

SEATING, MONEY, AND FOOD AT
AN AMDO VILLAGE FUNERAL

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ABSTRACT

Seating, food, and money are discussed in the context of funerals held in the Amdo Tibetan village of Lo khog, located in Mar khu thang Town, Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, PR China. An analysis of these three elements, combined with an intimate personal account of the funeral of the first author's close relative in 2005, offer insights into villagers' social status, and power and gender roles in their everyday lives.

KEY WORDS

Tibetan funerals, Amdo, social status, power, Qinghai, Rma lho, Huangnan

PERSONAL ACCOUNT (RIN CHEN RDO RJE)

"Rinchen..., Rinchen..." Mother wept, not finishing.

"Rinchen..." Sister grabbed the phone from Mother and broke in, but with much hesitation.

"Ah..." I said in a faltering voice

"Come home now. Father expected you to be in Do kyA today," she said.

"Okay..." I mumbled.

"Oh! Dbang rgyal left us. Left us forever," Sister said.

No sooner had I put on my shoes than I found myself going home. I took a seat next to the window at the very back of the bus. The bus window was half open. Cold air lashed in and stung my face. I felt somehow relieved of the pang I felt in my heart. Over the long trip, the swaying of the bus lulled me into childhood memories of his images, one after another. This deeply stirred me. Tears trickled down my cheeks. I hated that it was him, and not me.

The bus bound to Gcan tsha let me off at Gdung sna. I went to a local shop to buy three tea bricks, which is what people normally present at a funeral. Unwelcome weather restricted transportation on the dirt roads. It was impossible to hitch a ride uphill. I waited. I had no choice; I took a van to the county town just before dark.

I spent the night at the home of one of my maternal cousins. Cousin brought up the subject of our next day's ride to Do kyA soon after my first sip of tea.

"Don't worry about tomorrow's ride. We're all set," he said.

"Er..." I choked, my heart aching at the mention of Cousin's death.

"We'll set out before breakfast," he said.

"Okay," I murmured.

I huddled under one quilt with my two nephews, who slept soundly all night. I couldn't sleep. I kept tossing and turning as if nails were being driven into my back. I finally dozed off as darkness began to leave. But almost immediately, with my heart beating oddly, I woke, bathed in heavy sweat that drenched me from my head downwards. I felt strangled by some invisible force. I sat up in the bed for a moment then slipped out of the house.

At the doorstep, I heard Cousin cough who, I assumed, had awakened from the squeaks of the door shutting behind me. It was overcast. The street was empty except for some cleaners sweeping at the far end of the street.

Our jeep roared as it snaked its way along the dirt track up the mountain slope and we observed majestic A myes Srin po looming through the fog. A narrow plot of forest stretched along a ridge. A few adobe houses dotted the mid-part of the nearest hill, at whose base ears of crops rustled heavily in the wind.

One adobe house stood out, bustling with activity, brimming with people both in and outside the house. With hands pressed to their foreheads, a few among them stood to see our jeep parked on the trail overlooking Uncle's house. With red eyes, Father immediately climbed up to greet us. Seeing my presence, Father's sad face showed a faint smile. Cousin and two other visitors were relieved of their

mourning gifts and beckoned towards the house gate.

A few villagers squatted near the house gate with chunks of bread in their hands, silently eating. At the sight of us, they stood at once and smiled a welcome. Women baking bread on the other side of the courtyard paused and stood, but kept their heads down. The air around us was heavily laden with the odor of baking and incense. Father waved, signaling to a boy, who hurried inside with a kettle of tea for Cousin and his companions, who were seated on the white felt at the hearth. I lingered on the porch. Fingering prayer beads, Cousin's father approached and gently patted me on the shoulder. It was followed by an emotionally unbearable scene with Cousin's mother, helped by Cousin's older sister, approaching me, both sobbing. Perhaps, my presence reminded them of Cousin who was my age. Having lost her son, Cousin's mother abandoned herself to despair.

Hearing the sobbing, Cousin's grandfather instantly appeared and told Cousin's mother and older sister to resume chanting. Seeing me, he quickly brought out a wood tray of baked bread, and poured me some black tea. Cousin's grandmother and two younger sisters were kneeling and spinning prayer wheels in front of the room in which I knew Cousin remained all alone. From their grievously exhausted expressions, I could tell they must have been there doing so since the first glimmer of dawn.

I sat on a mat next to Aunt, who instructed me to chant mantra verses inscribed on a crumpled, oily piece of paper. As she did, I chanted as many as I could, and after each complete recitation I marked it by slipping a yellow knot over a bead. Brother

came and handed me a hand prayer wheel to spin, which I did the entire afternoon.

Every fifteen minutes, Cousin's grandfather's visit to Cousin's undisturbed room alternated with his serving guests and monks. During every visit, the room was fumigated and clean spring water was splashed on the floor so that there would be no unpleasant odor.

In the early afternoon, the return of clan members along with their much awaited news from visiting eminent monasteries pleased Father and Cousin's grandfather. Both then wore relaxed smiles. Shortly afterwards, with full concentration, they set to the task of making a stretcher in the attic.

The monks stayed and Father, my uncles, Brother, and I were lodged in the house of an uncle's friend for the night. We slept on a *he rdze*¹ in age-order. I slept on the outer edge under one quilt with Brother.

In the wee hours, Father tugged at our quilts for us to get up. We hurried over to Uncle's house where monks were chanting, sitting cross-legged on the *he rdze* while male villagers either sat cross-legged or kneeled at the hearth. The room was crowded with mourners, so I had to push my way to the central pillar. Kneeling directly behind Aunt, I repeated after Aunt and the others. Aunt sensed my presence and turned, and then dissolved into tears. I flung back my head and out of the corner of my eyes, I discerned figures moving into the undisturbed room. I realized it was time for them to take Cousin.

¹ A raised adobe platform, constantly heated by smoke from the stove that passes through channels in the platform, before finally emerging from a chimney.

The whole crowd began to troop out of the house. Some village elders attempted to close the door to prevent women from coming out and wailing. Cousin's grandmother and sister struggled their way out and were finally let through. Cousin's grandmother howled, "Son, come back and stay with us for Grandpa!"

On the roof, the crowd was being instructed and I instantly knew it was Father doing the talking. My uncles and brother, and Cousin's grandfather maneuvered Cousin out of the room and hurriedly up along the ladder where Father and several experienced villagers received the stretcher. It was then moved over the wall and gradually lowered bit by bit by the ropes fastened to it. Uncles were already waiting for Cousin at the foot of the wall outside. Brother was still on the roof and slipped down the wall for he worried he couldn't catch up with the uncles. I quickly climbed down the ladder, and flew through the door after them.

We trotted along the trail along the hillside. Soon we had to cut through a vast area of desolate fields. We planned our arrival at the funeral site to be before sunrise so vultures could feed on Cousin at the first instant of sunrise. I replaced Brother, lifting one of the front poles and ran along with the uncles, who were being replaced by village elders. Dew on lush grass sopped through my shoes. One foot slipped into a pit hidden in the grass. The pole slipped off my shoulder, but Brother's timely grasp meant the funeral procession proceeded without a pause. This gave me the chance to regain my footing. Half an hour later, we reached an open area on a hill where the distant mountains came into view. Cousin's grandfather examined a stone-paved

area marked by a prayer flag hoisted there. He waved away a few wandering yaks. The villagers remained about thirty steps away. Cousin was then stripped of the white cloth and blanket and turned on his stomach, face down. The uncles held out the white cloth as a screen. Cousin's body was immensely swollen and dark. Cousin's grandfather smudged Cousin with wheat flour so his body looked better, nevertheless, the crack on his back, the cause of his death, remained apparent. Cousin's grandfather put cousin's palms so that they grasped each other, and crossed his ankles. He sighted along Cousin's spine to the mountain pass in the far distance, believing that was the way out for him. He pulled bread out of his robe pouch and scattered crumbs all around Cousin.

He said, his voice cracking with grief, "Son, you are blessed forever. I've made the way for you. I'll chant hundreds of millions of *ma Ni²* and light hundreds of millions of butter lamps for you. Don't fear. Don't look back. Rest in peace. Don't worry about the family. Find yourself a better home."

Except for Cousin's grandfather and Father, we all left at Father's suggestion that vultures might not fly down in fear of our presence. The crowd of villagers who had stayed in a circle around a blazing pile of dry bushes joined us as we climbed down along the trail. As the sun rose, and before we disappeared round a sharp curve, I looked back and caught sight of a few vultures hovering above Cousin.

At the dooryard of Cousin's home, two villagers waited with a kettle of lukewarm water and

² The six sacred syllables *aoM ma Ni pad + me h'uM*.

another kettle of lukewarm water mixed with a little milk that we rinsed our hands with. Lukewarm water was used first and milky water next. We then stepped over a smoldering pile of straw set in front of the threshold. Village elders were beckoned to climb through the window onto the *he rdze* while others were seated at the hearth.

Father, the uncles, Brother, and I had a separate room for a late breakfast. We were served a basin full of *rtsam pa*,³ plates of sugar and butter, and another basin full of baked bread. The uncles fed themselves quietly, but only a little food was eaten. Brother and Aunt drank tea squatting outside the door. Father made a chunk of *rtsam pa* and passed it to me across the table. I refused. I had no appetite. Whatever I ate or drank smelled of Cousin. In order not to rouse their attention, I snuck out of the room.

I sat on the edge of the threshing ground overlooking a cluster of adobe homes at the bottom of the forested valley. The village was silent except for barking dogs chained at several doors. A line of village women carrying buckets brimming with water trudged up the hill to Cousin's home. I hung my head in despair. Cold air tousled my hair. Fourth Uncle flopped down next to me and rolled tobacco in a piece of newspaper. He inhaled deeply as he smoked. Staring into the distance, he heaved a long sigh.

Out of the blue, Brother's cry on the roof drew my attention to flocks of vultures hovering high overhead, darkening the sky. Everyone's face lit

³ Roasted barley flour mixed with butter, dried cheese, and hot tea. It also refers to flour made from roasted barley.

up at the sight. It was almost noon when we caught sight of two dots on the hill—Cousin's grandpa and Uncle coming home.

Cousin's grandpa sipped tea as Cousin's father sat dejectedly and quietly on the porch. They both seemed not to have exchanged even a word on the way home. Cousin's grandpa remained chanting *ma Ni*, both of his hands busy counting beads and simultaneously, spinning a hand prayer wheel. Uncle slid his string of prayer beads over his left wrist and hurried inside to serve visitors.

In late afternoon, since major affairs had been taken care of, Father, the uncles, Brother, Aunt, and I got ready to leave. Before we all sat in a tractor-trailer, Father held his index finger under Uncle's nose and said vehemently, "If you start drinking again, I'll spit in your face."

Glaring at him, Cousin's grandpa added, "And besides, you won't be a part of this family."

Uncle wore a stern look on his pale, tired face and made a solemn oath that he would never drink so much as even a sip of liquor. Father and Cousin's grandpa were further convinced as he manifested unshakable resolve by raising his right palm.

Somehow, Uncle was blamed for Cousin's death. Every so often, he would be gone for a long time, and then return, always drunk. During those stays, he drank alone or was with some fellow villagers who were notorious drunkards. Mom said Cousin had learned these bad habits from Uncle.

Cousin was like my brother and a son of my family. He was a constant source of my childhood joy. I miss those times filled with our laughter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a plethora of publications on Tibetan funerals, e.g., a Google search on 'Tibetan funerals' produced 1,100 hits on November 20, 2007, that also included related video offerings on www.youtube.com. In the academic sphere, Tibetan imperial funeral customs, cultural assumptions attached to different funeral rites, and various ritual aspects have enjoyed popularity within the corpus of Tibetan funeral studies, e.g., Jiao and Hu (2003) and Chu's (1991) attempt to verify the existence and meaning of animal and human sacrifices during the era of the Tibetan Empire. Similar subjects were discussed in Ciwang's (2003) work.

Ancient Tibetan funerals are treated in a number of ways. Ying and Sun (2007) and Jiao and Chen (2003), for example, argue that the ancient practice of sky funerals (i.e., those which precede the earth burials of Tibetan imperial times) originated in Tibet. The authors argue that sky funerals functioned to reinforce kings' divine authority. They argue that the corpses of the first seven Tibetan kings were actually placed in inaccessible spots in the mountains where vultures fed on them. This was done in the fear that common Tibetans would learn the truth, i.e., that the kings died like everybody else. The mortality of kings first became evident when the misnamed King Gri gum btsan po (literally 'sword die emperor')—was killed in a public duel. This destroyed the notion that the kings were heavenly beings that went from Heaven to earth via a *dmu thag* 'rope'. The same authors suggest that the events just described explain the beginnings of earth burial and that the later sky funeral was the revitalized form of old sky funerals but altered by Buddhist belief. Jiao and Chen (2003) also acknowledge strong influence of Zoroastrianism on both Indian and old Tibetan sky funerals.

Zhang (in Geng 2004) concludes that earth burial was once common prior to the brief period of cremation, which was denied common Tibetans. Cremation, it was believed, brought one's soul into Heaven. Common Tibetans desired the same thing, i.e., the ascent of their souls into Heaven and thus adopted sky funerals from India, which epitomized the Buddhist notion of selflessly giving to others. Tai and Tao (in Geng 2004) conclude that sky funerals conform to the Bon notion that the deceased's soul will be taken to Heaven after it is eaten by vultures, i.e., the soul is carried to Heaven by the vultures.

Another prominent idea for the origin of sky funerals is such Buddhist narratives as 'The Body Offering to the Tigress' that tells of a prince offering his body to a starving tigress and her cubs. The body parts that remained were then cremated. There is incongruity in the idea that sky funerals are developed from a Buddhist notion that advocates cremation. Tai and Tao (in Geng 2004) suggest it was improbable that earth burial was once the primary form of burial in Tibet, since digging earth was a deeply entrenched taboo for Tibetans.

Geng's (2004) study of Tibetan funeral literature leads him to conclude that the outcome of related research differs mainly in what funeral type came first and cultural assumptions behind death rituals, and that the conflicts and different conclusions in such studies are such that Tibetan funerals need much more scholarly scrutiny.

A major flaw in work on Tibetan funerals, and Tibetan studies in general, is the notion that Tibetans are a single, homogenous people and culture. For example, studies on Tibetan dialects have described more than fifty separate dialects of Tibetan.⁴ Presumably, this linguistic

⁴ See Sun (2003) for an example and bibliography on Tibetan dialectology.

diversity is related to some degree of cultural diversity. In addition, Turin (2007) has suggested that, given that the Himalayan region contains one sixth of the world's languages, it should be considered a linguistic and cultural 'mega center'. Such observations raise questions as to how funeral activity in a particular local area represents the entirety of the Tibetan peoples. For instance, Derongzerendengzhu (1998, 810) wrote that in the Tibet Autonomous Region, relatives, neighbors, and villagers bring cash, grain, Tibetan barley liquor, and other items to the concerned family. However, in many Tibetan areas, such as the village that is the focus of this study, barley liquor is banned on funeral occasions.

A regional perspective is also employed, e.g., Bstan 'dzin dge legs' (1999) describes how, in the Tibet Autonomous Region, gifts of Buddhist icons and *thang kha*⁵ are presented to the *'pho ba gnang mkhan* lama.⁶ It is only briefly noted that feasts are offered to religious specialists and butter lamps are offered to the local monasteries. The suggestion is that what is described typifies all funerals throughout the vast Tibet Autonomous Region. The same tendency to generalize is found in Snyan bzang pa dge 'dun (2007), Gesangben and Gazangcaidan (2000), Liang (1993), and Liu (1991).

Bstan 'dzin dge legs (1999) suggests that presenting *thang kha* is the finest gift (throughout the entire Tibet Autonomous Region). In contrast, pieces of white felt and tea brick are obligatory gifts in Lo khog Village, with felt being particularly important. Likewise, Que (2005) asserts that water burial is for people at the bottom of a

⁵ A deity image on a cloth scroll.

⁶ The *'pho ba gnang mkhan* lama is responsible for guiding the deceased's soul to a next life. The term *sngas mgo* lama is also used in certain Amdo areas.

community's social strata; Gele et al. (2004) describes water burial as being only for people who experienced unnatural death in northern Tibet; and Du and Cui (2007) assert 'Tibetan' water burial is done to feed water deities and do not provide a specific timeframe for their assertions. In Lo khog, the situation is entirely different—water burial is the norm.

Certain funeral studies, e.g., Cui (2007), Bagaicuo (2005), Blackburn (2005), Shneiderman (2002), Ling (2000), Rinchen (1991), and Skorupski (1982) are ritual-oriented and fleetingly mention offerings and gifts that are an integral part of funerals; they make no mention of seating and expenditures. Brauen's (1982) work describes death customs in Ladakh in general and examines gift-giving in some detail, but barely mentions seating and food. Similarly, Ramble (1982) focuses on funeral rituals as means of expressing social status in Klu brag Tibetan Village in the Muktinath area of South Mustang, Nepal. Ramble describes drink offerings presented to the deceased in effigy; gives passing reference to lamas being paid in food, drinks, and cash; and mentions that villagers are fed twice (without detail) and given grain. Seating is not mentioned. Liang (1993) elaborates details on offerings to the deceased, but gives few details on food, gift-giving, and seating in Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Liu (1991) also describes the same elements in Sherpa communities, but seating goes unnoticed. Gesangben and Gazangcaidan (2000) describe funerals in Tibet, at times with fleeting mention of offerings, gifts, and food in some particular places. However, none of these describe these three elements together.

'Tibetan Studies' as a field of inquiry has long made certain assumptions about Tibetan society and areas. As already mentioned, one of these (erroneous) assumptions is that there is such similarity in Tibetan customs across the

enormous Tibetan cultural area that the results of a study in one area automatically represents the much larger 'cultural Tibet'. A second assumption is that the more complex a ritual, especially if it uses intricate religious texts and exotic religious implements, the more worthy of study it is. These and other such notions have prioritized Tibetan culture in a way that has nearly made certain elements of funerals that are of critical importance to ordinary Tibetans nearly invisible, e.g., the foods that are prepared and served, how people are seated at funerals, and the funeral economy.

The literature suggests that Tibetan funeral studies are characterized by a focus on rituals, complex religious elements, and on broad generalizations. Consequently, other ritual elements such as the themes discussed in this paper are rendered invisible. This study, unlike many previous publications, deals with elements on a specific, local level that are most relevant to ordinary Tibetan villagers. With the death of village elders in charge of such village rituals, many elements described in this paper will cease to be practiced within a decade or so. In order to preserve the diversity of culture that exists between Tibetan communities, more such detailed studies need to be carried out, before this variety is lost.

METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on seating, money, and food relating to funerals in Lo khog Village and, in so doing, provides detailed description of these three important elements and how they relate to the larger community from a local perspective. This is done in the context of a contemporary version of a Tibetan village funeral amid rapidly changing Tibetan culture in the early twenty-first century. Semi-structured interviews and experiential data on the recent

(2005, 2007) deaths of two of the first author's immediate relatives are used, revealing how villagers feel about funeral participation. The formal introduction to the paper provides detail about the ordinary life of its inhabitants, thus providing a setting for the more detailed description of funeral process and, within that context, seating, money, and food. These are the three major elements that are strongly associated with lived experience of ordinary Tibetan villagers and that can best reflect a rich culture concerning villagers' social status, power, and gender roles in their everyday life.

VILLAGE INTRODUCTION

Lo khog Village lies in Gcan tsha County's main valley, four kilometers north of the county seat, Mar khu thang Town, where two rivers⁷ from Srin po Mountain empty into the Rma chu (Yellow River). The village comprises ninety-one Tibetan households with a population of approximately 600 Tibetans.

Cultivating wheat on irrigated, terraced fields is the mainstay of the local economy. About one-tenth of the fields are planted with potatoes, rapeseed, and barley. The best land produces 400 kilograms of wheat per *mu*.⁸ The very limited land means that beans (for animal feed in winter) are not cultivated. Instead, wheat is exchanged for beans in such nearby mountain villages as Nya mo, Rstag 'a gong, and Lha sa. The majority of the land is irrigated with water from streams diverted from nearby rivers, which runs through the fields in ditches. Over 200 *mu* of land was abandoned in the 1990s because its location does not allow

⁷ Neither the valley nor the two rivers have specific names.

⁸ One *mu* = 0.067 hectares or 0.16 acres.

for irrigation and the subsequent low yields did not justify the effort that went into cultivation.

Most families own a mule, a few donkeys, and several cows. Mules are used as both plough- and pack-animals, while donkeys serve only the latter purpose. About ten households own forty to fifty goats and a few sheep. Their hair is used to make felt and is also sold for cash.⁹

Villagers sell grain when they are in urgent need of money and in daily life. They exchange grain for leeks, green chilies, potatoes, beans, starch noodles, brown sugar, salt, oranges, aluminum pots, metal buckets, steamers, strainers, vinegar, soy sauce, mutton, beef, pork, and farming implements with Han businessmen who transport the above items in small trucks to the village and then drive slowly along village lanes, shouting the names of their goods. These Han peddlers will accept grain as payment, while in the county town, only cash payment is accepted. This, along with the convenience, makes doing business with the traders who come to the village attractive. It is rare for Tibetans to do such business.

THE *BDUN PA SA*¹⁰ AND THE *SNGAS MGO* LAMA¹¹

The *bdun pa sa* (see Appendix One for an explanation of all non-English terms) are a group of seven monks that are

⁹ In 2007, one kilogram of hair sold for eight RMB.

¹⁰ This local Tibetan term literally translates as 'seven (monks)' and refers to a group of seven monks.

¹¹ Literally translated as 'pillowside lama' (the head of a bed where a pillow is placed), this particular lama sits by the deceased's bed next to the pillow supporting the corpse's head and says prayers. Sometimes he says the prayers into the ear of the deceased.

invited from the largest and closest monasteries¹² (Appendix Two gives a summary of the entire funeral process) immediately after a death. They chant *Bla mchod*, *Sman bla*, *Smon lam*,¹³ and *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad*, which are believed to remove the sins of the deceased and assist them in finding a favorable incarnation in the next life. This chanting is a tradition adopted from Bde chen Monastery that traces its origin to 'bras spung Monastery in Lha sa. The monks sit on a large piece of white felt underlain with two pieces of black felt on the *he rdze* (see Appendix Three for a map of a house showing seating arrangements). The deceased remains in an undisturbed room and is offered every meal including milk tea, *rtsam pa*, both fried and baked bread, *sha khu*,¹⁴ 'bras nyog,¹⁵ *mchod*,¹⁶ yogurt, and fruits, which are placed on the table near the corpse that also has at least three lit butter lamps placed in front of scriptures (see Appendix Four for the cost of these and other necessary funeral items).

After the *bdun pa sa* have completed their activities, which require four to five days, a *sngas mgo* lama is invited. At times, the *sngas mgo* lama arrives when the *bdun ba sa* are still chanting, in which case the *sngas mgo* lama sits on a stack of three pieces of white felt topped with a carpet on the upper part of the *he rdze*, while the *bdun pa*

¹² Bde chen, Brag, Mgur, Ko'u, Ngang rong, Gsang sgrog, and Lha ri monasteries.

¹³ 'phags pa bzang po spyod pa'i smon lam.

¹⁴ Noodles cooked with a generous amount of meat. Such a meal for each monastery cost approximately 1,580 RMB in 2007.

¹⁵ Cooked rice mixed with sheep fat, jujubes, and sugar. Raisins and butter might be added.

¹⁶ Soup with clear starch noodles, meat, potatoes, and a small amount of green chili.

sa occupy the other parts of the *he rdze*. The *sngas mgo* lama may also be seated in the prayer room.¹⁷ The *sngas mgo* lama is given a piece of white felt worth one hundred RMB, 300-1,500 RMB in cash, three tea bricks, a *kha btags*,¹⁸ and a *bzo 'go*¹⁹ of silk. Often, a quilt or blanket, a piece of white felt, a tea kettle, a scoop, three *thab rdo*,²⁰ and an aluminum pot containing a half kilo each of rice, wheat flour, barley flour, butter, and dried cheese are added. This addition is initially offered for the deceased for their journey to their afterlife. At times, both *phrug* and *tsha ru*²¹ are added to the gifts. The exact nature of gifts varies according to location and even from home to home. Offering flexibility depends on the concerned family's financial condition.²²

Each *bdun pa sa* is given fifty RMB in cash, a piece of bread baked in heated earth, and a tea brick. The *sngas*

¹⁷ The *sngas mgo* lama may also be invited to direct a living person's soul two or three years before their death.

¹⁸ A strip of silk presented as a sign of respect to individuals, to deity images, to sacred trees, etc. One *kha btags* cost four to eight RMB and one tea brick cost five to nine RMB in 2007.

¹⁹ Enough fabric to make a robe.

²⁰ Stones for building a hearth. Three stones are used to support a kettle or pot on a trip.

²¹ *Phrug* or *phrug lwa* refers to a thin woolen cloth robe while a *tsha ru* is a lambskin robe.

²² Bstan 'dzin dge legs (1999, 551) reports that in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the *sngas mgo* lama, known as the *'pho ba gnang mkhan* lama, is presented silk, cash, and a gilded (or bronze or clay) icon of Shakyamuni. The latter is considered the finest gift. If such offerings are too expensive, a *thang kha* is presented. Poor families offer a certain amount of cash and several *kha btags*.

mgo lama and *bdun pa sa* are offered meat, sugar, butter, and *rtsam pa* during their stay. In total, a visit as described above requires the following items for feeding the lama and monks (888 RMB in value):

Figure One: Lama and monks' food expenditure.

Item	Amount	RMB Per	Total RMB
sugar	3.5 kg	5.00	17.50
<i>rtsam pa</i>	6.5 kg	1.60	10.40
butter	15.0 kg	24.00	360.00
sheep carcass	1	500.00	500.00

Frequently, more chanting is suggested by the *sngas mgo* lama or *bdun pa sa*. If so, the concerned family turns to tantric specialists or *dge bo*,²³ who chant such scriptures as 'pho lung, Bkra shis brtsegs pa, Sman bla'i stong mchod, Gzungs 'dus, and Mdo for the next two or so days in the home of the deceased on the *he rdze*. They are not paid since they are from the same village.

'od dpag med stong mchod²⁴ is chanted by another group of monks in the deceased's home two to three days after the death. Sons, brothers, and cousins assist during the ritual. Requirements include 1,000 lit butter lamps (seventy kilograms of butter), 1,000 bowls of water, 1,000 bowls of barley (seventy-five to eighty kilograms of barley), and

²³ A former monk.

²⁴ This ceremony is performed so that Amitābha, the Buddha of Limitless Light, will show the way for the deceased who otherwise might become lost on their journey at the end of which the deceased begins their next life.

1,000 *lha bshos*²⁵ (150 kilograms of *rtsam pa*) on the offering tables before the monks. The chanting is completed in a day, but the offering lasts for almost two entire days. Typically, a family borrows lamps from the village shrine so as to have the necessary lamps. Thirty minutes are required for the lamps to burn out and then new ones are offered. Two days is required to burn the seventy kilograms of butter. Similarly, bowls are also borrowed from the village shrine for the offerings of water and barley. Every thirty minutes or so, the water and the barley are removed and fresh water and barley are added. This explains why two days are needed. Each monk is paid fifty RMB in cash, a piece of bread, a tea brick, and a *kha btags*.

The Sman bla'i stong mchod chanting ceremony may be conducted preceding one's death, but only when a person is on their deathbed. It requires the same items as described above. This chanting beseeches prayers from the God of Medicine or Sman bla, who eases the deceased's pain on their deathbed.

VISITS

Villagers visit the concerned family soon after hearing of the death. They bring a piece of bread baked in heated earth, a tea brick, or both as a token of their concern for the family. Relatives and sons or daughters who married out often bring loads of barley or wheat grain on pack animals ranging from 150 to 500 kilograms in amount. Those with official jobs bring 100-1,000 RMB in cash. A sheep carcass

²⁵ Such sacrificial objects made of *rtsam pa* as butter lamps and pyramids.

or a sheep stomach full of butter²⁶ may complement the cash offering.²⁷

A clan member records the gifts. The name of the father of the household presenting the gift is recorded, as well as the gift. These gifts pile up on the porch on the bare ground. Two or three clan members seat the visitors in the home of the bereaved. Elders sit on white felt on the *he rdze* while younger adult men sit on black felt at the hearth in the living room. Some elders may sit on white felt at the head of the row when the *he rdze* is fully occupied. Old women sit on the bare dirt floor at the hearth across from adult men. Some younger adult women may join the old women. Most adult women either squat or kneel on the porch. All visitors are served black tea, fried bread, butter, and *rtsam pa*.²⁸

Visitors from outside the village are seated on pieces of white felt at the head of the row at the hearth and are served butter, *rtsam pa*, and black tea. When they leave the bereaved home, each is given a bowlful of tea leaves wrapped in white cloth.

Sons, brothers, and cousins of the deceased travel to and beseech prayers from such major monasteries (see Appendix Five for details of monasteries visited by the bereaved family) in the county as Bde chen, Mgur, and Brag, whose monks then chant scriptures such as Smon lam

²⁶ A sheep stomach full of butter cost 350-450 RMB in 2007.

²⁷ Derongzerendengzhu (1998, 810) writes that relatives, neighbors, and villagers bring cash, grain, liquor, and so on to the concerned family in Tibet. Gele et al. (2004, 361) report that when relatives in the Tibet Autonomous Region hear the news of the death, they bring money, butter, and even animals.

²⁸ Lamas, monks, and men are served at tables while women and children are offered food by a few clan members.

and Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad for the better passage of the deceased's soul. Each monk in the approached monasteries is given a piece of bread and five to ten RMB in cash; the monks are also given *sha khu* at noon of the day these representatives visit. This is known as *mang ja*. Overall, such expenses include 450-500 pieces of baked bread²⁹ and 2,250 to 5,000 RMB in cash.³⁰

If the deceased is a child, village children are given candies in the hope they will pray for the deceased.

Children may also be given candy when an adult dies, but it is less common than when the deceased is a child.

SKAR MA

A *sngas mgo* lama determines the day, known as *skar ma*,³¹ for disposal of the corpse.³² During *skar ma*, male elders sit

²⁹ Bread alone required 300-350 kilograms of wheat flour, worth 420-490 RMB in 2007.

³⁰ Half of the deceased's property in the Tibet Autonomous Region is given to the Potala Palace while the other half is sold and the proceeds used to pay for meals for monasteries and given to poor people (Danzhu'angben, 2002, 246). In Nag chu, certain of the deceased's property such as bowls and tools are kept at home while such articles as clothes are given to corpse cutters, known as *gtegs ldan*, beggars, or specialists who chisel *ma Ni* on rocks (Gele et al. 2004, 362).

³¹ A ritual during which the corpse is removed from the home.

³² Silk and some cash are sent to the *rtsis pa* 'diviner' to choose an auspicious day for burial in the Tibet Autonomous Region (Bstan 'dzin dge legs, 1999, 552).

on the *he rdze* while younger adult men sit at the hearth. Female relatives of the deceased kneel at the doorway of the living room. Before the corpse is removed from the home, male villagers are served *sha khu*. Upon their return from the site where the corpse was left, they each receive a bowlful of tea leaves wrapped in white cloth and a fist-sized chunk of *rtsam pa*.

Bdun pa sa preside over *ma Ni* prayer chanting, which may also be conducted by village monks, nuns, and *dge bo* who are unpaid. They sit on white felt at the hearth and occasionally on the *he rdze*. They chant passages of *mgur*³³ employing long phrases that have initial grace ornaments. This chanting is accompanied by the playing of religious instruments—the *Da ru*,³⁴ a small two-faced drum with attached strikers, and *dril bu* 'bell'. The mostly female mourners, the majority of whom are also members of the funeral procession, kneel and face the specialists to sing the chorus *aoM ma Ni pad + me h'uM* after each verse is recited by the specialists. Their chanting is sung in unison, employing long undulating phrases. This ceremony takes place prior to removal of the corpse from the bereaved home and better ensures a good next life.

VILLAGE MEALS, BORROWED UTENSILS, AND OTHER NECESSITIES

One or two days after the death, a large adobe stove is built by clan members in the courtyard of the house of the deceased. Women make dough and men fry it. A whole day is spent doing this. At the same time, a group of clan members are assigned to grind two tractor-trailers of wheat

³³ 'Songs of spiritual realization'—see Sujata 2005.

³⁴ *Da (ma) ru*.

grain in a mill in such nearby communities as Gle chen and Mar khu thang. The people involved are served butter and *rtsam pa* for lunch, and *sha khu* for supper. They do not expect nor do they receive any payment since they are from the same clan. About two and a half kilograms of butter and ten kilograms of *rtsam pa* are eaten for lunch by clan members at work. Another entire day is spent by clan women baking bread in heated earth. The same amount of butter and *rtsam pa* just described are also required for this day.

All villagers are offered tea and fried bread at the bereaved home the morning of the following day. This is always extended to two to three days. Male elders sit on the *he rdze* while younger adult men sit at the hearth. Women and children sit in the courtyard. At noon, the meal alternates between *'bras nyog* and *mchod*. In the evening, they are served *sha khu*. The cost for each of the two to three days is approximately 500 RMB.³⁵

Generally, fifty kilograms of butter (1,000 RMB) is purchased either from Rma lho or Rtse khog counties. In most cases, the family has an adequate supply of *rtsam pa*—fifty to one hundred kilograms. Certain poor families are loaned *rtsam pa* by rich families, who expect them to return what they borrow when they experience a death in their families.

Two or three clan members stand at the doorway during the communal meal and dole out a share of food for

³⁵ Fried bread requires seventy-five kilograms of rapeseed oil (900 RMB) and 300 kilograms of wheat flour (720 RMB). Baked bread requires 250 kilograms of wheat flour (600 RMB). *'bras nyog* requires seventy-five kilograms of rice (300 RMB), fifteen kilograms of fat (150 RMB), seven and a half kilogram of sugar (thirty RMB), and fifteen kilograms of jujubes (100 RMB).

absent members to their relatives who have come. Each absent villager is given a slice of baked bread, two pieces of fried bread in the morning, a ladle of *'bras nyog* or *mchod*, one *mar lo*³⁶ at noon, and two ladles of *sha khu* in the evening.

Bowls, basins, buckets, spoons, black felt, and tables are borrowed from clan members. When these articles are returned, the clan members receive a few slices of baked bread mixed with fried bread.

Communal pots from the village shrine are borrowed and then returned with at least a half tea brick in each. All village families are each given an earth-baked bread and tea brick at the end of the two or three days of village meals offered by the family of the deceased. This is the minimum an ordinary concerned family offers. Wealthy families might give in addition, seven and a half kilograms of rice, fifteen kilograms of wheat flour, a half kilogram of butter, and ten to fifteen RMB in cash to each village family.

FASTING

Fasting, mostly by women, lasts for two to three days and begins with a session of chanting called *gso sbyong* by tantric specialists or *dge bo* at five a.m. for about half an hour. They sit on pieces of white felt, make *lha bshos*, and light butter lamps. This ritual requires six to seven and a half kilograms of *rtsam pa* and nearly one kilogram of butter. The total value of this amounts to 200 RMB. Fasting villagers are served only black tea or *ring ja* in the morning. At noon, they are served butter and *rtsam pa*. This meal is called *bzom tsa*. For only this meal, seven and a half to ten

³⁶ It literally translates as 'butter leaf', which describes its size and shape.

kilograms of butter and twenty-five kilograms of *rtsam pa* are eaten.³⁷ In the evening, they are only served black tea. They continue to fast the next day. Those fasting must not utter a single syllable. At the dawn of the third day, the fast is broken by a meal of *thor thug* (two and a half kilograms of roasted wheat flour cooked in a pot full of milk) and next, either *sha khu* or meat-stuffed dumplings. Before they leave, they are each given a tea brick, a piece of baked bread, and five RMB in cash. The monks or *dge bo* are each given a tea brick, a piece of baked bread, and ten RMB in cash, which is always double of what fasting villagers are given.

REBIRTH AND DUS RAN³⁸

For the first seven weeks after death, the deceased's soul roams in Bar do, the state between birth and death. The concerned family and close relatives abstain from recreational gatherings. Butter lamps are lit and chanting by the concerned family members is done continually. On the forty-ninth day, villagers are sure that the deceased has been reborn.³⁹ Fasting takes place again and requires exactly the

³⁷ 220-280 RMB in value in 2007.

³⁸ The first anniversary of the deceased's death.

³⁹ Bstan 'dzin dge legs (1999, 569-570) reports that forty-nine days after a death in the Tibet Autonomous Region, a lama and monks are invited to chant at the deceased's home. All the relatives are present to celebrate the rebirth of the deceased. Gilded copper, silver, bronze, or clay icons; *thang kha*; and miniature *thang kha* are displayed. Relatives present scarves and make offerings for the deceased. Lamas and monks are offered the warmest hospitality and a celebration is held for the relatives for their help up to the

same expense. Several monks may be invited to chant and they are given the same amount of gifts as the *bdun pa sa*. Once again local major monasteries are visited and offered butter lamps. Some rich families visit the *sngas mgo* lama, who ensures the ascent of one's soul, and present 100 RMB, a tea brick, a piece of bread, and a *kha btags*.

On Dus ran, a person from each village household is invited to the home of the deceased and served *sha khu*. At least three prayer flags are attached to the poles on A ma Sman btsun, A myes Cha tshang,⁴⁰ and Brag Monastery.⁴¹

Water burial, sky funerals, and cremation are practiced locally. Water burial is the most common in

day of the deceased's rebirth. On behalf of the concerned family, relatives visit nearby temples and present an assembly of offerings and buy new offering bowls to replace old ones. Some particular monasteries are provided a meal, and at the same time, neighborhood beggars are given food. Gele et al. (2004, 360-361) write that in Nag chu, the chanting lasts for forty-nine days in total. Butter lamps are lit, and *rtsam pa*, tea leaves, and fried bread are offered to the deceased for forty-nine days. Rich families may give a bull or a sheep to rock carvers to chisel the six sacred syllables on rocks in a spot previously indicated by the deceased or chosen by family members after a death.

⁴⁰ A ma Sman btsun is a considered to be a mountain and a high ranking female deity who Lo khog villagers compare to a caring, protective mother. This mountain is in front of the village. A round trip to A ma Sman btsun requires half a day at a fast walk. A myes Cha tshang is the *skyes lha* 'natal deity', and the mountain where this deity resides is behind Lo khog Village. Two hours on foot is required to reach the mountaintop.

⁴¹ A strip of prayer flag cost seven RMB in 2007.

communities along the Yellow River while sky funerals are common for mountain communities.

BURIAL AND FUNERAL METHODS

Respectable and knowledgeable elders and old monks are cremated. Water disposal is currently the most common current form of funeral for villagers, replacing the older form of sky funeral. Those with higher social positions, power, and wealth receive a grander and more expensive funeral. Following is a description of each type of burial/funeral.

Water Burial

Water burial is simple. The corpse is wrapped in either a blanket or white cloth and is then placed inside a *phrug* or *tsha ru*. On *skar ma*, the corpse is carried on a stretcher by the sons, brothers, and male cousins of the deceased to the Yellow River. The rest of the funeral procession, mainly fellow villagers, follows. On the riverbanks, two or three connected ropes are looped around the waists of the sons, brothers, and male cousins while the ends are held in the grips of other members of the funeral procession. They carry the corpse and wade into the river until water reaches their chins and then they let the corpse drift away with the current. Sometimes, the piece of white felt that is fastened on the stretcher is also dumped into the river.

Cremation

Cremation is an elaborate procedure. A knowledgeable monk or a tantric specialist studies several places and then settles on a site that is auspicious in some respect, e.g., a place that is bereft of any pollution and that is geographically/ geomantically ideal for the deceased. The chosen place is often a spot in a field on the village outskirts. Today, this procedure is omitted. When constructing a stupa and a *'bum khang*,⁴² this geomantic study is done very carefully. The family usually chooses the place the deceased should be cremated. A mason, who is paid fifty RMB in cash, a piece of baked bread, and a tea brick, is invited to the designated spot to build a stupa-like *bsang khri* 'cremation oven' in which the corpse is cremated.

Very early in the morning of *skar ma*, the *sngas mgo* lama proceeds to the site and chants Thar mdo and Smon lam. He is seated on a *khri* or a throne comprised of three pieces of white felt topped with a blanket and a flower image at the back. He is accompanied by three monks who chant and sit on white felt underlain by two pieces of black felt. Another monk hands offering ingredients to the lama, who consecrates them, returns the now-consecrated items to the monk who, in turn, gives them to a member of the concerned family and demonstrates what to do with them. A basin and a bowl of each of the following offering ingredients are placed on a long narrow table near the lama.

⁴² A square structure that contains thousands of deity icons molded from clay.

Figure Two: Burnt offering ingredient expenditure.

Item	Amount	RMB per	Total RMB
Sesame seeds	7.5 kg	7.00	52.50
Wheat	7.5 kg	1.60	12.00
Barley	7.5 kg	1.60	12.00
White beans	7.5 kg	2.00	15.00
White mustard seeds	7.5 kg	6.00	45.00
<i>So ba</i> ⁴³	7.5 kg	1.60	12.00
Rice	7.5 kg	3.20	24.00
<i>'on bu</i> ⁴⁴	100 pieces		
<i>Ku sha</i> ⁴⁵	1 bundle		

Seven and a half kilograms of each grain is required. The latter two items are always procured from the local mountains. Fifteen kilograms of butter are melted in a pot near the funeral proceedings. Melted butter is periodically poured into the cremation stupa to make a hotter fire.

About ten minutes after the fire has begun burning in the cremation stupa, the funeral procession leaves and returns to the deceased's home, where they are offered black tea, baked bread, butter, and *rtsam pa*. The lama and monks chant until the corpse is completely cremated, a process that requires about an hour. Bone ash is gathered about a half hour after the lama and monks leave. The remains are stored in a container by the sons, brothers, or cousins of the deceased and taken to the *a mchod* of the concerned family

⁴³ Thick-shelled barley.

⁴⁴ This is procured from bushes in local mountains.

⁴⁵ This is considered sacred grass. Buddha obtained *ku sha* grass from a shepherd to use as a mat before he retreated to meditate under the Boddhi tree. Procuring *ku sha* grass requires a six hour roundtrip to local mountains.

who performs *rus chog*⁴⁶ 'bone ritual' for forty-nine consecutive days, or for at least a week. The *a mchod* is always a *dge slong* 'fully ordained monk', who abides by the 253 codes of conduct. He is offered 800-1,000 RMB in cash, a *kha btags*, a piece of white felt, and three tea bricks. Afterwards, he is offered a bag of flour and a bag of fruits every year. Every Lo sar, he is visited by the concerned family who brings him a piece of baked bread and two or three tea bricks. It is also a must that a lower part of a pig or sheep carcass is sent to the *a mchod* every winter.

Upon the completion of *rus chog*, a son or a brother of the deceased, if the family is wealthy, goes to Lha sa to scatter the bone ash at such important religious sites as Se ra, 'bras spung, and Dga' ldan monasteries. The ash may also be scattered near Yum bu bla sgang and Lha mo bla mtsho. Most village families, however, are not wealthy, so mix the remains with brown earth, and mold *tshwa tshwa*⁴⁷ from it that are then taken to the tops of such local mountains as A ma Sman btsun or such monasteries as Brag. It may also be scattered on several sacred mountaintops or in the Yellow River. At times, bone ash is scattered on the water surface and then a *tshwa tshwa* 'mold' is used to slap the water surface. Making a trip to take bone ash to Lha sa and offering butter lamps in the Potala Palace, Se ra, 'bras spung, and Dga' ldan monasteries are ideal choices for villagers.

When a village monk dies, all the monks from his *gshog ka* or group of monks from the same monastery gather and sell his belongings to fellow monks or the monastery the deceased monk belonged to so that they will

⁴⁶ A religious ritual that consecrates the bone ash or the remains of the deceased.

⁴⁷ It refers to the mould and also to the clay stupa-shaped, egg-sized objects that come from the mold.

be able to host *mang ja* and offer butter lamps in monasteries. They chant for seven days consecutively. On the forty-ninth day after the death, the monks gather again to chant for the rebirth of the deceased monk. They do not expect payment and are not paid.

Sky Funeral

Sky funerals were discontinued in about 1990 because the sky funeral site required a journey on foot at a fast pace that took three hours one way. When the corpse was to be chopped up and fed to birds, a stretcher was made and sons, brothers, and cousins used it to carry the corpse on their shoulders to reach the site before sunrise; a level, grassy area on a mountaintop. When the funeral procession returned, they were offered a meal identical to that following a water burial. A group of monks might also have been invited to chant near the burial site. They were paid a total of one hundred RMB, a piece of baked bread, a *kha btags*, and a tea brick.

Friends of the concerned family might have gone to guard the body and accepted the duties of the *gtegs ldan* 'body-cutter' who was always a villager who had no blood or marriage relationship to the deceased. He was paid fifty to one hundred RMB in cash, a piece of baked bread, and a tea brick. Occasionally, *phrug* and *tsha ru* were given to the *gtegs ldan*, who rarely disclosed his identity in fear that he might be asked to do another cutting job in the future and the belief that cutting up a body might defile his soul.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Bstan 'dzin dge legs (1999, 560-561) reports that in the Tibet Autonomous Region, one or two people set out first either on horse or on foot with packs containing *rtsam pa*, tea, butter, Tibetan cakes, and cooked meat. The body

CONCLUSION

Seating is a rich study in relationship to the deceased, age, generation, authority, and gender. For example, in terms of gender, men are seated inside the house with male elders seated on white felt on *he rdze* while most women kneel or squat on the bare ground outside.

Gifts presented to those who attend the funeral demonstrate the importance of religious authority, e.g., a lama was presented gifts worth 548-3,526 RMB in 2007, while a village family was rewarded with a tea brick (five RMB in value) for their contribution of several days of hard, manual labor.

Food also represents social status, e.g., the *sngas mgo* lama and monks are served meat and other, better food and a wealthy family may feed the entire village for five days. Regular families were required, in 2007, to spend at least 740 RMB to feed the lama and monks.

Every village household contributes to the funeral; to do otherwise risks being labeled a cruel, indecent human

cutters, known as *stobs ldan*, and carriers, known as *phung gdan*, receive appropriate cash payment, a few pieces of *kha btags*, and a few clothes of the deceased. The *stobs ldan* receives many gifts. A few monks may be invited for about half an hour of chanting and are paid. Gele et al. (2004, 361) write that in Nag chu, distant relatives bring *rtsam pa* and boil butter tea far from the sky burial site. Meat is not eaten during the funeral. The *gtegs ldan*, who are often poor, are allowed to take the clothes of the deceased, fed a meal, and are given butter and *rtsam pa*. Occasionally, they are given a yak or a sheep. Rich families invite monks to chant close by. Yu (2004, 33) suggests that in the Tibet Autonomous Region, a body cutter is paid 300-3,000 RMB and a noted master might make 30,000 RMB a month.

being. When the representative of a village family is absent from a funeral of a neighbor or fellow villager, the village family receives such blistering criticisms as "Death is the greatest suffering one can experience. Evil must have gripped their entire family. Let's see what happens when death befalls them."

Many villagers are appropriated for various work duties—young men shop and perform such hard labor as building stoves for cooking in the concerned family's courtyard, chop meat, transport bags of wheat to the nearest mill to be ground in order for the family to prepare an adequate amount of wheat-flour-based food, and so on. Women bake bread, cook dishes of food, and serve visitors. Old men advise adults on such religious matters as which monasteries and lamas they should turn to for religious services. Old women chant and circumambulate the village *'bum khang* and pray for the deceased.

Looking at the broader picture of local funerals, status and other social distinctions are immediately apparent. This is evident from cremation and water burials, aside from sky funerals, which ceased more than a decade ago. Cremation is usually reserved for the group of respectable and knowledgeable elders, and old monks, owing to their religious authority. On the contrary, water burial is the commonplace method employed on the occasion when an ordinary villager dies.

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APPENDIX ONE: NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Tibetan terms followed by * are oral rather than literary terms. English terms preceded by * indicate that the translation indicates a category in which the Tibetan term belongs so that, for example A mdo (see below) is a location; the word A mdo does not, itself, translate as 'location'.

Tibetan	Wiley	Pinyin	Chinese Characters	English
ཇ་མཚོད།	<i>a mchod</i>	<i>jingchan heshang</i>	经忏和尚	a fully ordained monk who performs the 'bone ritual' for the deceased
ཇ་མདོ།	A mdo	Anduo	安多	*location
ཇ་མྱེས་སྤྱིན་པོ།	A myes Srin po	Anishenbao	阿尼申宝	*location/ deity name
ཇ་མ་ཉི་པ་རྒྱ་ལྷོ།	<i>aoM ma Ni pad + me h'uM</i>	<i>an ma ni ba mi hong</i>	唵嘛呢叭弥 吽	a Buddhist mantra
བར་དོ།	Bar do	<i>wa'erduo (zhongyin)</i>	瓦尔多 (中 阴)	the intermediate state between death and reincarnation
བདེ་ཆེན།	Bde chen	Deqin si	德钦寺	*monastery

བདུན་པ་ས།	<i>bdun pa sa</i>	<i>qi senglü</i>	七僧侶	a group of seven monks that are invited from the largest and closest monasteries
བཀྲ་ཤིས་བརྟེན་པ།	Bkra shis brtsegs pa			*scripture
བླ་བྲང་།	Bla brang	Labuleng si	拉卜楞寺	*monastery
བླ་མཚོ།	Bla mchod			*scripture
བྱག	Brag	Zhihe si	智合寺	*monastery
འབྲས་ཉོག་*	'bras nyog	<i>babao fan</i>	八宝饭	rice porridge
འབྲས་སྤུངས།	'bras spungs	Zhebang si	哲蚌寺	*monastery
བསང་མྱི	<i>bsang khri</i>	<i>jitan</i>	祭坛	place for burning smoke offerings
འབྲུམ་ཁང་།	'bum khang	<i>benkang</i>	奔康	a square structure that contains thousands of deity icons molded from clay.
བཟོམ་ཅ།	<i>bzom tsa</i>			a meal of butter and <i>rtsam pa</i>
པ་ར།	<i>Da ru</i>	<i>bolangu</i>	拨浪鼓	a small two-faced drum with attached strikers
དབང་རྒྱལ།	Dbang rgyal	Xiangjie	项杰	*person

དགའ་ལྷན།	Dga' ldan	Gandan si	甘丹寺	*monastery
དགའ་བོ།*	<i>dge bo</i>			tantric specialist, former monk
དགའ་ལུགས།	Dge lugs	Gelu pai	格鲁派	sect of Tibetan Buddhism
དགའ་སྒོང་།	<i>dge slong</i>	<i>qishi</i>	乞士	fully ordained monk
དམུ་ཐག།	<i>dmu thag</i>	<i>muta</i>	穆塔	'rope' by which being supposedly ascended from Earth to Heaven
དོ་ལྷ།	Do kyA	Duojia	多加	*location
དཔལ་ལུང་།	Dpa' lung	Hualong	化隆	*location
རྩི་ལ་བྱ།	<i>dril bu</i>	<i>jingang ling</i>	金刚铃	bell
དུས་རྒྱ།*	<i>dus ran</i>			the first anniversary of the deceased's death.
གཅན་ཚ།	Gcan tsha	Jianzha	尖扎	*location
གཅན་ཚའི་ཐང་།	Gcan tsha'i thang	Jianzha tan	尖扎滩	*location
གདུང་སྐ།	Gdung sna	Kangyang	康杨	*location
གླེ་ཚེ།	Gle chen	Lejian	勒见	*location

གནམ་རྫོང་།	Gnam rdzong	Nanzong si	南宗寺	*monastery
གྲི་གུམ་བཙན་པོ།	Gri gum btsan po	Chigongzanbu	赤贡赞布	*person
གསང་སྐྱོག་།	Gsang sgrog	Sangzhu si	桑主寺	*monastery
གཤོག་ཀ་*	<i>gshog ka</i>			group of monks from the same monastery
གསོ་སྦྱང་།	<i>gso sbyong</i>	<i>changjing</i>	长净	chanting performed during fasting
གཉེགས་ལྗེན།	<i>gtegs ldan</i>	<i>tianzang shi</i>	天葬师	'body-cutter' who dismembers the corpse
ཇེར་སྤེང་།	Gyer steng	Jieshendang si	结什当寺	*monastery
གཟུངས་འདུས།	Gzungs 'dus	Tuoluoni ji	陀罗尼集	*scripture
རྟེ་རྩེ།*	<i>he rdze</i>	<i>kang</i>	炕	heated sleeping platform
ཁ་བཏགས།	<i>kha btags</i>	<i>hada</i>	哈达	strip of ceremonial silk
ཁམས་ར།	Khams ra	Kanbula	坎布拉	*location
ཁྲི།	<i>khri</i>	<i>baozuo</i>	宝座	throne
ཁྲི་ཀ།	Khri ka	Guide	贵德	*location
ཁྲི་ལྗོ།	Khri lho	Guinan	贵南	*location
ཀོ་ལུ་བ།	Ko'u ba	Guwa si	古哇寺	*monastery
ཀུ་ཤ།	<i>ku sha</i>	<i>husha cao</i>	弧沙草	a sacred grass collected on mountains

ཀུན་རིག་རྣམ་པར་སྣང་ མཛད།	Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad	Puminghongguang fo	普明宏光佛	*scripture
ལ་དྭགས།	La dwags	Ladake	拉达克	*location
ལྷ་བཤེས།	<i>lha bshos</i>	<i>shenxiu</i>	神馐	such sacrificial objects made of <i>rtsam pa</i> as butter lamps and pyramids.
ལྷ་མོ་བླ་མཚོ།	Lha mo bla mtsho	Lamucuo tianhu	拉姆措天湖	*location
ལྷ་རི།	Lha ri	Lari si	拉日寺	*monastery
ལྷ་ས།	Lha sa	Lasa	拉萨	*location
ལྷ་ཡུལ།	Lha yul	Tiantang	天堂	Heaven
ལོ་ཁོག།	Lo khog	Luoke	洛科	*location
མ་ཎི།	<i>ma Ni</i>	<i>mani</i>	嘛呢	mantra
མང་པ།	<i>mang ja</i>	<i>zhaiseng cha</i>	斋僧茶	<i>sha khu</i> given to monks when requesting them to chant for the deceased
མར་ཁུ་ཐང།	Mar khu thang	Maketang	马克塘	*location
མཚོད།*	<i>mchod</i>	<i>huicai</i>	烩菜	offering
མདའ་བཞི།	Mda' bzhi	Haiyan	海晏	*location

མདོ།	Mdo	Jijing lun	集经论	*scripture
མགུར།	Mgur	Gulu si	古鲁寺	*scripture
མགུར།	<i>mgur</i>	<i>sheng ge</i>	圣歌	songs of spiritual realization
མུའུ།	<i>mu'u</i>	<i>mu</i>	亩	*measurement
ངང་རོང།	Ngang rong	Erang si	俄让寺	*monastery
ནམོ།	Nya mo	Niangmo	娘莫	*location
འོད་དཔག་མེད་སྒོར་ མཚོད།	'od dpag med stong mchod	Wuliangguang fo	无量光佛	ceremony is performed so that Amitābha will show the way for the deceased
འཕོ་བ་གནང་མཁན་སྐྱ་མ།	<i>'pho ba gnan mkhan bla ma</i>			the lama responsible for guiding the deceased's soul to a next life
འཕོ་ལུང།	'pho lung	Powalong	颇瓦隆	*scripture
ཕུག།	<i>phrug</i>			woolen cloth
པོ་ཏ་ལ།	Po ta la	Budala gong	布达拉宫	Potala Palace
རིན་ཆེན།	Rin chen	Renqing	仁青	*person
རིང་ཇ།	<i>ring ja</i>			black tea

མ་ཇུ།	Rma chu	Huanghe	黄河	Yellow River
མ་ལྷོ།	Rma lho	Huangnan	黄南	*location
སོག་བོ།	Sog bo	Henan	河南	*location
རྣིང་མ།	Rnying ma	Ningma pai	宁玛派	a sect of Tibetan Buddhism
རྩ་ག་འགོང་། (ཡིག་རྒྱན་ དུ་སྐད་ཀར་གོང་།)	Rtsag 'a gong	Zihagong	子哈贡	*location
རྩ་མ་པ།	<i>rtsam pa</i>	<i>zanba</i>	糌粑	roasted barley flour and the dough made from such flour
རྩེ་ཁོག་	Rtse khog	Zeku	泽库	*location
རུས་ཚོག་	<i>rus chog</i>			'bone ritual'
རྩྭ་ལྷ།	<i>tshwa tshwa</i>	<i>chacha</i>	察察	clay reliquaries
སེ་ར།	Se ra	Sela si	色拉寺	*monastery
སྐར་ཁ།	Sgar kha	Gaka si	噶卡寺	*monastery

ཤམ་ཁུ།	<i>sha khu</i>			noodles cooked with a generous amount of meat
སྐར་མ།	<i>skar ma</i>	<i>chubin</i>	出殡	the day on which the corpse is disposed
སྐུ་འབུམ།	Sku 'bum	Ta'er si	塔尔寺	*monastery
སྐུ་རྒྱ།	Skya rgya	Jiajia	贾加	*location
སྐུ་བླ།	Sman bla	Yaoshi fo	药师佛	*scripture
སྐྱོན་ལམ།	Smon lam			*scripture
སོ་བ།	<i>so ba</i>	<i>daike qingke</i>	带壳青稞	thick-shelled barley
སྐོང་སྐོར།	Stong skor	Huangyuan	湟源	*location
ཐབ་རྩོ།	<i>thab rdo</i>	<i>zaoshi</i>	灶石	hearthstone
ཐར་མདོ།	Thar mdo	Jietuo jing	解脱经	*scripture
ཐོར་ཐུག།	<i>thor thug</i>			noodles
ཚ་རུ།	<i>Tsha ru</i>	<i>gaoqiu</i>	羔裘	lambskin, lambskin robe
མཚོ་སྐོན།	Tsho sngon	Qinghai	青海	*location
ཏུན་ཧོང།	Tun hong	Dunhuang	敦煌	*location
ཡུལ་ཤུལ།	Yul shul	Yushu	玉树	*location
ཡུམ་བུ་བླ་སྐོང།	Yum bu bla sgang	Yongbulakang	雍布拉康	*location

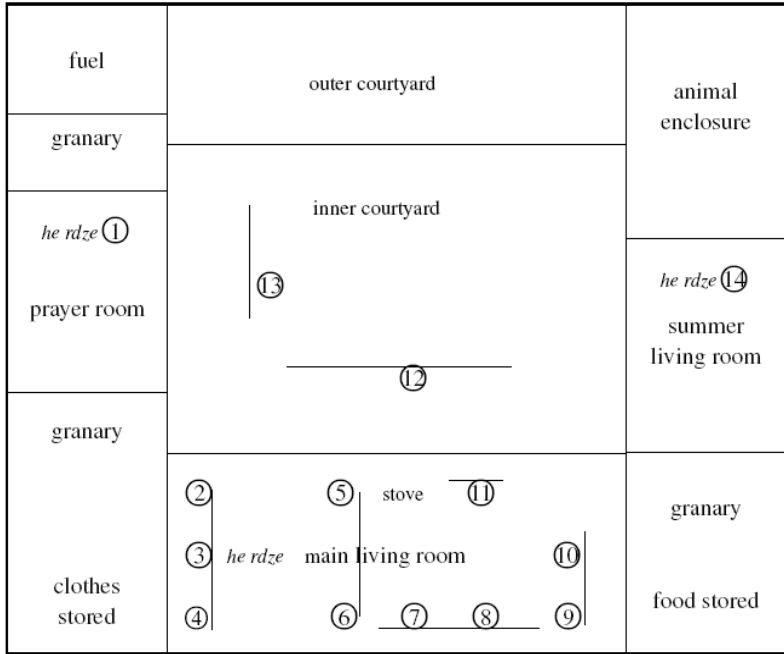
APPENDIX TWO: FUNERAL SCHEDULE

Day	Detail
Thirty days before the death if the family member is seriously ill	All family members are present.
The day before the death if the family member is seriously ill	Relatives visit the concerned family.
The day of death (Day 1)	<i>Bdun pa sa</i> are invited. Villagers visit the concerned family.
Day 2	Villagers outside visit the concerned family and fasting begins.
Day 3	<i>Sngas mgo</i> lama is invited for <i>skar ma</i> . The corpse is removed and disposed of.
Day 4	The entire village is fed three meals. All local monasteries are visited.
Day 5	The entire village is fed three meals. All local monasteries are visited.
Day 6	Fast begins at dawn.
Day 7	Fast continues.
Day 8	Fast ends at dawn.
Day 9	Visit Sku 'bum Monastery.
Day 10	Visit Bla brang Monastery.

APPENDIX THREE: FUNERAL SEATING AT A
TYPICAL LO KHOG VILLAGE HOME.



North



- 1 lama
- 2 lama
- 3 monk
- 4 old men from the village and outside the village
- 5 old men from outside the village
- 6 old village men
- 7 adult men from outside the village
- 8 adult village men
- 9 adolescents from outside the village
- 10 village male adolescents
- 11 old village women
- 12 village women
- 13 village children
- 14 corpse

APPENDIX FOUR: FUNERAL EXPENDITURES

Recipient	Cash	Other Items	Value RMB
The deceased		Offered every meal: milk tea, <i>rtsam pa</i> , fried and baked bread, <i>sha khu</i> , <i>'bras nyog</i> , <i>mchod</i> , yogurt, and fruits. At least 3 lit butter lamps are offered continuously.	40
<i>Sngas mgo</i> lama	300-1,500 RMB	A piece of white felt, 3 tea bricks, 3 pieces of baked bread, a <i>kha btags</i> , and a silk <i>bzo 'go</i> . This may be added to a quilt or blanket, a piece of white felt, a tea kettle, a scoop, 3 pieces of <i>thab rdo</i> , an aluminum pot containing half a kilogram of each of rice, wheat flour, barley flour, butter, and cheese. At times, both <i>phrug</i> and <i>tsha ru</i> are also presented.	548-3,526
Each <i>bdun pa sa</i>	50 RMB	A piece of baked bread, a tea brick, a <i>kha btags</i> .	434
Monks chanting 'od dpag med stong mchod	50 RMB	A piece of baked bread, a tea brick, a <i>kha btags</i> .	434

Monks chanting Sman bla'i stong mchod	50 RMB	A piece of baked bread, a tea brick, a <i>kha btags</i> .	434
Each visitor		Black tea, fried bread, butter, and <i>rtsam pa</i> . A bowl full of tea leaves wrapped in a white cloth.	385
Each monk in local monasteries	5-10 RMB	Served <i>sha khu</i> . A piece of baked bread, a tea brick.	8,000-10,500
Village children		Given candies.	50
Each funeral procession member		Served <i>sha khu</i> . Given a bowl full of tea leaves wrapped in white cloth and a fist-sized chunk of <i>rtsam pa</i> .	680
Clan women make dough and men fry it		Served 2.5 kg of butter and 10 kg of <i>rtsam pa</i> .	204
Clan women who bake bread		Served 2.5 kg of butter and 10 kg of <i>rtsam pa</i> .	204

Every villager		Offered tea and fried bread in the morning. At noon, the meal alternates between <i>'bras nyog</i> and <i>mchod</i> . In the evening, they are served <i>sha khu</i> . This feeding of the village is always extended to 2-3 days.	2,400
Each absent villager		A <i>mar lo</i> , 2 pieces of fried or baked bread in the morning, a bowl of <i>'bras nyog</i> or <i>mchod</i> at noon, and a bowl of <i>sha khu</i> in the evening during the period when all villagers are fed.	260
Each village family upon the completion of feeding the entire village		A piece of baked bread, and a tea brick. Wealthy families might give in addition, 7.5 kg of rice, 15 kg of wheat flour, 0.5 kg of butter, and 10-15 RMB in cash to each village family.	600-3,920

Fasting villagers	10 RMB (monks or <i>dge bo</i>), 5 RMB (regular fasting villagers)	Before they leave, they are each given a tea brick and a piece of baked bread. Served only black tea or <i>ring ja</i> in the morning. At noon, served butter and <i>rtsam pa</i> called <i>bzom tsa</i> (7.5-10 kg of butter and 25 kg of <i>rtsam pa</i>). Served black tea in the evening. No meal is offered on the second day. At dawn of the third day, served <i>thor thug</i> (5 kg of roasted wheat flour cooked in milk) and next, either <i>sha khu</i> or meat-stuffed dumplings.	900
A person from each village family on Dus ran		Served <i>sha khu</i> .	450
Three prayer flags			21
A mason for the <i>bsang khri</i> at the cremation site	50 RMB	Offered a piece of baked bread and a tea brick.	58
Funeral procession		Black tea, baked bread, butter, and <i>rtsam pa</i> . They are each given a tea brick when they leave.	350

A mchod	800-1,000 RMB	A <i>dge slong</i> or fully ordained monk is offered a <i>kha btags</i> , a piece of white felt, and three tea bricks. Afterwards, he is offered a bag of flour and a bag of fruits every year. Every Lo sar, he is visited by the concerned family who brings him a piece of baked bread, and 2-3 tea bricks. It is also a must that the bottom half of a pig or sheep is sent to the <i>a mchod</i> every winter.	1,270-1,570
Monks chanting at the sky funeral site	100 RMB	A piece of baked bread, a <i>kha btags</i> , and a tea brick.	112
Gtegs ldan	50-100 RMB	A piece of baked bread, a tea brick, and at times a <i>phrug</i> or a <i>tsha ru</i> of the deceased is given.	58-1,158

Other Expenditures (RMB)		
Feasting <i>sngas mgo</i> lama and <i>bdun pa sa</i>	3.5 kg of sugar (5 RMB/kg = 17.50 RMB), 6.5 kg of <i>rtsam pa</i> (1.6 RMB/kg = 10.40 RMB), 15 kg of butter (24 RMB/kg = 360 RMB), and a sheep carcass (500 RMB).	740
'od dpag med stong mchod	1,000 lit butter lamps (70 kg of butter), 1,000 bowls of water, 1,000 bowls of barley (75-80 kg of barley), and 1,000 <i>lha bshos</i> (150 kg of <i>rtsam pa</i>).	1,238
Sman bla'i stong mchod	1,000 lit butter lamps (70 kg of butter), 1,000 bowls of water, 1,000 bowls of barley (75-80 kg of barley), and 1,000 <i>lha bshos</i> (150 kg of <i>rtsam pa</i>).	1,238
Clan families are returned bowls, basins, buckets, spoons, black felt, and tables	Each is given a few slices of baked bread mixed with fried bread.	50
Communal pots from the village shrine are returned	At least a half tea brick in each of the communal pots.	10

Gso sbyong by tantric specialists or <i>dge bo</i>	6-7.5 kg of <i>rtsam pa</i> and nearly 1 kg of butter are required for the ritual.	42
For the first 7 weeks	3 lit butter lamps are continuously offered.	42
	On the 49th day, the deceased is reborn. Fasting takes place again, which requires exactly the same expense. Several monks may be invited to chant and they are given the same amount of gifts as <i>bdun pa sa</i> . Local major monasteries are again visited and offered butter lamps. Some rich families visit the <i>sngas mgo</i> lama who ensures the ascent of one's soul and who is presented 100 RMB, a tea brick, a piece of baked bread, and a <i>kha btags</i> .	1,700
	A blanket or white cloth, a <i>phrug</i> or <i>tsha ru</i> . A piece of white felt may also be dumped in the river.	50-1,600
Offering ingredients for cremation	A basin and bowl of sesame seed (7 RMB/kg = 52.5 RMB), a basin and bowl of wheat (1.6 RMB/kg = 12 RMB), a basin and bowl of barley (1.6 RMB/kg = 12 RMB), a basin and bowl of white beans (2 RMB /kg = 15 RMB), a basin and bowl of white mustard seed (6 RMB/kg = 45 RMB), a	532

	basin and bowl of <i>so ba</i> (1.6/kg = 12 RMB), a basin and bowl of rice (3.2 RMB/kg = 24 RMB), 15 kg of butter (12 RMB/kg = 360 RMB).	
	Upon the completion of <i>rus chog</i> , a male member of the deceased's family starts a journey to Lha sa.	700
Total = 24,384-36,132 RMB		

Gifts to the Concerned Family		
Sons and daughters, and other relatives	Loads of barley or wheat grain on pack animals ranging from 150-500 kg in amount. Those with official jobs bring 100-1,000 RMB in cash. A sheep carcass or a sheep stomach full of butter may complement the cash offering.	4,400-12,200
Visitors each bring a piece of baked bread, a tea brick, or both as a token of their concern for the family		960
Total = 5,360-13,160 RMB		

APPENDIX FIVE: MONASTERIES VISITED BY THE CONCERNED FAMILY⁴⁹

Monastery Name (Sect)	Township/ Town
Bde chen (Dge lugs)	Nengke
Mgur (Dge lugs)	Ma ke tang
Brag (Rnying ma)	Ma ke tang
Gsang sgrog (Dge lugs)	Skya rgya
Ngang rong (Dge lugs)	Tsho drug
Ko'u ba (Dge lugs)	Tsho drug
Gyer steng (Dge lugs)	Steng so
Rdzong nang (Dge lugs)	Khams ra
Gnam rdzong (Rying ma)	Khams ra
Sgar kha (Dge lugs)	Gcan tsha'i thang
Lha ri (Dge lugs)	Do kyA

⁴⁹ Bde chen has forty-three sub-monasteries located in Gcan tsha, Khri lho, Khri ka, Dpa' lung, Hai an, Stong skor, 'ba' rdong, and Rtse khog counties. Mgur Monastery has the longest history.