year, and again they support themselves by begging in the surrounding villages as well as in Shigatse, Gyantse and Lhasa. This lack of agricultural capabilities, or most often expressed to be a lack of willingness to work, is the main impediment for integration of *longkhen* into village life.

The local perception of what is a ’smart’ economic strategy basically involves building a household that includes a large resource of male labour. This is mostly achieved through polyandrous marriage arrangements. With a surplus of male labour some *menrig* engage in their traditional work in order to secure an extra income, and
those households which pursue strategies compatible with commoners’ ideals of economic rationality are valued more highly than does those do not. The beggars neither farm nor marry polyandrously, and so, according to the local understanding, they do not build an economically secure future. Hence, they remain on the outside of the moral community.

Inter-House relations and social mobility
In the ethnography from the Himalayan region, village co-operation has been described as elaborate and intricate networks of mutual aid. Central to participation is, I have argued, House membership, but also rig. In addition to individual relations such as friends and mila, the moral networks of lerog, performing harvest and production activities, ganye, securing good relations between a particular House and the village community, and kyidug ngalag, enabling the costly ritual activities of a House, constitute the all important relations for an ambitious domestic group. An elaborate network of inter-House relations strengthens the autonomous House, indicating a two-way process between the cultural values of interdependency and autonomy, as suggested by Desjarlais, in Tibetan communities. Fraternal polyandry is a way to develop both autonomy of a House, by keeping the House members together in a centripetal manner, and a powerful position in relations of interdependency of a House, by enabling an excess labour force to participate as lerog, ganye and kyidug ngalag to other Houses in a centrifugal manner.

These moral networks are not set; relations of mutuality are constantly initiated, negotiated, maintained and terminated, as long as the participants share the same rig. While some scholars have suggested that the workers of traditional skills in Tibet remained marginal to village organization due to the different character of their occupations and, therefore, their lack of participation in the central networks of village co-operations, I have argued otherwise. The change of occupational conduct does not seem to alter the low rank of the traditional artisans, rather on the contrary. When a blacksmith by rig does not work as a smith, commoners express it to be a waste of economic potential. Even though the work with iron, and fire in particular, is considered polluting, and one would expect that an avoidance of iron would decrease a person’s
pollution, this does not seem to be the case. Rather, abandoning traditional work has a negative effect on a person’s esteem in the villages. Much in the same way the arrangement of a polyandrous marriage, a strategy that strengthens the social position and potentially enables a process of social mobility for Houses of common rig, only has limited effect on the rank of a menrig House.

*Rig tsokpa*, then, is not about occupation or economic position, it is about inherent pollution in the lineage and the domestic group, much in the same way as found among the dalits in India (cf. for instance Deliège 1999). In addition, in the Tibetan case pollution has a concrete physical aspect as the transferring lineage is manifested in the bones of a person, which constitute the fundamental substance of a person (see Fjeld forthcoming a). Moreover, because pollution transfers through domestic activities, particularly through the sharing of utensils and sexual conduct, an unclean lineage necessarily transforms into an unclean household and House. Only by accepting the restrictions of social interaction that are laid upon them can those of menrig background participate in community life. When Lhakpa, the corpse-cutter, participated in the birth cleansing of his friend Rinzin’s daughter, he did not offer the butter directly to the baby’s mouth, but gave it to her parents instead. Moreover, because he is careful to clean the cup in front of Rinzin, and to keep his own cup in a separate (lower) place, Rinzin finds it easy to socialize with him. Importantly, their relation is individual, not House-based. By accepting their status as polluted, the traditional skilled workers participate in the reproduction of social order in which they are classified as low-ranked.

I repeat the significance of *rig* here because it is an issue very often overlooked in the ethnography of Tibetan communities. That being said, it is clear that inter-House relations in Sharlung and its neighbouring villages are a matter of negotiation, and in that process new social hierarchies become apparent. Alongside the social and political recovery of the former trelpa Houses after the Cultural Revolution and de-collectivization, some of the former families of landless farmers (*yokpo*) have established themselves as corporate, influential Houses, with, although brief, particular biographies and immaterial and material wealth to be transferred to the next generation. Some of these Houses have also developed relations of dependency with poorer households in the
communities, and these relations must be seen as part of negotiations of rank and the development of new social hierarchies.
EPILOGUE

Due to the lack of access, there has been a dearth of ethnographic accounts from the Tibetan countryside after the Chinese take over. This study has aimed to provide new ethnography from contemporary rural Tibet. Although I had made concrete plans for my research in Panam, the thesis is a result of surprising findings while in Sharlung, namely the increasing number of polyandrous marriage arrangements in the village and beyond. Polyandry is, as already mentioned, a rare marriage form; from what is known through international scholarship; it is today practiced only among Tibetan groups in the Himalayas, among the ethnic minority group of Premi on Tibet’s eastern frontier (Wellens 2006) and, as my material has shown, in Tsang. Historically, polyandry has been registered among peoples of various regions of the world: in addition to Tibetans, the Irava of Kerala, Todas (Kodas) of southern India (Mandelbaum 1938) and Pahari in the Indian Himalayas practiced fraternal polyandry; while the Kagoro in northern Nigeria (Sangree 1972), some Sinhalese peoples (Tambiah 1966), indigenous groups in north-America (Steward 1936), as well as Marquesan islanders in the Pacific (Otterbein 1963) practiced what was termed ‘associated polyandry’. There was also the rather particular case of Nayar marriages simply termed ‘Nayar polyandry’ (Gough 1959; Dumont 1961). There have been several attempts to synthesise studies of polyandry into a unified theory of the prevalence of such marriage forms; however, this study has had no such intentions. On the contrary, I have taken Berreman’s conclusion that polyandry (in similar ways as
with polygyny) is not a ‘sufficiently unified phenomenon to be explained in the same
terms everywhere’ (1962:72; see also Berreman 1980:377) as a guiding idea to my
analytical constructions on Tibetan polyandry. Therefore, I have emphasized the
particularity of the villages from where the thesis draws its material. The political and
social history, and especially the local responses to the implementations of various social
reforms, of this particular village constitutes a significant part in the analyses developed.
It is in the context of the locality that I have found the analytical foundation; rather than
in universalistic social theories.

Nevertheless, there are some universally found features of the prevalence of
polyandry that relate interestingly to the material from contemporary Tibet. Levine and
Sangree identify four characteristics that they suggest are common to all known
polyandrous practices: first, that polyandry is only found where polygyny is also
practiced; secondly, that polyandry found where marriage is highly flexible, permitting a
range of marital alternatives; thirdly, that polyandry is not only rare but also fragile to
external pressures and; fourthly, that polyandry requires a judicial separation of a
woman’s sexual and procreative attributes (1980:403-407). My material strongly
confirms the first two inter-related points concerning the presence of several marital
alternatives in addition to polyandry. As described, Tibetan marriage forms include
monogamy, polygyny, polyandry, as well as combinational forms, such as polygyandry
and bi-generational forms of polyandry and polygyny. Moreover, as Levine and Sangree
note, in the cases of co-existence, polyandry is often the ideological dominant and
preferred form. This is also the case in Panam. Interestingly, the Tibetan case relate less
directly to the latter two points made. Although polyandry is classified as illegal in Tibet,
and massive social and political reforms have restructured the village organization in
which polyandry traditionally was a part, this marriage form is, even to an increasing
degree, preferred among the majority of the population included in this study.

Furthermore, although Levine and Sangree hold that a separation of rights *in uxorem*
from rights *in genetricem* also applies to the cases of fraternal polyandry, this is not the
case in Tibet where, as I have shown, all co-partners hold equal rights to the wife’s
sexuality and her childbearing capacities. These latter differences could be seen as yet
another argument that polyandry must be analysed in its particular social, cultural, economic, and politico-historical context.

One of the aims of this study has been to develop an analysis of polyandry in a wider context: beyond the simplistic economic perspective and as directly related to broader processes of social and cultural change. However, in order to develop a language to describe these processes with less abstract and vague concepts than those of continuation and change, I suggested a focus on local groups of belonging, their rise and perpetuation.

Recent kinship theories have taken various forms, orientations, and show various concerns following both Schneider’s critical publications on American kinship and their fundamental influence on anthropological theory building, and the more general post-modern critique of Western scholars’ classification and representations of ‘the others.’ In the literature searching ‘beyond kinship’, theoretical projects based in Lévi-Strauss’ concept of the House have been promoted as one of the alternative responses as these focus beyond biology and unilinearity to incorporation of seemingly contradictory principles and practices of relatedness and belonging. Despite the typological starting point of Lévi-Strauss’ interest in the House, and the problematic reification that followed in his descriptions of ‘house societies’, ‘the House’ as a holistic analytical concept prevails in anthropology today. Much of the analytical strength of the House concept is found, I believe, in its inherently diachronic character and its close connection to local perceptions of group formation and notions of belonging.

While the House-debate in anthropology initially was dominated by studies of Southeast Asia, there has been a constant expansion of the ethnographic regions onto which the House concept has been applied, including Amazonia (Hugh-Jones 1993; Lea 1995), Europe (Pine 1996), Japan (Kalland 1999) and more recently, the Meso-Americas (Gillespie 2000). Common to all these studies is the attempt to analyse local social organizations in a new perspective, independent of whether former analyses had classified the particular kinship system as cognatic or unilineal. Developing a broader perspective has been the intention with this study; and by focusing on the interrelations between marriage and the local cultural category of belonging found in the social, economic, ritual and cosmological house. Such perspective is closely related to Aziz’
work on Dingri (1978a). In the ethnography on Tibetan communities, social organization has not been classified as either unilineal or cognatic but, rather, as a type of organization where people utilize both descent and residence for group membership. Although earlier studies have described the household as the central social unit, these have not, I have argued, developed the full potential of a fundamental focus on domestic groups as Houses. It is my contention that the House concept, as initiated by Lévi-Strauss and developed by anthropologists of various ethnographic regions, could provide a new useful perspective for further studies of social organization in the wider Himalayan region.

‘Trelpafication’, morality and marriage

Applying the House concept on the study of social organization in Tibet, I have suggested that, after the implementation of the Household Responsibility System in 1980, we see an ongoing process of upward social mobility and negotiation of rank in the villages of Panam. I have argued that the increase of polyandry and the upward mobility in which socio-symbolic Houses are established must be seen as two parallel processes where both elements inform the other.

‘Trelpafication’ is of course a constructed term. It is based in the landholding units of the traditional Tibetan socio-political organization and refers directly to the former upper classes (trelpa and genbo) in the locality around Sharlung village. As described earlier trel (khral) refers to ‘tax,’ and trelpa to ‘taxpayer,’ however, today are not extorted from the Houses of Sharlung, and as such they are not ‘taxpayers.’ Nevertheless, what I have emphasized here is thus not the politico-economic aspects of the traditional trelpa Houses, but rather the socio-cultural meanings of the trelpa category as these have been conveyed to me by the local villagers in Panam. As in many Tibetan communities, those classified as trelpa and genbo belonged to named estates of various sizes.

‘Trelpafication’ is fundamentally a process of social mobility. It is seen in various ways: in marriage and inheritance practices, in architectural values and in the unfolding of inter-House relations, that is, in the establishment of Houses. In terms of marriage, this process is apparent not only in the increased arrangement of fraternal polyandry but also,
on a more general level, in the ways in which the marriage institution itself seems to be changing. According to my informants, marriage among the former landless majority in traditional Tibetan society often took the form of *khathugpa* unions, that is, couple-initiated co-habitations. These were marriages with limited strategic value for the two partners’ natal households, and were established without elaborate ritual performances. Today, *khathugpa* is seldom, and when it happens, people find it to be unfortunate. For the majority of the villagers in Sharlung today, marriage is a family matter; it is an important strategy to strengthen the autonomous House and, by doing that, to enable new initiatives and negotiations of rank. As such, there seems to have been a turn from couple-initiated to parent-initiated marriage arrangements in rural Tibet in which the young adults share the preference for polyandry.¹⁸³

While I have not been able to present empirical material on wedding rituals and the changing characteristics of the marriage institution on a more general level, I believe that the analyses that I have done has opened this a new field of inquiry. In my initial methodological attempts to compensate for the lack of observed wedding rituals by asking my informants to reconstruct these ceremonies, it became apparent that many had only vague, unclear and often contradictory ideas about the performance of elaborate wedding celebrations in the village. These uncertainties might indicate that elaborate wedding rituals are in the making for many of the farmers today, as many have just recently begun to incorporate these as their own practices. The qualitative differences between what is termed *khathugpa* and what is termed *changsa* remain to be studied.

The process of ‘trelpafication’ takes the form of cultural incorporation, where one group takes on practices, values and beliefs associated with another groups. In this process we must recognise the importance of economy for people’s lives. As in Panam it is the former lower ranked landless farmers and skilled workers that incorporate cultural practices of the former upper classes, and as such, it is a process of up-ward mobility. This cultural incorporation is, however, not merely a process of copying: rather, these cultural practices are evaluated and transformed within a new context and made into people’s own. As such, it is more than a one-way trickling down process in which what is

¹⁸³ Sneath (personal communication) has observed a similar change in Mongolia, where the commoners only recently have begun to celebrate the ritual that constitutes what is in the literature termed ‘marriage,’ and that was previously an upper class phenomenon.
to be incorporated is passively received; it is an active process of involvement in which meaning is constructed and values manifested.

In the context of dramatic and long-term political and social changes in Tibet, people look for ways to live what is perceived to be a good life. I have argued elsewhere that in contemporary Lhasa the former aristocracy take, and are given, the role of cultural experts; in that process they have definitional power of what is ‘Tibetan culture’ (Fjeld 2005). In Sharlung there has been no aristocratic presence, and those defined as powerful were the landholding genbo. The relations between the former landholders and the landless labourers in such small village are complicated due to the history of direct work relations, in which some of the landlords are remembered for particularly brutal treatment of their peasants. Yet, a common characteristic to the processes of cultural incorporation in rural Tsang and the renewed significance of the former aristocracy in Lhasa is the high degree of cultural continuity found in the context of dramatic political and social changes. The Chinese invasion and more than fifty years of occupation of Tibet have brought a new society, and a new state, to the Tibetan people. Today, the political strategy to further change Tibet seems to be a Beijing-initiated process of modernisation through economic development; an initiative that apparent for the most in the urban centres. In Sharlung, the main modernising force in recent history has been the Household Responsibility System in 1980. It is ironic that it is precisely the implementation of this land reform that seems to have enabled the majority of the farming population to, increasingly, arrange what the Chinese government labels a ‘primitive, abnormal, immoral and backward’ type of marriage (Ben Jiao 2001:6).

For Tibetans in Panam, polyandry is neither backwards, nor is it immoral or abnormal. On the contrary, it is a highly valued marriage form. At the same time, polyandry is considered to be a more demanding marriage form than monogamy, although less demanding than polygyny. Despite of (or perhaps due to) its demanding nature, Tibetans in Panam share a notion that a successful polyandrous marriage is an indication of good personal ethics of the individuals involved. Aziz has pointed out that ‘polygamy, and particularly fraternal polyandry in D’ing-ri, symbolizes for the D’ing-ri-wa a host of qualities which Tibetans strive for’ (1978a:143). These qualities, she suggests, are the individual’s abilities to share and to compromise in order to reach a
common goal. In a wider perspective, these qualities could be associated with central values within a Buddhist, and folk religious, worldview. By being part of a successful polyandrous marriage, each individual exemplifies practices that are highly valued within Buddhism, these being primarily the values of detachment (non-jealousy), of putting others before one self, and, as already mentioned, of co-operating in order to reach a common goal. Moreover, these values can be seen to correspond to the root poisons in Buddhism, namely desire (attachment), hatred (aversion), and ignorance (delusion).

My informants do not claim Buddhist ethics for their marital choices; however, many make the point that only a ‘good person’ can manage many husbands. The inter-relation between personal ethics and the ability to live in a polyandrous marriage becomes particularly clear when talking about marriage among the local beggars (longkhen). Around Sharlung, none of the beggar families are married in polyandrous unions. The main reasons for the monogamy practices among the beggars are, according to their co-villagers, lack of moral abilities; they are not able to maintain plural marriages due to their selfish, greedy and jealous mind. The Mola in the Tagrab House explained:

I heard that one of Jongpo’s brothers [a beggar family in Gangkar] arranged a polyandrous marriage some time ago. But it only lasted for some months [smiling]. They cannot make it work. They always fight with everybody - also among themselves. Last year one beggar stabbed a relative with a knife. Then it is not possible with polyandry, is it?

The corresponding values of being a good person and being able to maintain a plural marriage reinforce the preference of polyandry in Panam today. Individual unselfish behaviour, such as emotional and economic generousness, enables the keeping of the family together, while at the same time developing a domestic group of some significance in the local community. The value of ‘keeping together’ reflects in several contexts; marriage preferences, labour division, economic strategies, conflict resolution, inheritance practices, notions of sibling solidarity, as well as in organization of domestic ritual space and in architectural aesthetics. Those that are part of large polyandrous marriages enjoy a high esteem in the Sharlung, because they manage to act in an unselfish way towards their marriage partners and their parents, or parents-in-law (see
also Goldstein 1990). This is particularly true for women, as their position is seen to be more challenging than that of co-husbands.

Marriage and domestic organization, and particularly the inter-connections between notions of pollution and morality within the category of low-ranked skilled workers (menrig) remains an interesting and important issue. I believe that the findings presented in this thesis has opened a new field of inquiry concerning marriage, group formation and the organization of social networks among the various people classified as menrig, a field in which more work could be done.

The Rise of the Polyandrous House

This thesis has aimed to describe a process in which the former landless labourers, who, in the Tibetan society before the Chinese takeover, married monogamously and organized themselves in unnamed nuclear families, now establish named estates and arrange polyandrous marriages. These parallel processes of transformations of the constitutive character of domestic groups, on the one hand, and the distribution of marital forms, on the other, should be seen as two aspects of fundamentally the same; The Rise of the Polyandrous House. This House is a well-established category in Tibet, and polyandry is an intrinsic part to the establishment, and, most importantly, in the perpetuation of such social groups.

In many societies Houses are established in the upper classes of society (Gillespie 2000; Lévi-Strauss 1987). This both has been and still is the case in Tibet as well. The aristocratic, monastic and often smaller telpa estates were named Houses; although they operated in different ways and their estates were of different sizes, they were corporate bodies that maintained and continued their estates through means of marriage, filiation, adoption, or lineages of reincarnation. Although many Houses transferred only immaterial wealth from one generation to the next (such as a name, a social position in a ranked community, ritual power or, as in the case of many telpa Houses, tax obligations to be fulfilled), these are associated with access to land. The period in which new polyandrous Houses have risen is one of redefined rights concerning the access to land. It is also a period with great economic changes in which new relations are instigated and new social hierarchies negotiated. As Lévi-Strauss pointed out, it is precisely in such
transformation periods that Houses are thought to materialize more broadly, as redistribution of wealth and access to power in particular enable new local groups to establish estates previously known only to the upper levels of society (1987). Analysing polyandry as an element of a process of rising Houses enables a diachronic perspective that allows an emphasis on continuity; a continuum between the past and the present, through periods of rupture. This is particularly significant in Tibet due to its dramatic recent political history. For the local farmers, their houses are embedded with meaning that links the present to the past and, if they manage their relations well, to the future.

Polyandry, then, becomes a continuous cultural practice, preferred by farmers of all social backgrounds and recently made possible to the majority, through the nationwide land reform in the beginning of 1980s. Already an established practice in Panam, the arrangement of polyandrous marriages remain a highly valued way to improve one’s social position in the village community, not so much by establishing alliances with high ranking Houses through marriage, but rather by strengthening the House to which one belongs and securing its perpetuation across generations. With that, the House perseveres when the individual members cannot.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Used in thesis</th>
<th>Wylie transliteration</th>
<th>English translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acha</td>
<td>a cha</td>
<td>elder sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achi</td>
<td>a phyi</td>
<td>grandmother (Tsang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achok</td>
<td>a jo</td>
<td>second eldest father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achung</td>
<td>a chung</td>
<td>youngest father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aku</td>
<td>a khu</td>
<td>paternal uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ama</td>
<td>a ma</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amchok</td>
<td>am cok</td>
<td>‘ears,’ informants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ani</td>
<td>a ne</td>
<td>(novice) nun, father’s sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ashang</td>
<td>a shang</td>
<td>maternal uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bar thog</td>
<td>bar thog</td>
<td>middle floor</td>
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<tr>
<td>baru</td>
<td></td>
<td>corpse-cutter (Tsang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chak soba</td>
<td>lcaks bzo ba</td>
<td>‘iron maker,’ blacksmith</td>
</tr>
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<td>chang</td>
<td>chang</td>
<td>barley beer</td>
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<tr>
<td>changsa</td>
<td>chang sa</td>
<td>marriage</td>
</tr>
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<td>chang sa re re</td>
<td>chang sa re re</td>
<td>‘one one marriage,’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chaptru</td>
<td>byabs ‘khrs</td>
<td>monogamy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chelmo</td>
<td>’chal mo</td>
<td>ritually purifying water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chenpo</td>
<td>chen po</td>
<td>promiscuous woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>chigo</td>
<td>sphyi sgo</td>
<td>big, great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chile</td>
<td>sphyi las</td>
<td>‘outer door,’ gate</td>
</tr>
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<td>chi trug</td>
<td>sphyi ‘pru</td>
<td>public work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chikhang</td>
<td>spyi khang</td>
<td>public grain, tax</td>
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<td>chindak</td>
<td>sbyin bdag</td>
<td>public house</td>
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<tr>
<td>chinlab</td>
<td>byin rlabs</td>
<td>patron</td>
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<td>chö</td>
<td>chos</td>
<td>blessings</td>
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<td>chökhang</td>
<td>mchod khang</td>
<td>religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>chöle</td>
<td>chos kyi las ka</td>
<td>shrine room, offering room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chökyong shungma</td>
<td>chos skyong srung ma</td>
<td>religious work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chölog</td>
<td>chos klog</td>
<td>Buddhist protectors</td>
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<tr>
<td>chörten</td>
<td>mchod rten</td>
<td>the ritual reading of religious texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>chuba</td>
<td>phyu pa</td>
<td>stupa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chu lha</td>
<td>chu lha</td>
<td>Tibetan robe, dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cun (Ch.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>god of the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dartar</td>
<td>mda’ dar</td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depön</td>
<td>mda’ dpon</td>
<td>ceremonial arrows with ribbons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dig ra</td>
<td>sdig pa ra dza</td>
<td>a category of the nobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dikpa</td>
<td>sdig pa</td>
<td>scorpion, sigils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dönba</td>
<td>sdon pa</td>
<td>sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>döntri</td>
<td>gdon ‘dre</td>
<td>monastic vows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dram nye</td>
<td>sgra snyan</td>
<td>demon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tibetan lute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dranak  sbra nag  'black tent,’ nomad tent
drangbo  drang po  fair, just, honest
drawo  dgra bo  enemies
drib  grib  enemies
dribtsog  grib btsog  pollution-dirt
drong  grong  hamlet, village
drongba  grong pa  household
dü  bdud  evil spirit
düchung  dud chung  ‘small smoke,’ landless farmers
dütshang  dud tshang  'smoke dwelling,’ household
dung  gdung  beam
dzo  mdzo  cross-breed of cow and yak
dzong  rdzong  fortress, County, local government in the traditional Tibetan political organisation
gabo chewa  dga' bo bye pa  to make somebody like oneself, attract
gag  bkag  to hinder, block
gang  sgang  up, above
ganye (abbr. gabo nyebo)  dga’ po nye bo  the 'near and dear,’ mutual aid network
gara  mgar ba  blacksmith (deteriorative)
genbo  rgan po  ‘elder,’ representative of taxpayers in traditional Tibetan political organization
genshö  rgan shos  the eldest (brother)
gentsang lamlug  'gan gtsang lam lugs  Household Responsibility System
gerpa  sger pa  category of the former nobility
gyebo  rgyal po  spirit (of deceased ordained relative)
gyud  rgyud  lineage
imi  i mis  grandfather (Tsang)
ja mar thug  ja mar thug  tea, butter, soup – offering to the namo
jin (Ch.)  rgya ma (Tib)  Chinese measurement (one jin= half kilo)
karto  dkar tho  ‘white books,’ recording the assistance received at weddings and birth cleansings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kartsi</td>
<td>white drawings of auspicious signs on the wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kashi</td>
<td>the four pillars of a house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ke</td>
<td>(oral) language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khambu</td>
<td>apricot, offering to namo house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khang</td>
<td>the new house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khangba serpa</td>
<td>white ceremonial scarfs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khatag</td>
<td>‘mouths meet,’ couple-initiated marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khathugpa</td>
<td>house name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khyim-ming</td>
<td>household/ House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khyimtshang</td>
<td>he/she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khong</td>
<td>‘circulating around,’ distributional system of sexual access in a polyandry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kora khor</td>
<td>nobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kudrak</td>
<td>natal god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kye lha</td>
<td>‘low birth,’ woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyeme</td>
<td>wife’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyeme phala</td>
<td>‘happy bad’, network of mutual assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyidug ngalag</td>
<td>‘big House,’ high-ranking House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khyimchen</td>
<td>‘home dwelling,’ household, House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khyimtshang</td>
<td>high-ranking House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khyimtshang thobo</td>
<td>husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyoga</td>
<td>husband’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyope phala</td>
<td>corporation of a lama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyopo</td>
<td>the bringing of the bride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labrang</td>
<td>karma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labu</td>
<td>work exchange</td>
</tr>
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<td>langchang</td>
<td>god, deity</td>
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<td>le</td>
<td>spirit medium</td>
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<td>lerog</td>
<td>shrine room, temple</td>
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<td>lhaba</td>
<td>beggar</td>
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<td>lhakhang</td>
<td>annual groups, collective period</td>
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<td>lham</td>
<td>the New Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>longkhen</td>
<td>serpentine spirit</td>
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<tr>
<td>lori tsogchung</td>
<td>‘house of lu,’ shine of lumo</td>
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<td>losar</td>
<td>change of sex during birth</td>
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<td>lu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
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<td>ma spun</td>
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<td>dmangs gco’i bcos bsgyur dmar srung dmags smad / dman pa</td>
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<td>mar shungma</td>
<td>dmar srung dmags smad rigs</td>
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<td>mna’ ma bthang</td>
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<td>ngotsa</td>
<td>ngo tsha</td>
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<td>‘wind horse’ inscribed on flags</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(female) serpentine spirit (Tsang)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in-marrying husband</td>
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<td>matrilateral kin</td>
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<td>Democratic Reforms</td>
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<td>Red guards</td>
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<td>lower</td>
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<td></td>
<td>low kind</td>
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<tr>
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<td>to disintegrate, annihilate</td>
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<td>‘human lease’</td>
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<td>a category of the nobility holding high political positions</td>
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<td>hired labour</td>
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<td>People’s commune</td>
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<td>commoner</td>
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<td>divination</td>
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<td>diviner</td>
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<td>grandmother</td>
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<td>surface measure: 0.0667 hectares</td>
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<td>‘black book,’ recording the assistance received during mortuary rituals</td>
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<td>in-married wife</td>
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<td>send a nama (marry off a daughter)</td>
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<td>house protector (Tsang)</td>
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<td>inside, inner</td>
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<td>(inner) door</td>
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<td>domestic work</td>
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<td>female household head, nightclub</td>
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<td>‘insiders’, family</td>
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<td>barley, grain</td>
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<td>‘owner of illness,’ the dü called upon during exorcism ritual</td>
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<td></td>
<td>mountain of pilgrimage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>lineage of lay tantric practitioner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘the strong person,’ the protector of the dü (nedag) shy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
nor nor cattle, wealth, property
norkhang nor khang ‘wealth house,’ granary
nor lha nor lha ‘god of the wealth,’ household protector
nuebueb nyebo nye bo near
nyekhang nyal khang bedroom
nyetsöng gyurku lngal rtsol bsgyur bkod reform through labour
nōba gnod pa harm
nōba gāg (ya) gnod pa bkag harm stopper, talisman
nōba yong gnod pa yong the arrival of harm
nub nub west
pag spags tsampa dough
Panam pā nams Panam
pangṣöl bang gsol ritual cleansing of babies
phala pa lags father
pecha dpe cha religious text
pha pun pha spun patrilateral kin
pha chik ma chik pha gcig ma gcig ‘one father one mother’, siblings of same father and mother

phenthok phan thoks good things
pho lha pho lha protector of the patrilineage
pho yul lha pho yul lha the yul lha of Sharlung
phug lha phug lha god of the inside
pumba pum ba container used for offerings
pun spun relatives
pungya spun kyag relatives (colloquial)
pun nyebo spun nye ba near relatives
putsab bu tshab adoption
ralug ra lug mountain, the wilderness
ri ri kind, category, hereditary social status
rig rigs ‘one rig’, being of the same kind
rig chikpa rigs gcig pa high-rank hereditary social status (rig)
rig thobo rigs mtho po unclean rig
rig tsogpa rigs btsog pa helper, friend
rogpa rog pa mutual aid group system, collective period
rogre tsogchung rogs res chogs chung Teams, collective period
rukhaag ru khag bones
rū ru ‘same bones,’ agnates
rū chikpa rū gcig pa patrilineage
rū gyud rū rgyud
rüpa   rus pa  ‘people of the same bones,’
        agnates
sa      sa       Earth, soil
sadag   sa bdag  lord of the earth
samadrok sa ma ‘brog  semi-pastoralist
sang    bsangs   incense offering
sayön   sa yon   household leader
serpa   gsar pa  new
sem gyud sems rgyud personality, stream of mind
shagog  sha khog wedding gift: a slaughtered
        sheep with the stomach
        filled with wool
shing   zhing    agricultural produce
shingle  zhing las  agricultural work
sha     sha       flesh
shag    shag      residence
sha gyud  sha rgyud  ‘lineage of flesh’,
        matrilateral kin
sharnyi dütog  shar snying bdud bzlog  ‘The exorcizing of demons
        through the essence of wisdom,’ household ritual
        butcher
shemba  bshan ba  female tsen
shintre gsin ‘dre  hay
soma    sogma     agricultural tools
sonam lakcha so nam lag cha  Tibetan medicine
sowa rigpa gso ba rigs pa  aggressive and jealous
        woman
söntrema  gson ‘dre ma
        stove, hearth
        celebration marking the move of the stove to a new house
        god of the stove
        kitchen/livingroom
        struggle sessions during the Cultural Revolution
        to bring luck
        to send
        household
        upper floor, roof
        celebration marking the completion of the roof of a new house
tab     thab      corpse-cutters, burial
        workers
tab lha  thab lha
        tabtshang  thab tshang
        tamdzzing  ‘thab ‘dzing
        tashi demtrel bkra shis rtin ‘grel
        thang    btang ba
        thempa   them pa
        thog     thog
        togchang  thog chang
tomden  rtogs ldan
torma   gtor ma  offering cake
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tibetan</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tø</td>
<td>stod</td>
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<td>trag</td>
<td>khrag</td>
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<td>tremo</td>
<td>‘dre mo</td>
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<td>trelpa</td>
<td>khral pa</td>
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<td>trimön</td>
<td>‘dre mo</td>
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<td>trogle</td>
<td>‘brog las</td>
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<td>trogpo</td>
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<td>tsampa</td>
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<td>tsheyog</td>
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<td>tulku</td>
<td>sprul sku</td>
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<td>uri pangden</td>
<td>uri spang gdan</td>
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<td>ushing</td>
<td>dbu zhing</td>
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<td>wog lo</td>
<td>‘og la</td>
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<tr>
<td>wokhang</td>
<td>‘og khang</td>
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<tr>
<td>yakpo ma chewa</td>
<td>yak po ma byas pa</td>
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<td>xiang (Ch.)</td>
<td>shang</td>
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<td>yab yum</td>
<td>yab yum</td>
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<td>yamdag</td>
<td>yams nad kyi bdag po</td>
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<td>yang</td>
<td>gYang</td>
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<td>zasum</td>
<td>bza’ gsum</td>
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<tr>
<td>zhung gyuba</td>
<td>gzhung rgyugs pa</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Notes:
- stod: upper
- khrag: blood
- ‘dre mo: female tsen
- khral pa: ‘taxpayer,’ landholders in traditional Tibetan political organization
- tshe gyog: demonese
- ‘brog las: herding, nomads work
- grogs po: friend
- rtsa: veins
- tsa la: traditional stove
- rtsam pa: roasted barley flour
- bcan: spirit (of deceased non-ordained relative)
- uri spang gdan: gift to the bride’s mother upon marriage
- dbu zhing: twigs used for ritual purposes
- ‘og la: underneath, below
- ‘og khang: basement
- yak po ma byas pa: to not treat well
township
- shang: ‘father-mother,’ the union of the masculine and feminine principles
- gzhis: the category of the nobility that were the descendants of Dalai Lamas
- gYog po: serf, landless farmer
gul lha: god of the place
bza’ gsum: polyandry
gzhung rgyugs pa: government serfs