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SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS UNDERLYING THE CONTEMPORARY REVIVAL OF FRATERNAL POLYANDRY IN TIBET

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May, 2001

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DEDICATION

To my parents,
Kunsang Dorje and A-Kar

To my three sisters,
Basang, Penpa, and Gording

And to my wife,
Bu Pengda

for their unconditional love and support and patience
and for making it all worthwhile

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my deepest and sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Melvyn C. Goldstein. His guidance, encouragement, understanding and support throughout my study in the State and throughout every stage of this work are greatly appreciated. Working with him in various research projects is invaluable training and intellectually satisfying experience.

I want to express my particular appreciation to Dr. Cynthia M. Beall for her valuable help during the process of the grant application and suggestions on the data analysis.

Special thanks are due to my friends and colleagues, Tanzin Namgyal and Puchung Wangdui for their assistance and suggestions in the fieldwork that I was able to collect rich data.

I also wish to thank the Anthropology Department of Case Western Reserve University, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and Tibet Academy of Social Sciences for providing opportunities and financial support during my study in the State.

Finally, I must express my appreciation to the people of Dechen village, Mag xiang, and Benam County. Although I can not specify each one of them, their generous hospitality and patience in answering numerous questions during the interviews are specially acknowledged.

This dissertation was made possible by the grant 6054 from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FHH	Female head of household
HH	Household
t.	in Tibetan
c.	in Chinese
S.D.	Standard Deviation
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China

Socio-economic and Cultural Factors Underlying the
Contemporary Revival of Fraternal
Polyandry in Tibet

Abstract

By

BEN JIAO

This dissertation presents the first data on Tibetan fraternal polyandry (two or more brothers sharing a wife) based on fieldwork in Tibet per se. Based on 12 months of anthropological fieldwork conducted in a village in Benam county in Shigatse prefecture of Tibet Autonomous Region, China, the dissertation examines the revival of polyandry in rural Tibet using a multifaceted research strategy that included a mix of traditional anthropological methods.

Despite the illegality of polyandry in the People's Republic of China and its virtual demise during the commune era, China's post-1978 economic reforms created a new set of socio-economic conditions that has led a substantial number of Tibetan families to choose the traditional Tibetan marriage pattern of polyandry over monogamy. At present, 33% of households in the study village practice polyandry. The dissertation examines why villagers are choosing polyandry in such numbers and what the consequence of selecting it is for them.

The reasons provided by villagers for practicing polyandry were economic and fell into three categories: concentration of male labor in households, greater potential to exploit off-farm economic opportunities, and the preservation of a household's land intact across generations. These reasons were borne out in reality as polyandrous households were found to be significantly more successful economically than monogamous and polygynous households. Households who practiced polyandry had significantly more males earning off-farm wages, had a higher total value of animals owned, and critically, had 43% higher per capita income than monogamous and 208% higher income than polygynous households. Polyandrous households also were significantly higher proportions of the upper socio-economic strata.

The dissertation examines the two major alternative explanations for polyandry found in the literature on polyandry in Tibetan society – the socio-economic versus the cultural. The findings of this study confirm the "socio-economic" explanation of Tibetan polyandry. Tibetans were clearly not deciding to marry their sons polyandrously because of a deep-seated cultural value that prescribes that form of marriage. Rather, they utilize polyandry because of materialistic, means-end factors that they perceived made polyandry more advantageous to the subsistence of their household and thus their stature and standing in the locality.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THEORIES AND DEBATES

In human society, there are three main types of marriage -- monogamy, polygyny, and polyandry. Of the three main types of marriage, polyandry (two or more males jointly sharing a wife) is by far the least common, occurring in only 0.5 percent of all societies (Scupin and Decorse, 1995). Of the small number of societies practicing polyandry, Tibet was one of the most important because of its size and the extent to which it was practiced.[1] Tibetan polyandry has been mentioned in most textbooks on marriage and the family since the early frontier travelers to Tibet first reported this rare type of marriage. Within Tibetan society, several varieties of polyandry exist although by far the most common form of polyandry was and is fraternal polyandry, i.e., two or more brothers jointly sharing a wife.

Several questions and debates have been raised in the anthropological literature regarding why polyandry develops within particular sociocultural systems. This dissertation will explore these by investigating the socio-economic and culture factors underlying the revival of fraternal polyandry in an agricultural village in the Tibet autonomous Region, China. It will also examine how polyandrously married Tibetans

[1] Because the data on other forms of polyandry are limited and superficial, this dissertation will focus only on Tibetan polyandry.

understand and deal with a range of issues related to multiple brothers sharing a wife, for example, paternity, regulation of sexual access, organization of work and the reciprocal relations of children and their multiple fathers. In this chapter I will examine a number of important issues found in the literature on Tibetan fraternal polyandry.

Marital Rules and Prevalence of Polyandry in Traditional Tibetan Society

All societies have a variety of rules to regulate whom one should marry and whom one should not marry. In Tibet two basic marital rules are often mentioned in the literature.

Firstly, there is a rule of exogamy in which marriage is prohibited within a patrilineal descent group ("rus rgyud," or bone lineage). In this system, sexual intercourse between members of the same descent group were considered incestuous and were punished severely. This system was widely practiced in Tibet before the 11th century but today it can only still be found among some Tibetan nomad groups. According to Levine (1988), other scholars from China (Cheng, 1995; Xing, 1997; Anon, 1987c) and my observation among nomads in western Tibet, Tibetans using this system believe that one's descent is passed on through the medium of sperm from the father to his son and from his son to his grandson and so forth. The word "rus" in Tibetan means bone and symbolizes strength, hardness, and everlastingness. The word "rgyud" simply means lineage. Each "bone lineage" has its own name and relative status. People with the same bone lineage always consider themselves relatives and, to a degree, often are willing to help each other even though they may be strangers.

This lineage system, however, generally is no longer operative in Tibet where virtually all areas have shifted to a system based on bilateral kinship. Thus, the exogamy and incest in Tibet today are determined according to a bilateral rule that traces descent through both the maternal and paternal sides of one's family. The bilateral limits of kinship are generally said to be seven generations on the paternal side and five generations on the maternal side.[2] Marriage within these limits is considered incest.

In addition to the bilateral rule of incest defining marriageable partners, marriages in Tibet were typically arranged from within social class/caste. In traditional Tibetan society, Tibetans were divided into three social ranks in the secular domain. The aristocracy (t. sger pa) owned land and subjects and were categorized as the highest rank. The taxpayers serfs (t. khral pa) held arable land from their lords and fulfilled various tax obligations in kind, money, and labor, and were categorized as the middle rank. The dü-jung serfs (t. dud chung) were landless peasants and were categorized as the lowest rank.

In the traditional society (pre-1959), it was not common for a member of one strata to marry someone of another, but when such marriages did occur there were no penalties. Today, although this feudal class system is no longer in existence, the economic status of a family is still considered important when choosing one's marriage partner.

On the other hand, traditional class distinctions are still very important with regard to the so-called "unclean" castes. In Tibet, there was another stratification system

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[2] There is considerable variation in areas of Tibetan culture and in some ethnic Tibetan areas in Nepal like Limi, cross cousin marriages are permitted (Goldstein, 1976).

in which individuals were classified as either "clean" or "unclean" in descent. These unclean castes were found all over Tibet and were considered inherently polluted. They were originally defined by their performance of polluting occupations, e.g., butchering and blacksmithing, but for centuries their unclean status has been considered hereditary regardless of their actual occupation. The notion of pollution and untouchability is thought to have come from India when Buddhism was brought to Tibet from India in the 7th century AD, but it is nowhere near as extensive in Tibet as is found in India. There was really only a numerically tiny category of "unclean" castes groups in Tibet, the remainder of the population having no caste distinctions at all. Tucci (1967:160), for example, referred to these differences when he pointed out that "Many of the rules which so severely govern marriage in India were completely absent in Tibet." Nevertheless, marriage with untouchables in the traditional society was strictly forbidden and a series of rules limiting interaction were also followed regarding commensality and other forms on interaction. If a non-unclean person in Tibet married an untouchable, he/she would be considered polluted and would not only be rejected, but sometimes also punished by, his or her own group. The children from such unions were always treated as untouchables, passing on that status hereditarily. During the Cultural Revolution era such notions of untouchability were banned but after the liberalizing reforms that began in the 1980s, the idea of untouchability has again become an critical factor when seeking a marriage partner.

A variety of types of marriage are found in Tibetan society including monogamy, polyandry and polygyny. Polyandry as practiced in Tibet, however, is not a single type. Most polyandry marriages are fraternal, but there are also occasionally non-fraternal

polyandrous marriages, and there are a number of bigenerational polyandrous marriages in which father and son(s) or uncle and nephew(s) share a wife. In general, polygyny, is less common than polyandry but is permitted and occurs. The most common form of polygynous union in Tibetan society is one in which a man is married to several sisters, a form know as sororal polygyny. Other forms of bigenerational polygyny such as mother and daughter as well as aunt and niece sharing a husband are also practiced by Tibetans. Similarly, a form of polyandry called polygynandry in which two or more brothers marry two wives is occasionally practiced.

In the literature, there are many contradictory descriptions about the prevalence of the three types of marriage. Prince Peter (1965: 199) found that "the distribution of polyandrous families varied greatly throughout the plateau. In Ladak, I found the percentage to be very high: in Leh out of 100 families, 90 were polyandrous. I heard from my informants in Kalimpong that in Central Tibet, in the twin provinces of Ü and Tsang, the proportion was the same. In other provinces, such as Kham, Tö and Hor, only 40 per cent practiced this form of matrimony, whereas in Amdo there was no polyandry at all." Tsung-lien and Shen-chi (1953:142) indicated that "Polyandry, of the type in which several brothers share one wife, is a popular form of marriage in Tibet." On the other hand, Duncan (1964:87), for example, stated that "As a general average it will be found that out of ten marriages, seven will be monogamous, one polygamous and the other two polyandrous." Tucci (1967:159) also wrote that, "This custom (polyandry) did exist in every part of Tibet, but it was not as common as is generally believed."

Although no anthropological research on marriage per se was conducted in Tibet during the traditional society (pre-1959) and there are no systematically, no carefully

collected quantitative data, the Chinese government sent a number of teams of researchers into Tibet after it incorporated Tibet into the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1951. These researchers were not trained anthropologists, but they lived in the countryside and collected field data on life in agricultural and nomad areas in Central and Northern Tibet in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Much of this has recently been published (Anon, 1987a; 1987b; 1987c; 1988). The findings from these reports suggest that monogamy was more prevalent than polyandry and that the rate of polyandry varied considerably, from 1.6% to 32 % (Ma, 1996). Agricultural and agro-pastoral areas had higher rates of polyandry than nomad areas. In general, therefore, the evidence that we have from the traditional society suggests that monogamy was statistically the modal form of marriage with polyandry the next most common and polygyny the least frequent. However, the presence of multiple forms of marriage in different prevalences has raised the questions of why Tibetan families opt for polyandry or monogamy or polygyny. This issue has been of interest to Chinese and Western scholars alike.

Chinese Views of Polyandry

Chinese research on polyandry falls into two periods. The first was the work of the researchers mentioned above who went to Tibet in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The second consists of contemporary researchers who started writing about polyandry after the liberalization policies implemented under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s. In general, Chinese scholars and popular sources in both periods have seen Tibetan polyandry as primitive, abnormal, immoral and backward.

The researchers sent to Tibet in the 1950s were not particularly focusing on Tibetan marriage and family. Rather their work concentrated on studying rural life under the Tibet feudal serf system which continued to function until March 1959. However, since polyandry was widespread in Tibet, they encountered it in their fieldwork and collected data on its operation. They interpreted fraternal polyandry based on Marxist notions as derivative from the breakdown of the evolutionary period of group marriage. This form of marriage, they argued, continued in Tibet after the end of the period of group marriage because of the difficult conditions present in Tibet, and then because of the oppressive aspects of the semi-feudal serf system that developed in Tibet. They argued that since Tibet was isolated geographically from the rest of the world for many centuries, its culture, economy, and political system had changed little and its people were living in deep poverty. Under these conditions, fraternal polyandry was preserved up to the present.

The failed Tibetan uprising in 1959 led to the termination of the semi-feudal system and the implementation of socialist political, social and economic institutions. By the mid-1960's, the Cultural Revolution movement arose and interest in traditional Tibetan institutions ended. Consequently, no research was conducted on polyandry during this time and no articles were written. The end of the Maoist era and the rise of Deng Xiaoping led to the reemergence of Chinese scholarship and new articles on Tibet beginning in 1979.

Current Chinese scholars base their writings on the data collected by the earlier researchers, however, they reinterpreted that data arguing that polyandry is a survival of the marriage found in matriarchal society (Wuang, 1984; Loser, 1984). More specifically,

they argued that when Tibetan society shifted from matriarchy, the economic condition of some families was too poor to allow them to marry monogamously so they kept practicing polyandrous marriages (Xing, 1997). Their discussion of why polyandry continued in Tibet until modern times primarily focused on economic forces in the Tibetan semi-feudal system and the overall poverty and isolation of Tibet. Tibetan fraternal polyandry, therefore, in both literatures was seen as a primitive anachronism that had little value. This view is currently still in vogue in China. The continued practice of polyandry in Tibet, therefore, is frequently attacked in the popular and scholarly press as feudal and backward (Lu, 1999).

A second theme in the writings of Chinese scholars on polyandry criticizes it from the ethical point of view. It holds that from an ethical point of view polyandry is immoral and of no value. By contrast, monogamy is based on mutual love between a man and a woman, and is highly valued and encouraged in all societies. It is a universal form of marriage and is regarded as the preferred human mating system. Polygyny was considered more acceptable than polyandry because Chinese culture traditionally tolerated and accepted this while polyandry never was. In fact, Chinese culture despised and discriminated against polyandry regarding it as incestuous.

The ethical bias against polyandry that is expressed by Chinese intellectuals can be traced in part to the history of Chinese revolution. In 1919, the intellectual-led May 4th Movement had a great impact on China's revolution. They attacked China's traditional polygynous marriage customs arguing that monogamy is the best form of marriage because it is based on the idea of freedom to choose one's spouse and freedom to divorce. After 1949, polygyny was interpreted as the typical immoral marriage type

that was mainly practiced by the exploiting class such as warlords, landlords, and despotic gentry. The practice of polygyny, therefore, was prohibited by law. However, when Chinese scholars did their field surveys in many parts of Tibet in the late 1950s they were puzzled by Tibetan fraternal polyandry because this marriage form did not fit either their class analysis of marriage types in China or their own cultural values. Therefore, it was not surprising that they stated that Tibetan fraternal polyandry was an "abnormal form of marriage." Since that time Chinese scholars and politicians have claimed that polyandry is physically and mentally harmful to polyandrously married women. Some Chinese considered that a woman in a polyandrous family is treated as a sex object by her husbands (Wu, 1991; Zhang, 1989). Wu, elaborated, "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" (1991: 494 - 495). Wu also criticized polyandry claiming that it is not good for children since fathers will not pay much attention to their children due to lack of identification of the genetic father in Tibetan fraternal polyandrous families (Wu, 1991). Because of such cultural and ethical biases, Tibetan fraternal polyandry has not been objectively investigated by Han Chinese scholars. Instead it has been negatively described. Gengwang has criticized that saying, "In past research we have devoted ourselves to determining the nature of plural marriage and its etiology as the survival of primitive group marriage. But we have neglected plural marriage as a part of the Tibetan cultural pattern with its own special functions and structure" (Genwang 1995: 304).

Western Views of Tibetan Polyandry

One can also find similar biases in some of the Western writers on Tibetan polyandry. In the West, earlier researchers considered this marriage type as "less civilized" and "more promiscuous" than other forms of marriage. Polyandry was also seen as "unnatural." For instance, Stephens (1963:34) states, "It appears that polygyny - one man's having several wives - is a very usual, 'natural' human condition. Polyandry - several men sharing one wife - appears to be very unusual, very 'unnatural'." Berreman (1980:378) points out that "Polyandry has fascinated anthropologists largely, I think, because it is exotic and, perhaps especially to the male eye, problematic. We have tended to regard monogamy as expectable (even moral), polygyny as reasonable (even enviable), and polyandry as puzzling (even disturbing)." Furthermore, Cassidy and Lee (1989: 2) stated that "Many researchers have focused their attention on the presumed 'unnaturalness' of polyandrous marriages and the alleged 'problems' created by polyandry, rather than providing a more complete understanding of the economic and social reasons for its occurrence."

The Western literature on polyandry contains three main alternative theoretical explanations for the presence of polyandry in Tibet: the "pure poverty" explanation, the "socio-economic" or multidimensional explanation, and the "cultural" explanation.

The pure poverty approach was the earliest explanation, being first conveyed by the Jesuit priest Desideri who lived in Lhasa in the early 18th century. He argued that fraternal polyandry was employed by Tibetans because of their great poverty. He wrote, for example:

> "One reason for this most odious custom is the sterility of the soil, and the small amount of land that can be cultivated owing to the lack of water. The crops may suffice if the brothers all alive together, but if they form separate families they would be reduced to beggary" (Fillip, 1937: 194).

R. Litton (1963:183) using secondary sources (that were based on the observations of travelers and explorers) similarly stated that polyandry was a mechanism by which the poorest survived. He wrote, "polyandry is due to hard economic conditions which leads to this form of marriage found only in the lower classes of people. Tibetans of higher economic status tend to be monogamous, while rich nobles are monogamous and sometimes polygynous." Prince Peter conducted research in Ladakh (an ethnic Tibetan area of Northwest India) and reported that polyandry was found among the lower classes because the poorer people could not afford to split what little land they had. They had to share it undivided and used fraternal polyandry to do this (Prince Peter 1963). Cassidy and Lee (1989) based on an examination of polyandrous cases in the literature suggested that polyandry was an adaptive response to societal poverty or scarce resources by minimizing family size and population growth and maximizing family's chance of survival.

The Socio-Economic (materialist) Explanation of Tibetan Fraternal Polyandry

More recently in the 1970s and 80s, Goldstein developed what is now the dominant, socio-economic explanatory model of polyandry in traditional Tibetan society. His data clearly revealed that fraternal polyandry was practiced by the richer strata in

Tibet, not the poorest. In a number of papers based on fieldwork with Tibetan refugees in India and with indigenous Tibetans in Limi, a remote community in the Far West of Nepal, he argued for a dynamic approach in which polyandry is considered part of a more general Tibetan "monomarital principle" that also includes a wide range of other marriage forms such as patrilocal monogamy, matrilocal monogamy, some forms of polygyny and bigenerational polyandry (father and son with a joint wife) (1971a; 1978; and 1987). While these marriage types at first glance seem very different, Goldstein suggested that they actually derived from the same underlying cultural logic, the same decision-making structure. The essence of the monomarital principle, he wrote, was that a variety of marriage types were acceptable so long as only one set of heirs was created in a given generation. By limiting each generation to only one set of heirs, the likelihood of family fission and land division were reduced, and the well-being of the family enhanced. Fraternal polyandry accomplishes this well, for example, because there is only one wife and one set of children (heirs). If the males among this set of heirs in turn marry polyandrously, the family estate will again get passed on without partition. This emphasis on the conservation of a family's land across generations, Goldstein argued, derives from the limitations imposed by Tibet's particular environment and its feudal-like political economy.

Arability of land in Tibet is limited by altitude because the higher the altitude the colder the climate and the shorter the growing season. Thus, although there were always substantial expanses of land that were not being farmed in Tibet, such land was not useful for a number of reasons, the main one being that most of this land was situated at altitudes above the limits of farming. Further restricting the scope of farming in Tibet was

a relatively low annual rainfall. This meant that most farmland must be situated in locations where it can be consistently irrigated in spring and early summer from rivers, and many areas can not be farmed because of this lack. Because of these constraints, the amount of land available in Tibet for farming is limited and in modern times it has been virtually impossible to open up new fields. Thus, families that divided their land did not have an option of enlarging their farms by bringing virgin land into use. Instead, they ended up with land holdings that were smaller.

Environmental factors alone, however, cannot account for the extensive use of polyandry versus monogamy. Addressing this issue, Goldstein argued that the widespread use of fraternal polyandry in Tibet derived from a number of interrelated factors involving the nature of "land tenure, political structure, the corvée tax system, interpersonal relations, male labor, ecological and economic constraints, demography, and changing political and cultural parameters" (1990: 619). In particular, Goldstein argued that the nature of the feudal estate system made polyandry a particularly valued marital strategy.

Tibetan society was characterized by a feudal-like political economy which placed heavy corvée labor obligations on households. Land in Tibet was divided into estates held by monastic and aristocratic lords, as well as by the government itself. These estates generally were divided into demesne and tenement land, the latter being held by a class of hereditarily bound peasants. These peasants were obligated to provide corvée (free) labor to work the lord's demesne lands, the yields from which went entirely to the lords. The tenement land provided the subsistence of the peasant families. On most estates, peasant families were required to provide the lord one worker every day of the

year, and usually two at peak agricultural times. Such peasants were also bound to their estate so could not legally relinquish their land and obligations. Consequently, this system placed heavy labor requirements on peasant families and gave families with labor power economic advantages (Anon, 1991; Dargyay, 1982; Goldstein, 1971a; 1971b; 1978; Levine, 1992). Fraternal polyandry, therefore, was particularly advantageous in Tibet because it not only conserved land intact across generations, but at the same time it also concentrated labor in the family (Goldstein, 1971a).

Goldstein, however, also showed that not all rural families in Tibet had hereditary rights to land, and that it was only those who held land, the tre-ba ("taxpayers"), who had heavy corvée tax obligations. Those without arable land—the poor peasants called "dü-jung"—subsisted mainly by selling their labor, either for food or for small plots of leased land. With no land, minimal property and no heavy corvée obligations, the dü-jung generally married monogamously, establishing separate households when they reached marriageable age. Fraternal polyandry, therefore, was typical not of the poor but of the better off strata that possessed heritable land, owned resources worthy of preserving across generations, and had heavy labor obligations to fulfill (Goldstein; 1971a; 1971b; 1978). For these strata, Goldstein argued, polyandry was a means to maintain and/or enhance a household's economic and social status.

Goldstein's theory has been supported by two other retrospective or historical studies done by Dargyay (1982) on a village in Gyantse district in southern Tibet and Aziz (1978) in the southern Tibetan district of Dingri. Both studies report that there is a correlation between marriage type and socio-economic status, and that tre-ba families

were more likely to marry polyandrously while dü-jung families generously married monogamously.

The multidimensional socio-economic explanation also is supported by the data collected by the early Chinese researchers sent to Tibet. Although their evaluation of polyandry was highly negative, their summary of Tibetans' own explanations support Goldstein's socio-economic explanation. Like Goldstein, they reported that fraternal polyandry is mainly practiced by rich or taxpayer families who say they practice fraternal polyandry in order to prevent the division of family property and to achieve a good standard of living. Partitioning of families by establishing each brother's own neolocal family would, they say, reduce the original family's living standard. They also reported that Tibetans also said that an important economic advantage of fraternal polyandry was that it increased labor allowing families to fulfill numerous demands such as doing small-scale trading, paying heavy taxes, working on various farming and herding tasks, and doing family housework. Finally, they found that fraternal polyandry was the preferred form of marriage which was well accepted and valued by both the parents and society (Anon, 1987b; Anon, 1987c; Ma, 1996; Wu, 1991; Gengwuang, 1995; Xing, 1997; Zhang, 1989; Cheng, 1995; Li, 1948).

Finally, various studies from Ladakh, an ethnic Tibetan area in northwest India, show that Ladakhi villages also practiced fraternal polyandry and for reasons similar to those discussed by Goldstein. Traditional Ladakhi families had similar socio-economic and political pressures as had Tibetan families including a corvée tax system and the need for male labor to fulfill tax obligations (Goldstein and Tsarong, 1985). Fraternal polyandrous marriages in Ladakh, therefore, were also seen there as a strategy to meet

these household obligations. However, there were also some differences, e.g., sons in a family did not have jurally equal right over their lands as they did in Tibet. The eldest son not only had full rights over the land but also had control of the family corporation. Younger brothers might marry monogamously and establish independent households, but they would not inherit land. Goldstein and Tsarong suggested that, "Ladakhi social structure, therefore, eliminated the underlying contradictions of Tibetan social structure by linking primogeniture to fraternal polyandry. By this strategy, land fragmentation was precluded and labor concentration was assured"(1985: 6). Prince Peter (1963) also found that villagers of Ladakh expressed the view that they were practicing this type of marital custom because it was the only way to avoid dividing up their property and obtain sufficient labor needed to cultivate their field. Similar findings were also reported by Crook (1994). He found that amongst Ladakhi informants "Speaking of the functions of polyandry they always say it exists in order to maintain the estates of the farmers intact" (1994: 479).

Research among ethnic Tibetans living at high altitude in Tsang village in Limi in N.W. Nepal revealed that fraternal polyandry and monogamy were the main forms of marriage (Goldstein, 1976). However, the social structure in Limi was less complicated than in traditional Tibet because large monastic, aristocratic or governmental estates were not present. Nevertheless, like Tibet, Limi's high altitude environment made land scarce and made opening new agriculture fields extremely difficult. Most families owned less than one acre of arable land. Thus, Goldstein found that as in Tibet, in Limi villagers considered that, "the maintenance of this land intact, i.e., without being split into smaller and smaller parcels, is a critical factor in sustaining a satisfactory standard of living"

(Goldstein,1976: 231). Fraternal polyandry, therefore, was utilized in Limi to conserve land and to concentrate labor in the family.

Finally, further evidence supporting the socio-economic basis of polyandry in Tibet, was presented by Goldstein (1971a) concerning Tibetan refugees in India. He found that refugees living in an agricultural camp in Mysore Province were not marrying polyandrously, despite the cultural values they brought to India only 5 years earlier. The refugees in this farming camp held land not in family units but rather as individuals, and this land reverted to the refugee camp when they died. Moreover there was little need for male labor as seeding and plowing were done by tractors. Consequently, the function of polyandry no longer was present. The change in the socio-economic and political environments had eliminated the utility of fraternal polyandry and led to its rapid discontinuation.

In summary, the socio-economic explanation of polyandry in Tibetan society explains polyandry primarily as a mechanism for preventing the division of a household's land among sons and for concentrating male labor in the household. Polyandry, therefore, is a functional analog to primogeniture in Europe albeit one in which brothers stay together with the undivided patrimony. This explanation argues that polyandry was valued in Tibet primarily as a means of maintaining or enhancing the standard of living and status of households rather than as a consequence of poverty or for some cultural imperative (Goldstein, 1971a; 1976; 1990). It was a means to an end, rather than an end in and of itself. Tibetans all valued polyandry, but the poorer landless strata utilized it infrequently since they had little to conserve. Consequently, it was the land holding

peasantry and the aristocracy who practiced polyandry prior to 1959, not the landless poor.

The Cultural Explanation of Tibetan Fraternal Polyandry

The poverty and socio-economic explanations of polyandry have been criticized by Levine (1988). She suggests that there is a stronger cultural value and cultural preference for polyandry than reported by Goldstein and others. Levine conducted field research in a small population of Tibetan speaking people called Nyinba in a remote valley in northwestern Nepal, south of Limi where Goldstein worked. In general, the household and marital system of the Nyinba is close to the Tibetan pattern. In Nyinba society, patrilineal descent determines social ranking within the community, marital choice, and rights to family property. The community was divided into two strata and two separate circles of kin: "the higher-ranked descendants of village founders who are full citizens and landholders, and the lower-ranked landless descendants of their former slaves" (Levine, 1988: 11).

According to Levine's argument, the materialistic approach can not explain why a given social system utilizes polyandry. She suggests that numerous societies with similarly impoverished environments do not practice polyandry and there are other strategies such as primogeniture that Tibetans could have used as an adaptive and rational response to the condition of scarce resources by providing a means of transmitting family property intact over generations. Therefore, cultural difference is the key for producing various marriage forms in those societies. Materialist explanations, she argues, also fail to

explain why Tibetan polyandry is fraternal, because "where material concerns are dominant, the strongest and the brightest Nyinba men [an area in northwest Nepal] would group together in polyandrous unions and would leave lazy, cantankerous, and handicapped brothers to fend for themselves. The fact is that men stay together with brothers who are sickly and troublesome and say they do so because of the obligations associated with fraternal kinship." (269) She finds that solidarity of brothers is valued by the Nyinba and is the core symbolic ideal which explains why Tibetans share their wife with their brothers. What makes polyandry different from other marriage forms, she says, is that polyandry has a special cultural value. For instance, ancestors as brothers linked in polyandry can be found in many Nyinba legends and genealogies, and there are stories that celebrate ancestors and ancestress for the harmony of their family life. Because polyandry is a very common form of marriage, when children grow up in this society, they see nothing wrong with their parents or elders living in polyandrous relationships. When these children reach marriage age, they not only accept polyandry, but also practice it.

When Levine asked the Nyinbas why they had married polyandrously, they generally responded that it was an age-old custom brought from Tibet. This statement, she argues, supports her view that it is the cause of polyandry. From her point of view they were expressing a folk notion of cultural determinism. She (Ibid. 1988:171) points out that "polyandry in marriage is so integral a part of Tibetan social structure that Nyinba ancestors who migrated south from Tibet certainly imported it and refined it in their new circumstances." The reason that Nyinba maintained this marriage form was that

Nyinba imported both a Tibetan household system and a Tibetan cultural orientation. Therefore, it is the cultural value that is the key factor.

This explanation, however, has many problems, including inconsistencies in her own data. Despite her claim to cultural values being the determining force underlying polyandry in Nyinba, not all Nyinba families practiced polyandry. In fact, it was not practiced at all by the class of slaves who did not own land. However, Levine arbitrarily excluded these from her data and as a result skewed her results and findings. In other words, polyandry among the Nyinba was characteristic of the land holding stratum just as it was in Ladakh and Tibet. As Goldstein (1990: 619), in a response to Levine put this, "if they (Tibetans) were primarily marrying polyandrously because of its cultural value per se, we would expect polyandry to be distributed equally throughout the society, regardless of issues of class and land ownership. But this is not the case even in Levine's own population."

In the same vein, it is also important to note that after slavery was ended among the Nyinba, some former slave households accumulated wealth, bought land, and have started to marry polyandrously. Thus, while there is obviously a cultural value in Tibetan society that valorizes fraternal polyandry and accepts it as a marriage option, the overwhelming evidence is that socio-economic factors play a major role in perpetuating Tibetan fraternal polyandry. Polyandry in Tibetan society, appears to be primarily a means to a social and economic end, not a cultural end in itself.

In fact, such attitudes are also found in Levine's book, for example, she reports Nyinba subjects explicitly articulating the economic value of polyandry: "people say that

polyandry prevents the dispersion of household wealth and the fragmentation of land and that it avoids the proliferation of households, thus restricting village growth" (1988: 32). This sounds precisely like the arguments of Goldstein and others, whom Levine argues are incorrect.

Nevertheless, Levine's views present an alternative to the socio-economic explanation for the causes of Tibetan fraternal polyandry. It reminds anthropologists to take into account the cultural perspective when dealing with Tibetan polyandry.

Tibetan Fraternal Polyandry, Infanticide and Female Non-marriage

Another argument found in the early literature on Tibetan polyandry asserted it was a response to a shortage of women. Murdock, e.g., wrote that "despite the paucity of cases there seems reason to assume that polyandry may sometimes be due to a scarcity of women resulting from the practice of female infanticide" (1949: 25). Prince Peter (1963) disagreed with this, arguing that Tibetans practiced infanticide because of illegitimacy, but it was for both male and females and therefore would not cause a shortage of females. Fieldwork with Tibetans in Nepal revealed not only no infanticide of females, but actually an excess of females (Goldstein 1976). Goldstein indicated that "there definitely was no pattern of female infanticide in Tibetan cultural areas," and there were significantly more females than males (Goldstein 1976:224). His data for Limi showed 76 females to 68 males in the reproductive age category (15 - 44). Instead of female shortage, Tibetan fraternal polyandry produced an unmarried female population (Goldstein, 1976). In Limi, about 30 percent of women who were of childbearing age

(age 20-49) did not marry. Goldstein (1976: 229) found that "unmarried females in Limi either (1) continue to live at home, (2) establish their own separate households, or (3) work as servants for others." However, being unmarried did not mean they did not give birth or they were excluded from the reproductive pool. In fact, in Limi unmarried women had average of 0.7 children per woman, and this average number was 2.6 less than married women. Because the unmarried women had far fewer offspring than married women, as a group, it resulted in limiting population growth. Moreover, the practice of polyandry minimized the number of mouths to feed and therefore maximized the standard of living of the polyandrous family. If all polyandrous brothers were to marry monogamously in this area, the number of unmarried women would be reduced, and the village population would increase by roughly 16%. The increase in population growth would increase pressure on family resources. Consequently, Goldstein's data revealed that it was not a shortage of marriageable women that created a need for polyandry in Tibet.

Schuler (1987) also found an excess of unmarried women in Chumik--about 22% of the women 35+ years old and 28% of those aged 45+ had never been married (Schuler 1987). However, in addition to polyandry, she found that, "religious celibacy, practiced by about seven percent of Chumika men and nine percent of the women ages 35 and over, is one factor related to non-marriage that is absent in Limi but often practiced in Tibet proper" (Schuler 1987: 3). She further argued that, "A traditional village-level political organization based on a system of household estates, patrilineal devolution of property, primogeniture and fraternal polyandry, social stratification based on several different criteria, marriage by capture, hypogamy, a brief, seasonal demand for

agricultural labor, and migratory trade were found to be intricately related to the high incidence of non-marriage and the relatively late age at marriage among Chumikwa women." (154).

In contrast, Levine (1988) contended that there was a female shortage that was due not to infanticide per se, but to the poor treatment of daughters and thus high female child mortality. Levine presented evidence in her study that more than a third of the children reported born did not survive to be five years old. She concluded that there was high female infant and child mortality and a sex ratio that favored males (616 to 716). She found that one of the important reasons for this was that Tibetans expressed strong son preference which led mothers to breast-feed daughters less and gave female children poorer quality food. However, Schuler's study (1987) found that Tibetan women tended to prefer daughters instead of sons, because, they say, daughters could help their family and work more.

On the whole, though, with the exception of Levine, contemporary studies reject the notion that Tibetans practice female infanticide or that a shortage of women underlies the Tibetan practice of polyandry. Moreover, recent data from Tibet per se (in contrast to ethnic Tibetans in Nepal) supports the arguments of Tibetan society having a substantial number of unmarried females. The 1990 National Population Census was the first time in Tibetan history that information was collected through survey and registration for the whole population, and so it was the first opportunity for researchers to obtain detailed demographic data in Tibet. From this census, Sun and Xia (1992) found that within the female population of Tibet, 30.3% of the women ages 15 and over were unmarried. This percentage of unmarried women was much higher than China's national level (21.3%).

The data from Tibet also showed that the percentage of married women age 15 and older was lower than that of married men age 15 and over (55.5% to 58.4%). By contrast, in China, the percentage of married women age 15 and older was higher than married men ages 15 and over (69.7% to 66.6%). Sun and Xia concluded that this high percentage of unmarried women in Tibet could be due to certain amount of polyandrous marriage that existed in Tibetan society.

Finally, data recently collected by a three year field study on the impact of decollectivization on rural Tibet found lower mortality for female children. For example, in a fertility survey of over 1700 women 15 years and older, 637 of their births had died. Of these 36% were female children and 52% were males (12% were unidentified by sex). This pattern held true for most ages, for example, when the 366 children who died in infancy were examined, 33% were female and 55% were males (12% were unidentified by sex). Similarly, the sex ratio favored women (2805 to 2778) (Goldstein, Beall, Jiao, Tsering, nd.).

Change and Tibetan Fraternal Polyandry

Goldstein has argued that because Tibetan fraternal polyandry as an institution is practiced because of social and economic factors, changes in these factors will lead to changes in the prevalence of polyandry (Goldstein, 1978; 1981a; 1981b). Goldstein argued that despite the traditional absence of any negative connotation associated with brothers sharing a wife, polyandry manifested inherent structural conflicts that made it fragile and potentially unstable. One of the main sources of this instability was the

subordinate position of the younger brother. Tibetans valued sibling solidarity, but operationalized this as the younger brother living under the authority and direction of his elder brother. Thus, polyandry required younger brothers to sacrifice control over their actions.

Other structural problems also focused on the younger brother. For example, sizable discrepancies in age between the older and younger brother often resulted in the elder brother living monogamously with the wife for years before the younger brother reached sexual adulthood when a variety of intergenerational problems might occur. Although the cultural ideal required the wife to treat all her husbands with equal affection, an older wife sometimes found the youngest husband immature and adolescent and treated him differently. Or conversely, when a younger brother grew up he sometimes considered his wife "old" and preferred to seek a woman his own age or younger.

Fraternal polyandry, therefore, operated to a considerable extent at the expense of the younger brothers. Those bothered by this had to weigh the benefits of staying in the polyandrous union against those of splitting off and forming their own neolocal household. A key factor in this decision was the nature of economic opportunities available to younger brothers on their own, since they would not receive enough land to live at the same standard of living as the main household. Traditionally, there was a dearth of attractive alternatives, e.g., as mentioned earlier, it was virtually impossible to become a landowner by opening up new fields and there were few off-farm sources of employment. Younger brothers splitting off from a household inevitably become laborers

or tenants and usually experienced a drop in standard of living. Consequently, younger brothers did not frequently choose to split and polyandrous marriages tended to be stable.

The appearance of new economic opportunities that are accessible to individuals—e.g., new opportunities to engage in trade or wage labor—have been seen as likely to foster a decrease in polyandry as dissatisfied younger brothers now have new options and can increasingly opt to split off from polyandrous marriages or not marry with their brothers initially. Goldstein, as mentioned above, observed that when Tibetans became resettled in a refugee camp in S. India, virtually no new fraternal polyandrous marriages were arranged (Goldstein, 1971a).

Social, political and economic changes in the traditionally Tibetan area of Ladakh have also led to a decrease in the practice of polyandry (Goldstein and Tsarong, 1985). Anthropologists (Goldstein, 1981a; Crook and Shakya, 1994) pointed out that after Indian independence in 1947 corvée taxation was not allowed, primogeniture and polyandry were made illegal, and all members of a family were given equal rights over their property. Moreover, because of the war between China and India in 1962, the Indian government recognized the strategic importance of Ladakh for the Indian military and as part of a development effort provided new economic opportunities to Ladakhi villagers. Jobs in road building, construction for the army, and area infrastructure had made the younger generation independent of their family's land estates. Consequently, the younger generation preferred to marry monogamously and established independent households. For example, Goldstein reported that in Phiyang village, "about one hundred years ago there were 64 main families (Khangchen) who held virtually all the land and were the basic taxpayers. Today [1980] there are 143 households, including the 64 original main

houses. The additional 79 families are all 'little houses' (khang bu) that have come into existence [through out-marriage or partition] in the period since Indian independence" (1981a: 14).

Other studies also show a similar shift from polyandry to monogamy due to changing socio-economic opportunities. Crook and Shakya (1994) compared their own 1981 data from Leh with Prince Peter's data from Leh in 1938. They found that the total number of households had increased from 16 in 1938 to 25 in 1981, and that polyandrous marriages had decreased from 63% of the total in 1938 to 16% in 1981. In 1938 all males were involved in farming the estates. By 1981 only half of 36 males were agriculturists and the remaining 18 men were employed by the government.

Consequently, there is persuasive evidence that changes in the social, economic and political environment can have rapid and profound affects on the prevalence of Tibetan polyandry, i.e., on how Tibetans opt to select among their culturally acceptable marriage alternatives. These examples, however, illustrate the susceptibility of fraternal polyandry to socio-economic changes in a negative sense, i.e., in reducing or eliminating its prevalence. Contemporary Tibet appears to illustrate the other side of this process, i.e., societal changes that foster an increase in its prevalence.

Tibet's incorporation into the People's Republic of China in 1951 brought the practice of polyandry face-to-face with a socialist legal system in which all forms of concubinage and polygamy (polyandry and polygyny) were prohibited. For a while after 1951, socialist laws and institutions were not implemented in Tibet and fraternal polyandry continued. However, after an abortive Tibetan uprising in 1959, the Chinese

government started socialist reforms that ended the feudal estate system. A few years after that, at the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, polyandry was totally prohibited because this marriage arrangement was considered an anachronistic feudal custom. Some writers (Wu, 1991; Cheng, 1995; Xing, 1997) stated that since then fraternal polyandry was no longer practiced by Tibetans but they are incorrect since existing polyandrous unions were normally permitted to continue to live together. Nevertheless, polyandry appeared on the verge of extinction in Tibet.

The end of the Cultural Revolution and rise of the reform period under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping ushered in a new set of conditions in China and Tibet. Since 1978, the Chinese Government has carried out major political and economic reforms. Collective ownership was replaced with the "household responsibility system" under which land and animals were divided among each family which assumed full responsibility for managing its land. Consequently, the household again became the basic unit of rural production, and all households controlled land of roughly equal proportions. This land, however, cannot be sold, so it is in effect a fixed resource, much as land was in the traditional society. The new reforms, therefore, appear to have created a set of conditions where polyandry might again have a useful function. In fact, anecdotal reports suggest that there has been a substantial revival of polyandry, even though it is still illegal according to the Chinese constitution. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the extent and nature of this revival of polyandry in rural Tibet. The dissertation will also present the first empirical data on polyandry based on fieldwork in Tibet per se. Although Tibet is the most important ethnographic examples of polyandry, previous studies were conducted with ethnic Tibetans in Nepal or Ladakh and the only

anthropological work done on polyandry in Tibet was based on reconstruction research with Tibetan refugees living in India (Goldstein, 1971a; Aziz, 1978; Dargye, 1982). Consequently, until now, no fieldwork in Tibet proper was ever carried out.

The study on which this dissertation is based was designed to investigate the socio-economic and cultural factors underlying how Tibetans in Tibet practice polyandry, as well as the factors underlying the recent revival of fraternal polyandry in Tibet. It will examine how polyandrously married Tibetans understand and deal with a range of issues related to multiple brothers sharing a wife, and the factors underlying the current decisions to choose polyandry for multiple sons. As one of the least well-studied institutions in the anthropological literature on marriage and the family, the dissertation will present important new ethnographic data on its operation in Tibet. The dissertation will also use this new data to address the validity of the two main alternative anthropological explanations of polyandry, i.e., the socio-economic (Crook and Crook, 1994; Goldstein, 1971a; Prince Peter, 1963; Ross, 1981; Schuler, 1987) and the cultural (Levine, 1988).

These data and analyses are presented in eight chapters. Chapter Two will discuss the study's research design and methods. Chapter Three will discuss the nature of taxation, marriage and the family in the traditional feudal era in the study village. Chapter Four will examine the changes in the village research site following decollectivization. Chapter Five will discuss the current patterns of marriage and family in the study village and Chapter Six will examine the factors underlying the revival of polyandry there. Chapter Seven will examine individual relations in polyandrous families, and Chapter Eight is the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

Research Site

Benam County in Shigatse Prefecture was chosen as the overall site of this study because it was one of the agricultural areas where polyandrous marriages were said to exist in large numbers. A preliminary investigation of several potential sites within Benam County was made, and on the basis of this investigation, Dechen[1], the largest village in Mag xiang[2], was selected as the field research site. This village employs traditional Tibetan subsistence modes, is neither among the poorest or richest of the village areas, and has a high prevalence of new polyandrous marriages.

Benam county is located in the southern part of Shigatse Prefecture in Central Tibet. Geographically, Benam lies in the middle reaches of Nyangchu River and is bounded from the east to the west by Gyantse, Sakya and Gangpa counties; from the south and the north it is bounded by Khangmar and Yadong counties and Shigatse city.

Benam is a mountain river valley with the higher elevations being in the southwest and the lower ones in the northeast. The range of elevation in the county is between 3,850

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[1] Anonymous.
[2] Xiang is a Chinese term used in Tibet for rural districts comprised of several villages.

to 5,300 meters. At the lower altitudes in Benam the river valley is wide with the broadest area close to the Nyangchu River being 50 km wide. The narrowest part of the county is in the upper valley. It is about 20 km wide. The distance between southern and northern sections of Benam county is 120 km.

Two big rivers flow in this county. One, the Tanchu river, is a seasonal river. That is to say, it is dry from the end of September to the following mid-June. From mid-June to the end of September water runs in its streambed, but this has very little utility for agriculture. The maximum rate of flow is from 60 to 80 cubic meters per second.

The other river is the Nyangchu River. It is a main tributary of the Yalung Tsangbo River that runs from the southeast to the northwest in the northeastern part of the county. Its maximum rate of flow reaches 120 cubic meters per second when there is heavy rainfall. In normal times, the rate is between 30-40 cubic meters per second. During the dry season in Spring and when large amounts of water in the upper reaches of the river are used for farming, the river becomes very small, but there is also danger of flooding during periods of heavy rain.

The climate in Benam is semi-humid/semi-arid and the average annual temperature is 6.1 degrees C. The warmest average monthly temperature is 26.6 degrees C in June and the coldest is -25.8 degrees C (in January). The annual number of hours of sunshine is around 3,200 and the annual precipitation is 350 mm (Benam Document, 1991). However, rainfall is not evenly distributed throughout the year and most rain is concentrated during July and August when 70% of the year's total rainfall occurs. Because of this, Benam suffers from not enough rainfall during the early part of the growing season and too much rainfall late in the season. Crops, sometimes, are actually damaged by waterlogging.

Heavy rains also frequently cause flooding that washes away the crops, farmland, irrigation canals, and roads. The year 1998 typifies Benam's problems. It did not rain at all from March to July and many farmers feared their production would be decreased to a minimum by the drought. However, after the beginning of August, it started to rain heavily for about a month and half with the result that the crops and farmland in some areas were washed away.

The worst natural disaster in modern Tibetan history occurred in Gyantse and Benam in 1954. Due to a spate of continuous rainstorms, a lake called Sangwang broke causing the Nyangchu River to overflow its banks. Gyantse county reported that the flood submerged more than 20 villages, took the life of 735 people, killed 6,180 animals, and flooded 41,045 khal[3] of farmland. In Benam, 52 villages were destroyed, 24 people died, 1,220 animals were lost and 28,693 khal of land was not harvested.

Because of low rainfall from January to July, drought is another of the main natural calamities in Benam county. Each year about 20% of the total cultivated land is damaged by drought (Benam Document, 1982b). A county document reports that between 1980 to 1990, Benam county suffered serious drought for four years, had three years with above normal rainfall (the average was above 400 mm), and had only three years with normal rainfall (Benam Document, 1991). The four years of drought occurred continuously from 1980 to 1983. During those years, less than 200 mm of rainfall fell per year. Within the total cultivated area, 54% of the land was affected and the yield was decreased by more than half. Many fields obtained no harvest at all. In some areas wells also became dry, this

[3] A khal is a traditional unit of land that today is equivalent to the Chinese mu.

causing serious drinking water problems for both people and animals. For example, in Duchong xiang, drinking water had to be transported from other places by truck.

Early Frost and hail also often threaten the growing crops. When frost occurs early in the middle of July it affects the normal growth of the crops by decreasing the weight of the kernels and reducing the total amount of production. Hail also commonly damages 15 to 20% of the fields.

Water loss and soil erosion are also important problems that Benam farmers face. On March 1, 1980, a research team sent by Shigatse prefecture to Benam county spent six months conducting a general soil survey in five areas of the county. They found severe soil erosion and suggested that the reason for the erosion was the gradual decreasing of the ground cover due to late rains and uneven rainfall distribution. This has been exacerbated by a shortage of fuel that led farmers to cut wild plants and bushes around the village and in the lower parts of mountain slopes. They also found that even though trees had been planted in barren gravel bands, the survival rate of these trees was very low.

The lack of good ground covers leads to erosion during winter and spring which are not only the dry but also the windy seasons. At these times crops have been already harvested and the stubble has also been eaten by animals. Every afternoon the wind blows and the whole valley is enveloped by gray dust as the rich top soil of the bare farmland is blown away. Thus the fields suffer erosion at this time. At the same time, a wide area of sand dunes are being formed near to the farmland and this is also a threat to the fields. In northern part of the county there are more than 20,000 mu[4] of sand dunes.

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[4] A mu is a Chinese land unit equal to 0.067 hectares.

Finally, another problem found in Benam is the result of the opening of arid (non-irrigated) lands for planting grains. When this was done the natural vegetation was destroyed and the erosion was made even worse. The research team estimated (Benam Document, 1982b) that about one third of total farmland was originally occupied by grasses or thorn bushes. Most of these newly opened fields were located on mountain slopes which were far away from the villages with no available irrigation so their yields were low. They suggested planting grass in this farmland as this would be good for the animals and the ecological environment.

The Course of Historical Changes

The origin of the name "Benam" can be traced to two famous 13th century Tibetan Buddhism translators (t. lotsawa) named Badra Nyima Drapa and Nalang Dorje Denshong who spent time in this place together studying Buddhism. As a result of this, people started using the first letter of their names— "Ba" and "Na"— to refer to this place. After many years, "Bana" has come to be pronounced as "Benam."

During the traditional period (before 1959), three districts (t. dzong) existed in the area that is equivalent to today's counties: Benam, Dochung, and Wangden. These districts were each headed by two officials operating jointly, one being a monk official and the other a lay official. These district commissioners collected taxes and arranged corvée human and animal labor. They were appointed by the Gyantse Jikyap (the traditional name for the governor of a province that included several districts).

Benam district was divided into several kinds of feudal estates. Some villages were estates of aristocratic families like Beling, and other belonged to monasteries and lamas. Still other were what was known in traditional Tibet as "government serfs" (t. gshung rgyug ba), i.e., they belonged to the government through the district.

On November 15, 1951, the People's Liberation Army arrived in Gyantse for the first time. On August 23, 1956, the Communist Party Committee branch of Benam dzong was formally established consisting of three Chinese members. Later, a branch office of the Tibet Gongwei (work committee)[5] was also set up in Benam Zong. The former Benam district governor was appointed as director and vice secretary by the Committee. This was the first time in Benam that the traditional government had been integrated with organs of communist political power, although at this time the district governor retained control over affairs in the district completely independent of the communist party committee. Meanwhile, the communist party office in Benam made their working priority propagandizing on behalf of the "17 Point Agreement" (the 1951 agreement that incorporated Tibet into the PRC). At the same time, they admitted and trained many local people into their office and gave some loans to Tibetans for their agricultural development.

After the abortive Tibetan uprising and the flight of the Dalai Lama to exile in India in 1959, the traditional feudal serf system was abolished and democratic reforms were implemented. Several months later, on August 31, 1959, the three Zongs mentioned above were merged into one large unit called a xian (county) in Chinese. It retained the

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[5] An administrative organ established by the Central Committee of China and the PLA in Tibet in the early 1950s.

name of Benam. The first governor (c. xian zhang) was a Tibetan aristocrat from local area, Solang Dorje. The first party secretary was a Chinese called Xu Shuyi.

Under the new Benam county government, seven administrative units known by the Chinese term qu were created, and beneath these twenty two rural districts or xiang were formed at the local level. In 1964, Shigatse prefecture and Gyantse prefecture were combined into one new large prefecture and was named Shigatse prefecture. Benam county today is one of the most important agricultural areas among the 18 counties within Shigatse prefecture.

Initially land from the lords' estates was divided among the peasants, and then shortly after this, a mutual aid team system (t. rogs ras tsogs chung) was started wherein several households cooperated in production (but retained their own yields). Then, finally, a full-scale people's communes was started in 1965. At this time, all land and animals fell under collective ownership, and people were organized into production teams. Families' livelihood depended on the number of work points its members earned, each task in the commune work cycle being awarded a set number of "points." Like all other places in Tibet, Benam county, therefore, has gone through a series of major changes following the end of the traditional feudal system.

The current system began in 1981 when the communes were ended and the commune's fields divided among its members. At this time the so called "responsibility" system was begun in which households were given control of land for at least 30 years, the household again becoming the basic unit of production.

Finally, in 1987, the government simplified its rural administration in order to reduce financial expenses and to make administration more convenient for local villagers by abolishing all qu governments and, in Benam, consolidating the existing 22 xiangs into 11 larger xiang units. The current composition of Benam was created at this time.

Increasing Population and Uneven Economic Development

Population data before 1958 do not exist. This is partly because the traditional Tibetan government did not regularly conduct population surveys, but also because most historical documents from these areas were not preserved. A recent document indicates that in 1958 the total population in Benam was 18,049 people. Ten years later, in1968, the total population had increased to 22,729, and by the end of 1995, the total population was 40,086 (Benam Document, 1982b; Statistical Bureau of TAR, 1996). This growth is substantial, but we do not know how much of it was in-migration versus natural population growth.

Economic development has been uneven in Benam county. According to an investigation done during 1988 and 1989 (Benam Document, 1990), with the exception of two pastoral xiangs, the areas of poverty are mainly distributed among five xiangs of the southwestern part of the county and three xiangs in the northeastern. Within these poor areas, there are 4,500 mu of land only 30% of which are irrigated. The remaining 70% consist of non-irrigated fields that are dependent on rain (and snow). Most of these poor areas are also located at higher altitudes, above 4,200 meters. The combination of not

enough rainfall, frequent of natural disasters, and lack of irrigation facilities, has resulted in low agricultural production in these areas.

In contrast to these poor areas, in the northeastern part of Benam most fields are located in the plains of the Nyangchu River. In these areas, over 95% of the fields are irrigated. These lower, well irrigated areas, were included as one of the commodity grain bases[6] in Tibet in 1982. Since then the government has invested considerable sums of money to build and improve irrigation facilities and to make new seeds and fertilizers available. Consequently, the average yield per mu in these parts of the county is much higher than that of the southwestern part, and the grain per capita is also over 50% higher. Farmers there not only sell more quota grain to the government,[7] but most of them also sell extra grain to government. By contrast, in the poorer part of the county, people just have enough grain to meet the quota limit, and most of them do not have any excess of grain stored at home.

The research site on which this study is based is located in the poorer, southwestern part of Benam county in Mag xiang. This area is situated at an elevation of 4,200 meters. Mag xiang's communal land and animals were divided between individual households in 1981on a per capita basis. Households then became the main units of production as they had been in the traditional society. At this time, today's Mag xiang was actually two xiang units (Magpu xiang and Magda xiang) and was under Dochong qu, but in the administrative consolidations of 1987, the two xiangs were combined into one xiang

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[6] These are areas that produce large amounts of grain that is sold as a commodity.

[7] In the TAR, the two chief sources of grain are the quota grain that farmers sell to the state at slightly less than market price and the surplus grain sold by farmers.

and the qu was abolished. The new larger xiang government site was located in Dechen village which I chose as my research site. It is 33 km from the Benam county seat.

According to local official documents, in 1996, the population of Mag xiang was 4,561 individuals and 580 households (Mag xiang Document, 1996). Three decades ago in 1959, data show a population of 2,123 persons and 358 households (Mag xiang Document, 1988). This reveals a population increase of 53.5% for individuals and 38.3% for households. Although these data refer to the same geographic area, as with the county level data, we do not know how much of this was in-migration versus natural population growth (Benam Document, 1996). In 1995, county records indicate that the annual rate of population increase in Mag xiang was 1.32% which was fractionally higher than the rate for Tibet as a whole (1.31%).

Mag xiang is classified as a semi-arid area in the county, and pursues a combination of farming and animal husbandry, the former being the more important. It consists of 11 administrative villages (t. srid 'dzing gyi grong tsho) formed by 56 natural villages (t. rang byung gi grong tsho), all of which are located in a narrow mountain valley that is 24 kilometers long. A seasonal river runs through the valley but is without water flow from February to June. The distance between the xiang and the county seat is about 30 kilometers, and although there is a motorable road between these, it is dirt and very rough.

Traditional farming methods are still used in all Mag xiang's villages with human and animal labor being involved in most farming activities from planting to winnowing. The main change in farming technique involves the use of modern machinery such as

tractors and trucks to move the cut crops from the field to the threshing ground and then to thresh the grain.

The land in Mag xiang is very varied some fields being located in the plain of the valley and some of them on the lower mountain slopes. Fields in both areas have been divided into small plots bounded by low earthen bounds. Until 1997, there were two traditional crop rotation systems. One involved planting lentils for the first year on a single field (sometimes mixed with mustard). The following year, barley is planted alone on the same field, and then in the third year, barley and lentils are planted together (sometimes, barley and mustard are planted together). Then the cycle starts again with lentils. Lentils traditionally were frequently planted because people correctly believed that they increased the strength of the soil and provided fertilizer for the next year's barley crop. This rotation was strictly followed in six hill villages in the upper valley, including Dechen, my research site.

A second traditional planting strategy left a field fallow for one year after planting barley on it. This was typical of the villages in the lower valley.

Chemical fertilizers, human excrement and animal manure are used extensively in Mag xiang. Both the xiang and county governments greatly emphasize the need for farmers to invest in chemical fertilizer and accumulate large quantities of manure. Since 1996, farmers have had to pay the full price of fertilizer while before that the government paid half of the price and the farmers paid the other half. The government also encourages farmers to use improved seeds as much as possible, and sometimes, helps farmers to

secure new improved seeds. In most cases, farmers exchange their grain for the improved seeds from other areas.

Each year certain targets of manure accumulation and usage of the improved seeds are set by the county for each xiang. Before spring, the county organizes several groups of county officials, xiang leaders, and heads of villages from all over the xiang to visit villages and check whether or not they have met the targets. In each village, they usually examine the preparations by selecting a few households randomly and then giving them certain points based on the adequacy of their preparations. Afterwards, the best prepared xiang will be rewarded with money and those that were inadequately prepared will be fined. For the past several years, Mag xiang has been neither rewarded nor fined. Its villagers usually do not have difficulties accumulating manure since they raise more animals than other places in the county, but, they do have problems preparing sufficient amount of improved seeds. One reason for this is that they have to travel more than 30 kilometers (several days) by horses or donkey cart to reach the area where they can exchange seed, but a second reason is that many households in Mag xiang are not convinced of their value. They argue that there is no guarantee that the new seeds will produce a high yield because they generally need special care in the form of more irrigation and more fertilizer. Since water is very limited in this area, many prefer to use traditional seeds which they consider more stable.

The limited water resources is the single most significant factor for the crop yields. Because of shortages in water, most villages have several small-scale water reservoirs and a major responsibility of the xiang is the maintenance of these irrigation facilities, e.g., the repair of irrigation canals and reservoirs before the planting time. There are also many

conflicts regarding the usage of water so another important responsibility of the xiang government and village committee is the organization and enforcement of certain rules regulating household's access to irrigation water. Each village has a detailed and complicated set of rules and methods of using water.[8]

As a result of Mag xiang's weather conditions, limited irrigation facilities, and higher altitude due to its location in the upper valley, Mag xiang ranks only between the middle and lower levels of Benam county (Xiao, 1994). Nevertheless, agricultural output has improved since land division in the early 1980s as has income per capita.

Because of its conditions, it has also been difficult to increase the amount of land under cultivation. The amount of arable land has only increased 20.5% during the period since decollectivization, from 7,033 khal in 1959 to 8,842 in 1996, while the total head of livestock has increased 49.5% from 11,603 to 22,977. However, since the population increase has been substantial, the average amount of land per capita has decreased more than half from 3.3 to 1.9 khal/person. The average number of animals per capita has also decreased from 5.5 to 5.0/ person.

Even though Mag xiang is officially considered an agro-pastoral village, people are mainly engaging in agriculture. However, each individual household does raise small amounts of livestock such as dzo (the hybrid cross of a yak and an ox), yak, sheep, goats,

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[8] To maximize water, villagers irrigate some fields once during the winter, leaving the water frozen. When it is time to plant in spring, they do not have to irrigate again as the soil moisture help the seeds to grow. In addition, farmers leave lots of small stones in the field. When I ask them why they did not clean off the stones, they responded saying that this is a method for dealing with drought and the shortage of water. When fields are covered by small stones, it prevent sunlight from directly hitting the soil and burning the seeds. They believe that the shadow of the small stone moistens the soil, and have a saying that, "There is a spring under each stone."

cows, donkeys, mules, horses, and chickens. Some animals such as pigs are not kept by farmers in these area because it is considered to be harmful for the local deity. Due to the shortage of grassland, during the summer time most villages gather their large livestock such as dzo, yaks, and horses and herd them in other counties where they have to pay a small amount per head. In addition, many villagers buy or exchange the straw from crops in other areas to help to feed animals during winter time. A study (Xiao, 1994) reports that the maximum capacity of the pasture lands and crops fodder is 22,000 sheep in Mag xiang but the total number of animals in Mag xiang was 22,751 (which is equivalent to 32,873 sheep) so they are beyond the carrying capacity by over 44%. This is partially supported by older people who expressed the view that the animals produce less meat and wool per capita now than they did thirty years ago.

The xiang government has organized villagers to open new fields in areas right beside the river bank as this is the only place that has not been cultivated in this xiang. In 1998 the xiang organized construction teams to spend several months building new levees along the river bank so as to convert the wasteland there into fields. Unfortunately, most of these newly opened field have been washed away by flooding. When I visited the research site in December, 1998, the previous road was washed away and the top soil of the lower lying fields had been replaced by rocks and sand. Two houses were also totally destroyed, although no one was hurt. People told me that it took them three or four months of hard work to repair the damaged land so it could be planted in the coming year, although even then it would take several years for the land to reach its previous level of production. There was more flooding in 1999, and 2000, so these new fields have not been very useful.

Research Methodology

As indicated above, fieldwork was conducted in Dechen, an agro-pastoral village in Benam county for a total of 12 months between September 1996 and July 1998. The great strength of anthropology's methodology is its ability to avoid constraining subject responses by limiting data collection to fixed questions in a survey instrument. Thus, I utilized a multifaceted strategy with a mix of methods such as in-depth and open-ended interviews, formal and informal interviews, key informants, focus group, and participant observation. In addition to this, a general village demographic and economic census was conducted and a large corpus of local and county government records were examined. Using these approaches, I was able to collect valid and reliable data on polyandry by eliciting how the subjects themselves understand polyandry in general and with respect to their specific household situation, and contextualizing this in the socio-economic matrix of village life in contemporary China/Tibet.

The population of Dechen village (in 1996) is 690. These are organized into 92 households, the average household size being 7.5 persons. Households were the core study unit, and all households in the village were studied.

A variety of marriage types was present in Dechen including different forms of polyandry, polygyny and monogamy. Of the 92 households, 28 households (30%) were involved in polyandrous marriages at the beginning of the study. Another 3 additional households contracted polyandrous marriages and had wedding ceremonies during the

course of field research. At the end of research, therefore, there were 61 non-polyandrous households (66%) to compare with 31 polyandrous households (34%).

Early on in the fieldwork, a demographic and economic survey of each household was undertaken. The results of this were compared with government records, on land and animal holdings and household membership, and discrepancies reconciled.

Several months were then spent sifting through and copying more than ten thousand county and xiang government records relevant to that village area over the past 38 years. At the same time, a range of local, xiang, and county officials was interviewed regarding these transitions. The overall economic status of the village area was assessed from government records on production and sales, and interviews with villagers, key informants, and local and district officials.

Following this, the in-depth interview phase of the study was begun. During this period, two sets of in-depth interviews were conducted with all 92 households: an initial interview and a follow-up interview. The interviews utilized the open-ended interview techniques guided by use of an interview guide that was built up from previous data. The focus of these interviews was on marriage and polyandry.

Several months were also spent investigating key specific topics such as marriage, religion, farming, subsistence and taxes before and after 1959 (i.e., during the era of the old society before 1959 and the new socialist social system after 1959).

At the beginning I was concerned that the findings might be negatively influenced because fraternal polyandry is illegal in China, namely, that the subjects may not give accurate information. This ended up not being a problem.

At the start, when I explained the purpose of the study to the head of village (t. grong dpon), a fifty five year old man who has been in this and similar positions for more than three decades and is held in high esteem by both the villagers and the xiang officials, he told us that we would not have any problem getting accurate information. He introduced me to the whole village, household by household, and very graciously told me the general background and marital status of each household. His introductions turned out to be very accurate and were validated by our subsequent visits.

While conducting the initial village household/ economic census, I was able to test some of the questions about polyandry and found that the villagers were not reluctant to talk about practicing polyandry. They were neither afraid nor embarrassed by it. In fact, families who engaged in polyandrous marriages were very proud about their use of fraternal polyandrous marriages. Similarly, we found that county, xiang and village officials also openly talked about this marriage type, and I later learned that a number of officials had relatives engaged in polyandrous marriages. Consequently, while polyandry was officially illegal in Tibet/China, in reality it was openly being practiced and was well regarded.

After completing each phase of the research (the household census, first set of in-depth household interviews, etc.), a break of several weeks to a month was spent in Lhasa in order to review the interviews, read articles on relevant topics, and discuss issues with

colleagues in my institute. At the same time, I worked on the interview schedule and in-depth interviewing guidelines/questions for the next stage. This approach allowed me to address issues that were not covered in previous interviews and add some new controversial topics. For instance, I learned from the first census interview that a several polyandrous families had recently partitioned. During the break I prepared some detailed questions that probed for factors associated with splitting up and added these into the interview guidelines for the first set of in-depth interviews. Another example occurred after I had done the set of first in-depth interviews. When I returned to Lhasa I found many of the high officials in the Tibet Autonomous Region were strongly attacking the "backward" and "unhealthy" Tibetan traditional customs in speeches and on TV, newspaper, and radio, and learned that polyandry was being targeting as one of the backward customs. The main reason they cited was that this type of marriage was said to be very physically and mentally harmful for women. When I discussed this reason with my colleagues at the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences and others, some of them thought that this reason did not reflect Tibetan reality, but others agreed and suggested that it was time for Tibetans to give up those "backward" customs. Consequently, I decided to examine this controversial topic in the second in-depth interviews by discussing this with women who were themselves engaged in polyandrous marriages.

Emic data on why polyandry or monogamy was chosen was collected via interviews with all households in the village. These included each member of the marriage union and their parents. The interviews used an open-ended, unstructured format allowing questions to be addressed in the order that appeared most natural in the interview sessions. These interviews were tape recorded for subsequent transcription, coding and analysis. All

subjects, therefore, were asked the same set of questions, but not necessarily in the same order. This approach was considered more likely to produce meaningful data than a closed-ended, fixed order interview schedule, yet also enabled the study to collect a uniform data set for qualitative and quantitative comparisons and analyses.

Two male Tibetan assistants who were former classmates and current colleagues in Lhasa were employed. They had rich experience with village life and a deep knowledge of Tibetan culture. They were hired to help with the demographic and economic surveys, collect government records, and investigate key specific topics such as the marital patterns and the family before 1959. The assistants also helped verify the survey and interview data in the field so that discrepancies could be detected and resolved on the spot.

The in-depth household interviews included questions that elicited attitudes, beliefs and values regarding the cultural meaning of polyandry and monogamy and the reasons for polyandry or monogamy in specific households. These interviews also investigated a series of issues dealing with the operation of polyandry such as paternity, treatment of children, sexual arrangements, decision making, work allocation and social interaction in general. General attitudes were explored as well as the specific practices employed by each household. All interviews were conducted in each family's home and we roughly spent about 2 to 3 days discussing these issues with each household. At the end of each day of interviewing, my research assistant and I discussed the interviews so that we would not miss any nuances. In addition, a young 25 year old woman from the village was hired as our cook. After some time she joined our conversation about the village situation.

In addition to these interviews and surveys, traditional participant observation played an important role. After I arrived in the research site, I decided to live in the xiang administrative complex where the xiang leader offered us a room. I thought this location was ideal and agreed. One reason for this was that the xiang is the lowest administrative government in Tibet which directly affects villagers' daily life. Since I lived closely with lower level officials and spent lots time with them, I was able to develop relationships of rapport with them and was able to observe how policies such as marriage law, family planning, and others were implemented at the local level. Eventually they invited me to participate in their meetings and provided materials and information that I wanted to know. In addition, the research site was immediately adjacent to the xiang center, so in addition to our visits to village households, many of the villagers often visited our quarters and told us their own and others' stories. As a native Tibetan who grew up in a rural agro-pastoral village, I had no trouble with problems of linguistic and cultural misunderstanding and was able to easily observe people's daily life, participate in casual conversations and used the data obtained in different setting to cross-check the survey and interview data.

We also established excellent rapport with the heads of Dechen village. We occasionally visited them and participated in their parties and games. They became very helpful for the research. People told us at interviews that during the village's meetings the village heads talked about our visits in a very positive way and often told people that they should show hospitality to us and honestly answer our questions. We also earned people's trust by participating in the village's activities such as weddings, religious ceremonies, and their work.

Initially, I thought that it might be important to secure the assistance of a female assistant for in-depth interviewing with women. I thought that women and their families would feel more comfortable and be more forthcoming if a woman was present for these interviews. On the other hand, I was also worrying that if I did not interview the women myself, I might not get the exact content and nuances on those sensitive questions which I really wanted to know. Consequently, initially, I left very sensitive questions about sexual arrangements in polyandry and how polyandrous married women see their marital life in terms of physical and mental dimensions until the end. After conducting the survey and the first in-depth interview, I felt I had earned the local village's respect and trust, and informally had found both men and women were willing to talk about their life's experiences, good and bad. Consequently, excellent rapport was established and women were not embarrassed by sensitive questions that I gradually asked to test whether or not I could do the systematic female interviews by myself. Because they were answered freely, I became confident that I could do the interviews by myself so I started the second in-depth interview without female research assistants. The result was excellent—beyond my expectations.

This study design, therefore, allowed the collection of detailed quantitative and qualitative data on marriage and social/cultural/economics variables using the household as the focal unit. The in-depth interviewing concentrated on spouses and parents of polyandrous and monogamous unions. This design enabled me to analyze the validity of the socio-economic hypothesis for polyandry versus the cultural explanation. Similarly, it allowed comparisons of the meaning of polyandry and monogamy and allowed an analysis of the revival of polyandry.

However, before we discuss these issues, the next chapter will briefly describe the system of marriage and family in Dechen village in the old society, i.e., before 1959.

CHAPTER THREE

TAXATION, MARRIAGE, AND THE FAMILY IN DECHEN VILLAGE BEFORE 1959

Estates and Peasants in Traditional Tibet

In order to understand the traditional system of marriage and the family in Tibet, it is necessary to understand the semi feudal socio-economic system in which it was embedded. Pre-1959 Tibet was divided into landed estates (t. gzhis ka) held by three types of estate-holding lords: the government itself (usually administered by districts and their governors), an aristocracy comprised of several hundred hereditary families, and a religious sector composed of monasteries and incarnate lamas. Underpinning the Tibetan feudal estate system was the institution of "miser" (t. mi ser)—bound peasants analogous to serfs in medieval European feudalism. Tibet's miser were hereditarily bound to estates and the lords who possessed them. This meant that without special permission from their lord, peasants were not permitted to permanently leave their estate and live elsewhere. Lords, in fact, had the legal right to search out and forcibly return (and punish) miser who ran away without their permission. The large miser stratum provided the labor that converted the land held by the numerically miniscule lord stratum into productive resources.

The Tibetan feudal system consisted of a number of types of estates and miser that are important to outline briefly. Aristocratic and religious estates were typically

organized as manorial estates with demesne and tenement land sections, and village(s) of bound serf households. The estate's demesne land was farmed by the lord's serfs as a corvée tax (i.e., without pay), the yield from that land going entirely to the lord. It usually consisted of roughly 50-70% of the better land on the estate. The remaining tenement land was divided among the serf households who farmed it individually to secure their own subsistence. As mentioned above, serf households were hereditarily bound to their estate. They could not legally give back their tenement land and sever their obligation to their lord and estate. The heart of the Tibetan socio-economic system, therefore, was that the ownership of productive land resources was joined with a captive labor force.

However, there were several different serf strata and not all peasant households held land and tax obligations. At the top of the miser hierarchy were a type of miser called tre-ba (t. khral pa, "taxpayer"). They held land from their lord and in exchange were obligated to provide a variety of corvée and in-kind tax obligations to their estate in concert with the size of their land holdings. The basic tax unit was called a "gang" (t. rkang) and it was common for different taxpayer serf households on an estate to have different amounts of gang (and obligations). For example, a poor taxpayer family might have only 1/4th of a gang while a richer family might have 1 ½ gang of land.

Beneath the taxpayer strata was a category of poor serfs called dü-jung (t. dud chung) or literally "small smoke." They were also hereditary serfs of a lord, but did not hold any hereditable land (gang) or held only tiny plots. They usually lived in a house provided by the lord and worked at various tasks for the lord or taxpayer serf households subsisting through wages paid for their work and/or through leasing land. However, like the taxpayers, they were bound to the estate and could not unilaterally leave.

The lowest stratum of miser were called nangma or nangsen (t. nang ma; nang gzan). These were serfs who worked in the lord's house or at tasks he specified.

A fourth category of miser was called mibo (t. mi bogs) or "human lease." These were serfs who had received permission from their lord to physically leave the estate and work wherever they wanted. However, for this right, they were required to pay an annual fee ("a human lease" fee) to their lord as well as provide some labor on certain occasions. This status was not easy to obtain as lords were interested in keeping labor on the estate, but it was granted, for example, when a serf married out to another estate.

Recruitment to these strata was primarily through birth, although the ranks of the dü-jung serfs was constantly being added to when members of taxpayer families split from their natal households. In Dechen village, such individuals did not receive fields and became dü-jung. Dü-jung families occasionally became taxpayer households when the lord granted them the tax fields of someone who had died or fled. One's serf status passed by parallel descent to one's children: sons belonged to their father's lord/estate whereas daughters belonged to their mother's lord/estate. Since miser commonly married spouses from other lords, such mixed marriage families were common.

The Traditional System in Dechen Village

Land in Dechen village was held by two types of feudal lords: the central government in the form of a district called Dochung (t. rdo chung) which was located about 10 km. from Dechen, and by Beling (pseudonym), an aristocratic family. Of the

1015 "ke" (khal)[1] of land in Dechen, 108 ke (10.6%) were under Dochung district and the other 907 ke (89.4%) belonged to the Beling family.

Dochung district's land was divided hereditarily among a small number of "taxpayer" families who were obligated to provide corvée labor and in-kind taxes to the district. Originally there were four households who obtained their land from the government and paid their taxes to the Dochung county. By 1940, they had been reduced to three since one household ran away. However, the tax obligation, was the same so it had to be fulfilled by the three remaining households who now had to pay more. There was no resident administrative official like a headman or estate manager among them.

For the government taxpayers, each household had to provide corvée labor (t. 'u lag) to Dochung District which had three estates near to Dechen. The amount required for one gang of land was one full time unpaid laborer to work the estate's fields for the whole year. In addition to this, the families holding a gang had to give 32 ke of the best quality grain and 4 whole sheep carcasses to Dochung district. Moreover, each taxpayer family had to give 300 jin of animal dung for fuel, 100 jin of grass for fodder, 4 jin of butter, and about 600 jin of animal manure for the fields. Each family also needed to pay taxes consisting of about 2 jin of butter and 19 jin of grain to a government monastery. Since the families were also using pastureland and irrigation canals belonging to another aristocratic family, they also had to pay a pasture use fee that came out to 7 jin of butter. Other corvée obligations such the provision of transportation (t. khal ma) and riding animals (t. rta 'u) as described by Goldstein (1971b) were only occasionally required because of this area's remoteness.

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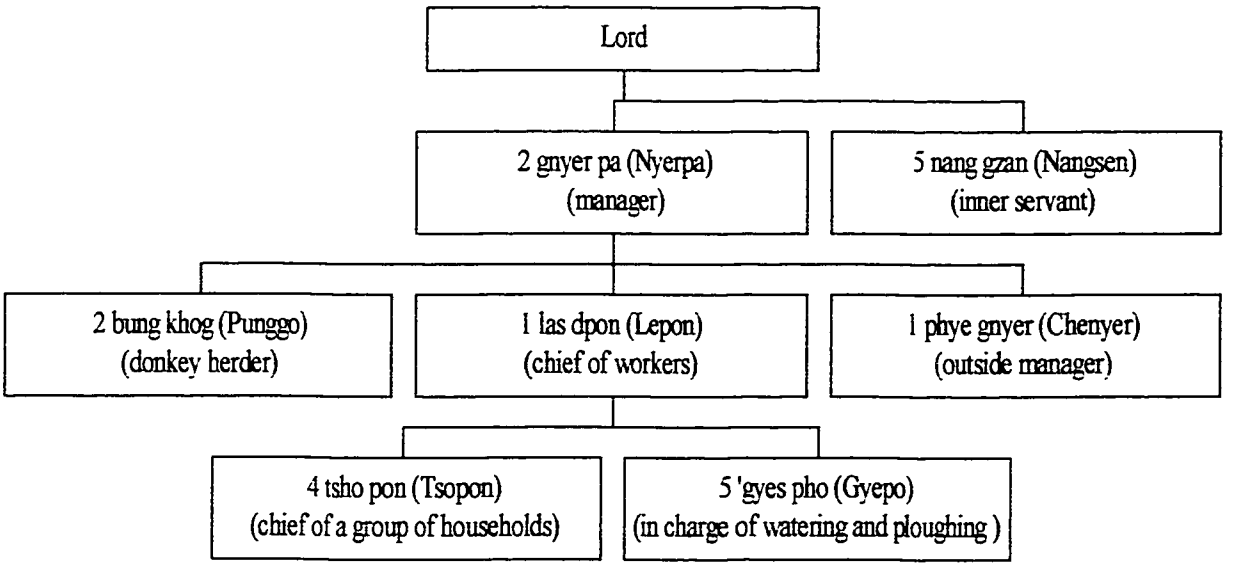
[1] A ke (t. khal) is the standard volume measure equal to about 31 pounds or 28 jin (of barley). Land was measured on the basis of how many ke of seed a field took at planting.

The majority of the land in Dechen was land held by the aristocratic Beling family. The Beling family's land was structured as a manorial estate with hereditarily attached miser families and estate administrators. About 63% of the Beling estate's land was organized into demesne fields, i.e., they were the fields from which the total yield went to the lord. This land was worked as a corvée tax by the miser families. The remaining 37% of the Beling estate was tenement land that was held by the serf "taxpayer" (tre-ba) families, the yield from these fields providing them their subsistence.

It is hard to know when the Beling family obtained this estate from the Lhasa government since the oldest people in the village said that they were under Beling for a long time and hadn't heard of any changes in ownership in their lifetime. At the end of the old system in 1959, therefore, this ownership had been hereditarily passed on within the Beling family for at least several generations.

Like other aristocratic estates, the estate's production was administered by a staff who were selected from the serf families by the lord. As figure 3 – 1 shows, there were 20 serfs who acted as staff/ servants and took care of the lord's daily life and the tasks of the estate.

Figure 3 – 1 The Estate Organization Structure



The estate's miser were divided into 2 village-like sub units called tso (t. tsho), each of which was headed by 2 tsopon (t. tsho dpon) or headmen. One tso was comprised of 10 taxpayer households and the other of 8. The headmen were selected by the serf households from their members and were responsible for overseeing the corvée labor that the families were obligated to provide as well as for dividing up the work obligations among the families based on the amount of land they held. This was the typical systems of estate organization in feudal Tibet.

For both the government and the aristocratic taxpayer serfs, the tax obligations were based on the land unit called gang. A gang was a volume area measurement

calculated by the amount of seed sown on a field. However, the size of a gang was not standardized and varied a lot between government and aristocratic land. Nevertheless, the more gang a family held, the more the tax and corvée obligations they were responsible for.

In general, corvée labor obligations were much heavier for the aristocratic taxpayer serfs than for government taxpayers. The taxpayers serfs of the Beling family were required to pay heavy corvée and in-kind taxes. On the 15th of the sixth Tibetan month, each taxpayer household had to specify one member of a family to be the lord's full-time corvée laborer for the coming year. They could not later change that person. Children and elderly were prohibited from fulfilling the corvée labor tax since they were considered to be inadequate workers.

This corvée labor obligation included two kinds of obligations. One was called nangtre (t. nang khral) or "inner tax," and involved work for one's lord. The other was known as chitre (t. phyi khral) or "outside tax," and involved labor for the government. For Dechen's aristocratic taxpayer households, the inner tax was the most difficult. Taxpayer families holding one gang of land had to provide one person to work all year. In addition, during the first Tibetan month they had to send 2 persons, 6 donkeys, and their own tools to dig manure from a far away place and transport it to the lord's fields. At the same time the family had to dig 124 bricks of grassland (used for fuel) and bring them back to the village (from a faraway mountain area). In the seventh Tibetan month, families had to send 6 donkeys for 12 days to bring firewood from the mountains to the lord's house. During planting time, all taxpayer families had to provide draft animals to plow fields for the lord and send one person to help plow and irrigate the fields after the

first watering. Families also needed to give one sheep, 2 jin of butter for each milking cow, 200 jin of firewood to the estate. In addition all taxpayer families provided extra corvée laborers for occasional work such as adding or repairing irrigation canals, pressing rapeseed oil, etc. Finally, they also had to send second person to assist in harvest work in Fall. However, they did not have to give their lord any grain as a tax.

For the "outside tax" to the government, families had to pay Gyantse District (which was more than 70 km away from the village). For a family with one gang of tax land, these taxes included 112 jin of barley, 900 jin of firewood, 400 jin of grass, and some eggs and meat. In addition to this, the family also needed to supply one person and some transport donkeys to Gyantse to transport military goods from one place to another for 7 to 8 days a year. These taxes did not have to be paid by the families holding one-quarter gang or less.

In Tibet, the army was also recruited as a corvée labor tax. Special larger gang called mag-gang (t. dmag rkang) or military gang were set up in the past and given to households who were then responsible for supplying a soldier. They could be either one of their own family members or someone they hired to serve on their behalf. The government in modern times paid a low salary to these soldiers and the households who sent the soldiers basically had to provide them with clothing, grain and money. In Dechen village, there were 2 military gang that were held by government taxpayer serfs and one military gang that was held by an aristocratic taxpayer. A fourth military gang was held by the Beling family. All taxpayer households sent one of their own sons to the military. The lord sent one of his serfs to serve.

This brief description of the traditional taxation system in Tibet (and Dechen) reveals that the taxpayer serfs had heavy labor demands all year. And not only did they have to meet the numerous tax obligations for their lord but they also had labor demands for their own agricultural field and animals. A local saying that expressed this says, "land the size of a palm needed to be paid for by obligations the size of the span from the wrist to the shoulder." But since taxpayers held hereditary land, they were the best off of the miser strata.

The second main type of miser in Dechen were the dü-jung. Dü-jung, as mentioned above, were serfs tied to a lord and estate, but they differed from taxpayers in that in Dechen they did not have a land tax base and thus did not have substantial tax obligations. New dü-jung, as mentioned above, were created when individuals split from their natal family and set up their own households since in Dechen such individuals did not receive any land from their natal household. Once established, the status of dü-jung was passed on hereditarily through parallel descent. Since there were only a few dü-jung households under the government, I will mainly discuss dü-jung households who were tied to Beling, the aristocratic lord. Dü-jung in Dechen survived by laboring on fields for the larger taxpayer families receiving wages or leases of land. This income was supplemented by other kinds of incidental work such as wool work (weaving, spinning) and so forth.

Finally, there was a type of dü-jung called nangma or nangsen who were really house servants of the lord. These were selected as a corvée tax from taxpayer or other dü-jung families by the lord and served usually for their lives. They worked full-time for the lord who provided them housing and food.

Serf Status and Marriage

This system of heavy corvée obligations for taxpayer families in traditional Tibetan society played a major role in shaping the taxpayer's marriage patterns and family life because of the need it created for large families that had a substantial labor force. Family units that contained many laborers were considered advantageous since they could easily fulfill their corvée labor obligations while at the same time doing their own household's work and still having excess labor to engage in other forms of income generating work like trading. Fraternal polyandry was a critical strategy that Dechen families used to maintain labor in their households because it kept brothers together in their natal household. Marriage, therefore, was seen emically as a strategy for maintaining or improving the economic status of households by concentrating labor in households.

It was a traditional custom for Dechen (and Tibet) to keep son(s) at home and marry out daughters. Fraternal polyandry was typically utilized by households who held hereditary land and had heavy tax obligations, i.e., by the taxpayer stratum. It was not as typical of dü-jung families for reasons explicated below. Of the 22 taxpayer households in Dechen, 7 (31.8%) of them were polyandrous and 15 (68.2%) were monogamous families. Although this seems to show that monogamy was more typical than polyandry, it was not since all but one of the 15 monogamous families were not able to utilize polyandry due to the absence of multiple sons in their household. In 10 of the 15

monogamous cases (66.7%), the family had only one son and in 4 cases (26.7%) the family had no son (and either a marriage was arranged in which a son-in-law was brought in for the family's daughter or the family adopted a son). Consequently, it was only in one household with two sons that monogamy was adopted rather than polyandry. And in this case there was a religious motive as the younger son was made a celibate monk and sent to Tashilhunpo monastery in Shigatse. In addition to sons, daughters sometimes also remained in their natal family but they never were permitted to bring in husbands so long as the adult son to being in a bride. They would always be celibate nuns or unmarried (and childless) lay women.

Polygyny was also practiced by Tibetans, but infrequently as it was disvalued by villagers who considered that polygyny would increase the number of children and create potentially conflicting sets of heirs (the children of the two wives). In Dechen, taxpayer households with no sons but several daughters, typically arranged a monogamous marriage for one of their daughters with the in-marrying-son-in-law becoming part of their household (a type of adoptive bridegroom). Other daughters were married out or made nuns.

Consequently, the data from Dechen in the old society closely followed Goldstein's "monomarital principle" (1971a) in that only one marriage was contracted per generation. If there was one son it would be monogamous, but if there were two or more sons it would usually be polyandrous. There were no instances where two brothers each took in a separate bride and lived together with their parents as a joint family since this was considered unstable and likely to lead to conflict and fission.

An important factor underlying the Tibetan marital system was the shortage of farm land. The feudal land tenure system in Dechen village did not permit families to sell or exchange their fields, so households could not increase their holdings through purchase of more land. Land tenure rules made families pass the land virtually intact from one generation to the next. Fields were not given to family members as dowry when they married out and was not divided when a member decided to split from the natal family. In cases where the household itself split into two parts, the land could be divided but that decision was up to the lord and in Dechen the Beling family normally did not approve such divisions. Thus, when family members married or split from the natal family, he or she got only some grain, clothes, and pots and pans (and jewelry in the case of women marrying out). On the other hand, he or she was not obliged to help pay the natal family's taxes or debts.

The heavy emphasis on labor intensive corvée taxes coupled with the restrictive inheritance system made polyandry advantageous for both natal households and brothers. For example, if a brother split from his natal household and established his own family in the village, he would become a dü-jung household with no land. His new family would only get a small room from the lord, and his livelihood would totally depend on working for the lord or other taxpayer households. Through such work it was difficult to earn wages which were more than just enough for one person. Thus, husband and wife had to work, and their standard of living was sure to be low. Similarly, the natal family would suffer since losing one brother meant adding an additional work burden for family and often additional expenses for hiring other persons. Thus, when taxpayer households arranged their children's marriages, they tried to retain adult manpower by having

polyandrous marriages for sons. The importance of concentration labor in households can also be seen by the common practice of making one or more daughters a nun in the local nunnery rather than sending them as brides.

The Dechen nunnery was owned by the Beling family and did not have its own land or other economic resources. It really consisted only of a small temple where religious statues were kept and a kitchen for making tea during religious rites which occurred only a few times a year. Since the nunnery had no sources of income, Dechen nuns (most of whom came from Dechen village) lived at home and worked for their families. Thus, by making a daughter a nun rather than sending her as a bride to another household, the girl's family retained their labor. Not surprisingly, this practice was typical of the taxpayer stratum since they were the one's with the heavy labor needs. For example, 17 of the 19 nuns in Dechen nunnery were from taxpayer households (and two were from the lord's family). None of them were from the landless dü-jung households. Moreover, making daughters nuns seems to have been especially important in households that did not have multiple sons to marry polyandrously, the nuns adding important labor. For example, among the 17 nuns from taxpayer families, 12 were from monogamous families.

Making a daughter a nun also saved on expenses for religious activity since the nun could do them, and avoided having to pay a dowry for marriage. An average taxpayer household it is said would have given a dowry consisting of 4 full sets of clothing, 200 jin of barley, and some jewelry. Moreover, villagers also believed that making a daughter a nun would preclude her being mistreated as a daughter-in-law, and

since she would not have her own children, she would feel more affection toward her parents and would take better care of them when they were old.

The marriage system was quite different for dü-jung households since they did not have any land or animals and did not have to provide either covée labor or in-kind taxes. The situation of Dechen dü-jung household was very similar to Goldstein's (1971a: 71-72) finding from his research site. I shall quote his statement below and describe some of my findings.

> Normally, there was a continual process of splitting off as the children married and established their own households. There was little pressure exerted to maintain an extended or even a stem family unit. Sometimes one of the children who was close to his parents remained with them, sometimes as the parents aged they "retired" and went to live with one of their children, but such families normally had no continuity and were not maintained intact across generations. Unlike the tre-ba, where marriage was a serious matter which entailed subtle strategies and arranged marriages, the dü-jung, with no patrimonies to maintain, characteristically married out of love and almost always married monogamously.

This was the case also in Dechen. Of the 38 dü-jung households, 26 households had a married couple and 25 of these were monogamous. There was only one polygynous household that occurred when a first wife was infertile and the man took a second wife. The other 12 households were unmarried women, nine of whom had illegitimate children.

There were several reasons for dü-jung marrying monogamously. The main one is that dü-jung did not have land that passed down in the family from generation to generation. When a member of dü-jung family reached working age, he or she got salary from the lord and had to concentrate on working for the lord. There were no resources to conserve and men lived by their own work and wages, which were usually at the subsistence level. Women were commonly required to do weaving, food processing, and other housework for the lord's family, and men were assigned to do plowing, herding, irrigating, and escorting donkeys that transported the lord's goods between Shigatse and border districts of Tibet. When they had some spare time, dü-jung would work for taxpayer families to get some additional food. The salary for most dü-jung was 12 khal of grain in a year (i.e., 370 pounds), provided in payments every five or ten days. This salary was paid no matter if a year was good or bad and most former dü-jung reported that it was just enough for one's own food. For an adult dü-jung, therefore, there was no difference whether he stayed in the natal family or established his own household. There was, therefore, very little advantage for dü-jung concentrating more labor in a family through fraternal polyandry and they had substantially smaller households. In Dechen, the dü-jung category in 1959 contained 131 persons and 38 households. The average size of dü-jung households was 3.4 persons compared with 7.1 for taxpayer households. And even when we exclude the households of unmarried women (12 households with 23 people), the average family size for dü-jung households was 4.2 persons which was almost 41% less than that of taxpayers.

In sum, fraternal polyandry in Dechen was mostly practiced by the landholding taxpayer households, and monogamy by the dü-jung families. Fraternal Polyandry was

seen as a critical means of concentrating adult labor power in households that had heavy labor obligations as a result of the system of corvée taxes and non-mechanized agriculture and animal husbandry. It was, therefore, practiced by the better off stratum in the village, the taxpayer serf families, and was seen as instrumental in improving their economic status.

CHAPTER FOUR

AGRICULTURAL REFORM AND VILLAGE COMPOSITION

Agricultural Reform

In 1979, China decided to end the commune system by launching a new economic policy. This new policy was called the "agricultural responsibility system" or the "household responsibility system" and was started first in Chinese rural agricultural areas. Under the new system, commune land was divided and contracted out to individual households on a long-term basis. The household again became the basic unit of production. Each household was obligated to pay a certain quantity of its yield as a tax to the state on the basis of the size of its land. In addition, households were under obligation to sell a quota (t. las 'gan) of their yield to the state at a price slightly lower than market price. The rest of what was produced could be consumed by the household, stored, or sold on the free market or to the government. This new system gave farmers control over the farming process as well as a great incentive to improve their living standard by working harder and more efficiently to produce more grains.

These reforms were also carried out in Tibet, although a little bit later than in other parts of China. They were not implemented all at once, but rather through a process that involved several stages. The following sections will discuss the general policies that were introduced in the Tibet Autonomous Region and how they were actually practiced in Benam county.

The first step took place after the central government held a major meeting on the situation in Tibet on March 14, 1980. At this meeting it was decided to end the emphasis on class struggle and instead shift the emphasis to economic development and improving the livelihood and standard of living of Tibetans. However, it was decided not to decollectivize Tibet at once. Rather, the first step involved providing households with more private resources for their own subsistence by distributing private (vegetable garden) land, animals and trees to those households that had none and increasing the amount of private land to the other households. At the same time, rules prohibiting private sideline work such as construction labor, gathering herbal medicines, transporting goods, and engaging in trade, handicrafts, and services were ended. Individuals and households were allowed to engage in these again. The communes were also now permitted to engage in such income generating activities. Local governments were directed to help the collective and private sectors to increase their income by actively creating supportive and convenient conditions for such developments. For example, a critical reform involved permitting villagers to travel wherever they wanted for the purpose of earning cash income through labor and trade. In addition to these, the state exempted Tibetans in agriculture, animal husbandry, and sideline activities from all taxes in an effort to facilitate a rapid increase in Tibetans' standard of living.

The new reform ideology also implemented changes in the commune system as a transition phase to ultimate decollectivization. In order to provide greater flexibility and encourage and provide incentives for households to increase commune production, a system of contract leasing was begun. Basically, the land and animals of the commune were contracted out to either individual households or to small work groups comprised of

several households. There were several slightly different types of contracts (really quasi-contracts) that were utilized.

The most ambitious system involved contracting out virtually all the commune's land to individual households or small groups on a per capita basis. Whereas previously individuals worked and received "work points" depending on their job (as determined by the commune leadership), now individuals worked exclusively on land "contracts" from which they were required to provide a production quota. Households, therefore, in theory could do better than under the straight commune system because under the new system they were allowed to keep any amount they produced over their quota. However, they were also required to make up any shortfalls in the quota. The new system was complicated in that the "work point" system was also maintained. In essence, the quotas took most of the grain produced, a portion of which was then redistributed to individuals based on their work points after the regular commune payments were made to the state, etc. This system required complex calculations and determinations of quotas, work points and investments, and was recommended only for those production teams that had excellent management skills.

A second type of new work arrangement was simpler to operate. It also divided the commune's land between households (and small groups of households) on a per capita basis, but set clear obligations they had to fulfill. The households/groups were required to sell a fixed amount of agricultural products to the state and pay their share of the commune's various internal funds ("accumulation fund,"[1] "public welfare fund,"[2]

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[1] Funds collected from the agricultural output for expanding production.

"administrative management fee,"[3] and "grain reserve."[4]). The remaining yield was owned by the contractors who could use it as they wished. Under this system, there were no "work points," and the commune did not need to calculate and redistribute the grain and other products to its members. This system was recommended to poorer communes and production teams whose households were living further apart and whose production was low and management skills were poor.

A third type of reform system divided farm work into sections for which reasonable work quotas were determined according to the size and difficulty of the job. These jobs were then contracted to groups or individuals. After the jobs were done, they were checked and work points were recorded according to the quotas. This was very similar to the normal commune operation and rarely utilized.

These options were presented to the Tibetan Autonomous Region as a whole, with each county being given the authority to decide how to proceed. In Benam County, the first changes began at the end of 1980. At this time the county government distributed some of its land to peasants to augment the size of their private (vegetable garden) plots. The amount of private land was increased from 2,039 mu in 1979 to 5,141 mu in 1980. That was an increase in the percent of private land from 2.2% to 5.6%. For households, the amount of private land increased from 0.4 mu to 1.0 mu per household.

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[2] This fund was used to support poor households and "five-guarantee" households (childless and infirm old persons guaranteed of the five necessities life such as food, clothing, housing, medical care, and burial expenses).

[3] Grain collected from the agricultural products to subsidize the heads of the production team.

[4] From total output of agricultural products a certain percentage of grain was put in commune storage in preparation for times of need.

In Dechen, the amount of private land was also increased and equalized so that each ten people held 1.5 mu of private plots which they were free to manage by themselves. In addition, households were also allowed to open new fields, and although none actually did this, a few did enlarge their private plots a little.

The Autonomous Region government also decided to improve livelihoods by having communes and production teams transfer more animals to peasant households as their private animals. However, in Benam county, they chose not do this but rather to lift the limits on the number of animals families could maintain and encourage individuals to raise more private animals. In addition, peasants were also permitted to own the private trees that they had planted, and the private trees held by the commune were returned to their owners from the old society. Households were given full rights to manage and use the production from the private trees.

The local government also encouraged villagers to seek sideline incomes, and by the end of 1980, 450 people from the county were involved in producing and selling local handicrafts, contracting small construction jobs, exchanging agricultural products and animal by-products, moving from village to village to do traditional crafts, and working outside of the county as laborers to earn cash income. This number was very small considering the entire country's size, but it was a start. The Benam county government also started to actively promote involvement in sideline activities, and on January 29, 1981 it organized and held a large market fair (called the Interflow of Commodities Fair) for four days in Norkyong village, near the site of the county government. This was first time people from all over the county got together to buy, sell and barter their handicrafts and other products in such a large public market.

At the level of the commune, Benam implemented the agricultural responsibility system that focused mainly on contracting commune land, farming implements and plowing animals to work groups. In addition to this, other animals were also contracted to work groups with similar arrangements as with the land. These work groups ranged in size from 3 to 10 households, this size being recommended by the county government. In general, in areas where households lived scattered over large distances, three to five households formed a work group and in the areas where they lived close to each other, they were organized into groups of ten households.

Each of these work groups had to provide production quotas to the commune, each crop having a fixed quota amount depending on its yield. In general, the quotas were set slightly above the individual production team's average yield per mu during the commune time. At the beginning, work teams were given an incentive to increase production by being allowed to keep 50% of anything exceeding the quota. There was also a disincentive—a penalty of 25% of the amount when they were short (to be paid from their own grain). Later these were revised to 100% of the excess as a reward and 50% of the amount missing as a penalty. Benam county records reveal that under this system local villagers received 8.1% of the total agricultural output as rewards for exceeding the production quota in 1980 and 14.5% in 1981 (Benam Document, 1982a). This was in addition to the amount they received from the standard distribution of grain rations and work wages.

In some areas a work contractor system was initiated. In this system the work teams needed to pay 3 to 5% of their grain for various collective funds such as the

collective accumulation fund, public welfare fund, and the administrative management fee. In addition, they had to give grain for the commune's grain reserve fund.

For both types of contractor systems, a portion of the grain produced had to be sold to the government. The amount to be sold varied depending on the yield. Those teams with high yields per mu had to sell more and those with lower yields, had to sell less. The amount of grain sold to the state was 6.9% of the total grain output in 1980 and 7.8% in 1981. It is worth mentioning that the total amount of grain distributed to peasants in Benam was 69% of total output in 1980 and 67% in 1981 (Benam Document, 1982a).

During this transition period, the ownership of land and animal still remained with the production team. Thus, the main characteristics of this transition period are that the commune/production team continued to manage the product distributions (grains, etc.), while the work groups and households were responsible for the day-to-day production activities and decisions. It differed from the commune because now material rewards were more closely linked to the peasant's labor. However, the government still controlled much of the production process. Because of a continued emphasis on the importance of unified management by production teams, they continued to play the major role in agricultural planning including such key items as how to plant and harvest, how many fields to be cultivated, how many and what kinds of seeds, fertilizer and insecticides should be used, how much of the yield should be turned in, and how many rewards and penalties to give. Thus, although this was an improvement over the straight commune system, it still restricted the peasant's enthusiasm for production.

However, there were important problems regarding implementing the new policies in Benam. One major problem concerned the government's decision to restrict the duration of the new contract to three years. This created uncertainty in the farmers' minds about the commitment of the government, and most peasants (and cadre) believed that the new agricultural responsibility system was just a short experiment that would not last long so they were unwilling to show much enthusiasm for the changes. For example, a head of one village recalled that, "During this time if a family wanted to make a contract with a production team, this family would get good quality land and animals but in point of fact, not many families wanted to make such contracts with the commune. This was mainly because the county and qu government (qu is an administrative level between county and xiang) were saying that this kinds of responsibility was an experiment for three years and after that the commune system would still keep on. So in our village people were saying that if this responsibility was good for only three years, then it was better to not make a contract with the production team since there were some risks and it would be too complicated to calculate everything after finishing the contract." Consequently, the new agricultural contract system was implemented unevenly in Benam. Some production teams started this reform earlier under the pressure of local authorities, but most waited and looked to see what others were doing. Since both farmers and local officials had experienced so many political movements and policy changes, it was very hard for them to change their views which had been strongly shaped under the previous political system, and it was also very hard for them to now accept the ideology of a system which had been severely criticized in the past. Many of them were thinking that this new policy was transitory and would be changed within a short time. The

villagers were saying that Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping made this new policy of agricultural responsibility system, but if both of them were not there then who could be sure that this policy would be kept unchanged. Therefore, Benam peasants accepted the new system in a very passive way.

At the end of 1981, the government acted to try to counter the negative aspects of the initial transition system by launching a new program of reform. These reforms produced great changes in Dechen. This time all land, animals, and farm implements were divided up equally among members of production team regardless of age, sex and social class background. The management of agriculture was shifted from the collective to the household, as it had been in traditional days. In many areas the commune continued to exist in name for several more years but in reality it played no role in production.

Under this system, households had to sell a fixed amount (quota) of their agricultural production to the state based on the amount of land they held, and pay its share of the collective's accumulation fund, public welfare fund, and other kinds of assessments. Each household also had to pay some money for the salaries of the heads of a village. They did not, however, have to pay a tax.[5]

Dechen is a community that consisted of 520 people and 84 households. In the commune period these were divided into two production teams, although the members of both teams lived together geographically. At the time of the reforms, each of the two

[5] The policy of no taxes is a special concession made to Tibet. In other parts of China, farmers pay both a tax and have to give quota sales.

production teams in Dechen divided its own collective land, sheep, goats and farm implements equally according to the actual number of people in each household. This number included infants born before the day of land division as well as new in-married brides.[6] At the time of division, the village had 1121 mu of land divided equally between the two production teams— in one production team, each person got 2.2 mu of land[7] as well as 3 sheep/goats. The other production team received 2.1 mu per capita and 3 sheep/goats per person.

Table 4 –1 shows that at the time of land division, about 81% of households had between 4 and 14 persons in their households and received between 7.7 and 30.2 mu of land. On average, each household in Dechen contained 6 persons and received 13.2 mu of land.

[6] Some families indicated that once they knew the commune would divide lands and animals to it members, the families arranged their children's marriage just before the division so that they would get more lands and animals.

[7] The members of first team got 0.1 mu more land because a family moved to other county and the other members divided this family's share of land.

Table 4 -1 Distribution of # People in the Households and Amount of Land Received in Dechen at the Time of Land Division

Range of People in HH	# of HH	Amount of Land Received by Household (in mu)
1 — 3	17 (20%)	2.0 —7.6
4 — 6	29 (34%)	7.7 —13.3
7 — 8	22 (26%)	13.4 —18.9
9 —11	13 (15%)	19.0 —24.6
12 —14	4 (5%)	24.7 —30.2
Total	85 (100%)	Total

Both teams did not have enough large livestock (yaks, dzos, ox, donkeys, and horses) to meet the subsistence needs of each household so decided not to divide them equally amongst the members. Instead, small teams called cushog (t. bcu shog, "group of ten") were established that contained ten people. If a family had ten people, then it was considered one cushog, but if the family did not have ten people, then it would be combined with one or two other families to make a ten person unit. There were 52 cushogs in Dechen. Each of these, through a lottery, received two dzos or one yak and one dzo, or one dzo with one donkey and one horse).

After the large livestock were distributed, each cushog made internal decisions about how to divide the animals among themselves. When a cushog included more than one family, some set a price for the animal(s) and threw lots to see who would get to buy

them. The ones who won animals by lottery then had to pay the others their equivalent share of the value. In other cases the plowing animals were used jointly and in yet others, the animals were sold and the money used to buy two or more poorer quality animals that were divided between the households. Small farm implements were allocated in the same way.

Communes in Tibet also owned large property including water mills, horse carts, and small tractors. Most of these were sold to those people who managed and used them during the commune time but some were divided or sold to other members of the team. For example, in Dechen, a section of previous estate owner's building was kept in common by the village as were the grazing pastures and hills. Three water reservoirs and irrigation channels were also used and repaired communally.

The new system implemented in 1981 is called the "household management responsibility" system. It has once again made households the basic unit of agricultural production and again transferred full responsibility to households to manage its land and animals and production. In general, the standard of living of almost all households has increased, some markedly.

However, the division of land is not permanent and households have usufruct rights but do not own their land. Initially, it was unclear how long these usufruct rights would continue. Then, in early 1984, the state made it clear that the system would not be changed for 30 years. A few months later, on October 30, 1984, the central government further clarified the situation by stating that, "Land was returned to the householder for his own use to operate as he chose. This policy would remain unchanged for the extended

future. Livestock were also raised by the householder as his private property and otherwise dealt with as he saw fit. As above, this is a long-term policy" (Zhong, 1995: 33). While there was still no set time limit for household's ownership, the implication was that 30 years was too short a time and that this arrangement would continue for more than that. However, in essence, the land is really being held on a long-term lease basis.

In Dechen and most of Tibet, this division of land to households is final in the sense that if someone in a household dies the household retains the land, and if a new child is born it gets no new land. However, households do not have the right to sell or buy land, the state retaining ownership of all land in Tibet/China. Households, therefore, are basically limited to the amount of land they received at the time of land division. Thus, a household that received two person's share of land at the time of decollectivization but increased to ten people through marriage and births can neither get an additional allotment of land from the government nor buy more land. As will be discussed later, this has produced a reduction in the amount of land per capita over the past 20 years.

Households have the option of leasing land to compensate for increases in family size, but because most farming households in Dechen do not have excess land they do not want to lease fields. Thus, in reality, no one leases any land in Dechen and rural families have to improve their living standard via their own efforts, either by increasing the yields of their fields or generating new income from sideline or non-agricultural work, neither of which is easy.

Consequently, while the economic reforms that ended the commune and implemented the household responsibility system have had a positive impact on local

economic development, they have also created new problems for households that are now trying to sustain and increase their standard of living in the face of smaller land holdings per capita.

Cultural Reforms

At the same time as the economic situation was transformed, other major changes took place in the realm of religion and culture. One of the most important of these was the relaxation of central government policies toward the practice of Tibetan religion. Beginning in 1978, the state decided to again permit Chinese to practice and study religion openly. For the first time since the onset of the Cultural Revolution, churches and temple were permitted to open their doors. Tibet participated in this change of rules. In most areas of Tibet, these changes gradually filtered down to the local areas where Tibetans again began to openly practice Buddhism. By the early-mid 1980's, monasteries and nunneries had reopened and Tibetans were openly practicing a whole array of traditional beliefs and customs. Many traditional religious activities, festivals, and rituals were revived including giving offerings to local deities and seeking advice from shamanistic oracles. In Dechen, the local nunnery reopened a bit later in 1987. The party's attacks on traditional culture as "old" and "backward" had ended.

Another major change that occurred at this time involved the ending of restrictions on migration. Previously Tibetans (and Chinese) were not permitted to move from their residence area to another area in search of work. Everyone had a residence/ registration card (c. hukou) listing their official residence and could not move without

getting permission first to change their place of residence. As mentioned above, after 1978 this restriction was eliminated and villagers were permitted to move to towns and cities to seek employment. This led to the evolution of what Chinese called the "floating population," i.e., millions of temporary migrant workers moving around the country to seek work in urban areas. In Tibet, these changes also were also implemented. Since the restriction on labor migration was lifted, many young people from rural villages have gone to work in cities and small towns such as Shigatse, Nagcuka and Sakya to earn cash income for their families. Under the new rules, villagers could also engage in trade and start rural enterprises. For most families, such non-farm activities are the main way they are trying to compensate for the fixed nature of their land.

After the start of the Deng Xioaping reforms, the offices and officials of the commune did not function as they had before but they were still maintained. It was only at the end of 1984 that the local administration in Benam changed and the terms "commune" and "production team" ceased to be officially used. At this time, the people's communes became a xiang[8] or "rural district," and the production teams were restructured to resemble traditional villages units called trongdzo (t. grong tsho). Thus, in Benam county, the existing 5 qu, 22 Communes,[9] and 163 production teams were transformed into 5 qu, 22 xiang, and 116 administrative villages.

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[8] Xiang is an administrative unit that is usually called a "township". It is above a village and below a qu, which in turn is under a county. After 1987, the system of qu was ended and the xiang became the next highest unit after the county. This order and system has been continued since then.

[9] Before September 1981, there were 21 People's Communes in Benam county. After that one People's Commune from Sagya county has been put under Benam county by Tibet Autonomous Region.

In Dechen village, as we mentioned before, most households from the two production teams were historically and geographically linked together in one village unit. The grazing lands, hills, water resources, and other agricultural facilities were indivisible between the two. Thus, when the commune system was ended in 1984, the two units were again combined into one village. Since then, Dechen village remained the same.

Decollectivization, therefore, was implemented in Dechen over a several year period. A number of villagers told me emotionally that it took one year to establish the People's Commune but it took several years to remove it.

Village Life

The residents of Dechen village are all Tibetans, as they were in the old society. There are no Han Chinese or Chinese Muslims (Hui) living there. The village is located in the upper part of a valley and is situated on a slope under a big mountain. It is a typical rural Tibetan village with no electricity or running water, and no modern paved streets. The center of the village is the old estate building of the feudal lord which was divided up between seven poor families in 1959. Surrounding it are the 60 old and new houses of the other families. These are nucleated, mostly one attached to the other. Most houses are built of mud and stone and most have two stories. People live on the second floor and animals are kept on first floor. The narrow and rough dirt paths that cross each other in the village become muddy and full of running water during the rainy season. In the middle of the valley a seasonal river runs through the fields. Poplar trees are planted in the front and back of most of the houses and on both sides of river bank. The mountain

range behind and opposite of the village is covered by thinly scattered vegetation. The hill located immediately in back of the village is the only place that is covered by dense bushes since the village has prohibited people from digging and cutting bushes there for their firewood. The reason for this prohibition is twofold. On the one hand, the hill is considered a holy place where the villagers worship and offer religious rituals to the local deity (t. yul lha) every year. On the other hand, the bushes protect the village from erosion due to heavy summer rainfall and are considered to add scenic beauty to the village. The villagers are proud of their conservation action and of leaving this as a gift for future generations.

The entire village is mainly engaged in agricultural production in which barley, lentil, and rapeseed are the main crops. Wheat is also occasionally planted but not to a great extent since it gets only low yields here. Both traditional seeds and new improved seeds are used, and the fields are cultivated through a system of crop rotation. No land is left fallow. Small amount of vegetables including Chinese cabbage, radish, and potatoes are planted near the village. The village's arable land is located partly on the mountain slope and partly in the flat bottom of the valley adjacent to the river.

Human and animals do the farming tasks. A small number of modern machines such as trucks and small tractors are used for transporting crops and goods and for threshing, but plowing is done with the traditional 2 animal plow-team. Increasing productivity per unit of land is an important goal for Dechen people because of the need to feed an increasing population so chemical fertilizers and pesticides are utilized increasingly. There are three water reservoirs in the village from which medium and small-scale irrigation canals extend but these have not overcome the problem of

insufficient rainfall. Basically the farm yield depends on rainfall rather than canal irrigation.

Since people have occupied every square kilometer of arable land, new land reclamation has become impossible within the village territory. Up to now the available arable land is able to feed the villagers, but it does not produce enough surplus to be marketed commercially.

Farmland is decreasing per capita due to population increase and because there has been a substantial amount of construction of new houses. When villagers' wealth increases and their family becomes bigger, there is a tendency for households to either build new houses or expand their old ones. By 1996, there were no empty spots that could be used for building new houses so the only solution was to use farmland and this is putting growing pressure on remaining arable land. Local officials estimate that 5% of the arable land has been used as building sites since land division. Moreover, in 1998, 1999, and 2000, Dechen experienced summer floods that resulted in the loss of a portion of their fields, again complicating the agricultural based subsistence economy.

Dechen people raise various kinds of livestock including dzo, cows, yak and donkeys. The mountain ranges on both sides of the valley are apportioned to villages according to traditional boundaries and all animals in the study site are herded on their share of the nearby mountain pastures during the spring time. During the summer, cows and small livestock such as sheep and goats are kept on these mountain pastures while big livestock such as donkey, dzo, and horses are pastured in a nearby county, villagers paying a small fee to that county for each head of animal. After harvesting, the animals

return and graze in the fields on the stubble. The mountain slopes behind Dechen are saved for use as winter pasture.

Although land has not increased since decollectivization, the number of animals is increasing in Dechen each year. However, animals do not produce enough by-products to meet people's needs and every year most households have to purchase (or barter) for additional animal products such as wool, butter, and meat from the outside for their own consumption.

Traditional culture and rites such as Tibetan New Year's celebration, farming festivals, religious rituals, weddings and funeral ceremonies are still practiced according to the area's traditional customs. And even though the government has introduced scientific agricultural methods, people still basically use the old farming customs. For example, the village hires a lay exorcist from a nearby area to protect its fields from hail. Every year the exorcist performs the traditional religious ritual in the village, and the village collects butter and grains from each household to pay for this protection. Similarly, before planting and harvesting, people get together to perform traditional ceremonies asking for a good harvest.

Modernization also has not brought big changes in people's material life and community development in this remote area. There is no electricity and only one television set at the xiang government that is run by solar power generator. Since 1998, a telephone was installed at the xiang administrative office that can receive outside calls but can not be used to call out. In 1993, a government office from Lhasa donated a rapeseed grinder and noodle-maker to the xiang that are operated by a small generator.

There is also a village school that teaches the first two grades in the center of Dechen. Students who graduate from this, transfer to the xiang school for third to sixth grades. However, while much of traditional culture continues, the gap between the old and young generation is increasing and the old and young see things differently and act differently. The younger generations is more educated and has not experienced the old society. And they are more exposed to the outside world since they frequently travel to cities to work as migrant laborers. Older people and parents are worried about whether they will be able to control their children's actions in the future. The old always complain that nowadays the young people like do things that are unsuitable to the village lifestyle like wearing fashionable and clean clothes and eating foods that are more spicy.

For example, a group of young people take their Tibetan lutes to Lhasa after the planting work is finished to work as musicians. They work in a restaurant during the daytime, and at night they dress in Tibetan clothes and play and sing Tibetan songs to entertain foreign travelers. They make good money and work for four to five months before returning to the village to help in the harvesting. This is a new phenomena for Dechen and the young people see nothing wrong with their way of earning income for their families. In fact, they are very proud that they can do something special and different in Lhasa city. However, this has brought lots criticisms from the older people in the village. They consider that these young people are embarrassing Dechen village because in the old society one kind of beggar traditionally wandered from place to place playing lutes and singing songs for food. Making money through one's manual labor makes sense to the old, but not this. Therefore, they call this group of young people as the " lute playing beggars" (t. sgra snyn btang nas slong mkhan). Thus, while much of the

traditional culture and values are intact, generation changes are occurring.

Administrative Structure

Dechen village is administered by a "Village Committee" (t. grong tso'i au yon lhan khang). This committee is under the jurisdiction of the xiang government and is comprised of four people from the village. These four people include one head, one vice head, one accountant, and one representative of the Women's Federation. Each member has his or her own responsibility for the village's public affairs. Very often each of them performs their duties by themselves, but important decisions are made jointly by all the members, although the village head plays the key role in decision making. The following description will give a picture of the way the Village Committee is selected and how they perform their duties.

The members of committee have three years term. When one term is completed, the villagers vote for new members. All people above 18 years of age have the right to vote. The xiang and the county make the schedules for village elections, but they do not specify the candidates. This is left entirely up to the villagers. They select candidates through a meeting of voters held in each village. At this meeting, the voters first select several representatives from both the Village Committee and from ordinary people to serve as public notaries to supervise and organize the nominations and elections. A piece of paper is distributed to each voter. On this papers voters write the names of four people they want to vote for. Illiterate voters ask literate ones to help them write the names. All the slips of paper are dropped into a ballot box and the notaries open the ballot box and

calculate votes in front of the voters. The top three nominees are elected as the new members of the committee. The one that gets the highest number of votes is the head, the second is the vice head, and the third an accountant. The head of the Women's Federation is selected via a separate election meeting consisting of only women, although the same procedure is followed.

After this election, the names of the elected persons are given to the xiang government, and the xiang government will report these to the county. Then the xiang will officially announce the new members of the committee. From then on, the former committee members hand over their work to the new members.

There is no sex discrimination during the election process and all people are eligible to vote and to be voted for. Nevertheless, most heads of villages like Dechen are males. This is because traditionally in Tibetan culture males are mostly involved in public and political affairs, while females are mostly involved in family and domestic affairs. However, there are exceptions, and a woman with experience and the talent to manage public works is sometimes elected. A village next to Dechen, for example, has continuously voted a woman as its head for many terms and she is still in that position.

The members of the village committee are neither local cadres nor full time administrative workers. They are farmers like the other villagers. They receive a yearly salary that is collected from the villagers based on each household's share of the land. This salary ranges from 400 to 800 yuan annually. Since the villagers always vote for the most capable people in their community, some villages heads complain that their salaries are too low and do not want to serve in this position. They believe that if they used their

capabilities to work outside of the village to earn cash income they can earn the equivalent of their salaries within one or two months. Others complain that serving as head of the village negatively affects their own family's work and thus impedes their ability to get rich. They are probably correct.

The history of Gyatso[10], the head of Dechen's village committee, provides some insight into the kind of people who are being elected as village heads. Gyatso is a 55 year old man who was elected as an ordinary member of the village committee beginning in 1981. Since 1990 he has been elected continuously as the village head. Before that he worked in the commune as the official in charge of commune property. He is an intelligent and knowledgeable man with a straightforward and honest personality who is highly respected by both xiang officials and all Dechen villagers. His personal history is interesting. He was born into a taxpayer family in this village, but at age 16 was sent by his family to the Tibetan army as his family's military tax soldier. During that time he was able to study written Tibetan language for the first time for four months in Shigatse city.

In September 1959 the Tibetan army was absorbed into the People's Liberation Army (PLA), he and other younger Tibetan soldiers became PLA soldiers. In 1962, he participated in the war between China and India for a week. When he came back to visit his family in Dechen in 1963, his family told him they need him to stay because they are short of labor, so he never returned to the PLA. Later he spent a year doing road construction in western Tibet. Since then he has not left Dechen. After he came back to

[10] All subjects' names are anonymous.

the village he became a member of the communist party and divorced from the previous polyandrous marriage with his older brother and remarried a woman from this village monogamously. Gyatso's sons live with him and are married polyandrously now. They and his daughters take care of the family's housework, farming, and outside wage labor.

Gyatso's duties are diverse and hard to delimit. Some of the main responsibilities are organizing seasonal agricultural tasks, coordinating village projects and religious festivals and organizing and monitoring the irrigation schedule. Gyatso's work also includes solving the difficulties of poor households, patching up families quarrels, and executing the xiang's and the village's regulations. Gyatso also recommends to the xiang who should be given government welfare.

The vice head of the Village Committee has no separate tasks but basically assists the village head and participates in the decision-making process. The village accountant does all the statistical reporting about how much grains should be sold to the state and how much fertilizers should be bought, etc., He also reports the yearly agricultural output. The position of member of the Women's Federation is always held by a woman and Dechen is no exception. Dekyi is a 46 years old woman who has been doing village service since she was 15 years old.

In Dechen, all the members of the Village Committee are communist party members, but that is not a prerequisite of office and in many villages the Village Committee officials do not belong to the party. There is also a party organization in Dechen that is headed by a Truren (a Chinese term) who is the same person as the Village Committee head. The party organization is called Village Party Committee (t. grong tsho'

tang u) but is not important in daily life as there are only 10 communist party members in the village.

The selection of xiang officials is very different from that of the village committee. The xiang government is mainly formed by two organs. One is the party committee which is headed by the party secretary, and the other is the xiang people's government headed by xiang mayor (c. xiangzhang). Like village officials, xiang officials also serve three year terms. Before selecting new xiang officials, deputies for the County Party Congress and the County People's Congress are elected in elections held at the xiang level. The names of the candidates are put forth by the county and xiang officials (from both party and government sides). These candidates are then voted on by the people and those with the most votes are elected to the Congresses. These then meet and vote on the county level officials. Here again, the candidates names are given by the higher level authorities in the Prefecture government. Once the county level officials are selected and their tasks assigned, then they appoint the xiang level officials. Finally the new committees of the County Party Congress and the County People's Congress appoint new officials for all xiang governments.

There are two types of personnel in the xiang government. One are formal government cadres (c. zhengshi guojia ganbu) who have high salaries with secure jobs. They also receive retirement pensions. The other kind of position is called appointed cadres (c. pingyong ganbu). These officials receive lower salaries and have less secure jobs with no retirement pensions. The salaries of both types of officials, however, are paid by the government. The xiang interacts with the village via the village committee which functions as a communication bridge between the xiang government and people.

This, then is the social, political and economic context in which villagers marry and start families. In the next chapter, marriage and family in Dechen will be examined.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN DECHEN VILLAGE

Compared to other villages in Tibet, Dechen with its 92 households and 690 people (in 1996), is a medium size village. Nevertheless, Dechen provides a complex picture of family and marriage in rural Tibet. In this chapter the complex and diverse patterns of residence and marriage will be examined.

In Dechen all households are named[1] corporate entities that continue across generations. The members of the household change each generation but the named entity is perpetuated.[2] Before 1959, a household name symbolized high social and political status and generally only the estate-owning class and the taxpayer households had such names. The landless dü-jung households had no names. However, after the democratic reforms of 1959, all households in Dechen took household names regardless of their prior social and economic status. This was encouraged by the local administration since it made their economic record-keeping easier and they did not have to change the name of a family each time the head of the household died.

The pattern of naming households in Dechen can be categorized in several different ways: (1) Villagers use auspicious terms to name their households. For example, "dekyi" (t. bde skyid) which literally means "happiness" is seen to convey the hope that the family will have a happy life and "gyendzom" (t. rgyal 'dzoms) which means "having

[1] Household names are called kangming (t. khang ming) or "house name."

[2] Household names are very common in most villages in Shigatse prefecture, but are not common in some other parts of Tibet.

abundance" symbolizes the hope that the household will have abundant clothing and food. (2) The location of a household within the village or neighborhood is also often used for household names, e.g., "dzing wog" (t. rdzing 'og) means "located beneath the water reservoir." (3) When a member separates from natal family and sets up a new family, the term "sur" (t. zur) is commonly used after the first syllable of the natal household name to create a new name. "Sur" means the secondary branch of a family (or "corner") so that "khangsur" means the household separated from the "khang mar" household.

A family's overall life is usually controlled by a male household head, but there is also a woman head who is usually the wife or the mother of the household head. In Dechen, the household head is the core position which functions as the backbone of the family. The terms "sa yon" (t. bza' yon) and "khyim dag" (t. khyim bdag) --which literally mean "food provider" and "owner of the family" --are the names used for the household head. The household head mostly deals with the management of farming, animal herding, trading and sideline work, i.e., affairs outside of the domestic routine. In addition, the household head is the figure who represents the family and participates in community social and political affairs. His authority is not only respected by family members but also by members of the community. In the family, for example, he sits in the priority seat in the house and is always the first to be served food. In community gatherings, he and other household heads are treated importantly in terms of the serving of barley beer and the seating arrangement.

Within the household, the household head makes various important decisions such as children's marriages, planning for building or expanding a house, buying

important things for the family, training children and conducting religious rituals in the family. Since they have the main responsible for making various decisions and work arrangements, most household heads tend to stay at home in the village except for short absences doing trading.

Although Tibetan kinship is bilateral, there is a strong patrilineal bias in terms of inheritance and succession to authority. Consequently, the household head in Dechen is almost always male, although if a household has no adult males, a widow or unmarried mother can serve as the household head. Similarly, the headship is usually passed from father to older son. There is no exact time for the household head to retire, and so long as the head is physically capable and economically active, he will continue in his position. However, generally when the older (or the only) son gets married, if the father feels that his son is capable enough to make decisions and organize the household's work, he usually will pass all or most of his responsibilities to the married son. The strong custom of the headship passing from father to older son minimizes conflict among male members of the family since younger sons do not anticipate becoming household heads. Consequently, among the 80 male household heads in Dechen in 1996, 50 (63%) of them are fathers and 21 (26%) are married oldest or only sons. There are only a few cases where a younger son (only 3 cases), a son-in-law (5 cases), or an adopted son (1 cases) are household heads.

Occasionally, a male household head dies and the household either has no other adult males or a son exists but does not want to serve as household head or is too young to do so. In such cases, the wife of the former household head typically will serve as the household head, but this is not common and usually only lasts until a younger male in the

household marries. In general, women act as household heads only in households headed by unmarried females. Consequently, over 87% of Dechen households are headed by married males and only 13% by females (see table 5 - 1). Among the twelve female household heads, five are single mothers, and four of them consist of a single unmarried woman with no children.

Table 5 – 1 Household Headship of Dechen Village

	Male	Female	Total
N of Married	80	7	87
N of Unmarried	0	5	5
%	87	13	100

However, there are exceptions to the eldest son assuming the position of household head. Sometimes the oldest son does not want to stay in his natal family and share a wife with his brothers and instead establishes a neolocal household or marries into another family as a magpa (or matrilocally residing bridegroom). In these cases he gives up his headship position. For example, one family in Dechen had three sons and four daughters. When the two older sons reached marriage age, the parents planned to arrange a polyandrous marriage for the two older sons and have the youngest (13 years old) son join the marriage when he was older. The father sent the oldest son to Shigatse city to work to earn some cash income and he stayed there for five months sending back 100 yuan to the family. However, after they stopped hearing from him, the family worried that something must have happened to him so the father went to the city to search for him. He learned that while the son was doing construction work in the city he met a girl

from a village in the Gyantse area and they fell in love. The son then went back to the girl's home and they married since she was the only child in her family. He, in essence, became a matrilocal bridegroom (magba). The father went to the girl's village and asked his son to come back to his home, but the boy refused. The parents are still disappointed by their oldest son's action, but will make the second son the future household head.

Every father/household head knows that it is difficult to achieve a cohesive family and he will try to organize his human resources to foster this. One aspect of this is planning for the future household head. Tibetan custom affords the oldest son a dominant position vis-à-vis his younger brothers and the fathers usually make an effort to pass their experience to the eldest son and train him to take over the headship. Younger brothers generally do not get similar training from their father and instead are indoctrinated with the value that younger sons should obey the eldest son.

Villagers always link the socio-economic status of a family with the capability of the household head. A richer family is taken as evidence that there is a very capable household head. No wonder that when all households were asked what is the characteristic of an ideal household head, over 87.8% responded that capability was the most significant characteristic. This "capability" includes a range of abilities such as knowing handicraft skills, being able to do trading/barter, treating all members of family fairly, having a good knowledge of farming, being able to budget the livelihood of the family, and being able to manage the household's work so as to improve the household's living condition. Examples that are frequently given for exemplary households heads are the leaders of the following two rich households in Dechen.

Tenpa, a former monk, is 55 years old. His household consists of himself, his wife and their 5 children (4 sons and 1 daughter). When the commune's land was divided between households, his family got six people's share. Since then the size of his family has increased from six to eight people although the land remained the same. The grain produced by this land was not enough to support the whole family well so in 1994 he took a loan of 5,200 yuan and contracted to operate what had been the xiang government shop. It has been very profitable. The shop is the only place to buy daily necessities in the area, and local people like to buy things from him due to his honesty and fair prices. He earns a net profit of over 2,000 yuan per year from the shop.

Tenpa's also has shown skill in managing the activities of the members of his household. His eldest son showed great interest in religion and the monkhood so Tenpa allowed him to become a monk at the age of 25 since he had three other sons. He is priming the second eldest son to succeed him by allowing him to take some responsibilities in the family. That son spends most of his time on farming tasks but in addition also helps in the family shop. Tenpa made his third son a carpenter, finding an apprenticeship for him. Nowadays, that son spends over four months a year working in the city and always brings home a net of over 1,200 yuan. Tenpa and his wife plan to get a bride for the second and third sons in the near future since both are of marriage age. The 4th and youngest son is 14 years of age and is in the sixth grade in the xiang school. Tenpa wants him to study hard, go on to middle school, and become a cadre in a government office since he feels that it is better to only have two sons in a polyandrous marriage. The daughter does housework and farming. He is planning to marry her out when she is old enough. As a result of his skillful management of the family's human and

material resources they have become rich since decollectivization and in 1999 built a large, high quality house. The family is also internally cohesive with no major conflicts, in large part due to his skillful management style.

Thondrup is another example of the ideal household head. He has a big family in which there are three generations with 14 people. His parents are married polyandrously although from the original three fathers now there is only one father alive with his mother. Thondrup became the household head after he and his four younger brothers married polyandrously to one woman. He makes all important decisions in family affairs and people admire him because he created conditions where all four brothers and the other family members live peacefully and generate a good livelihood. Most of time he stays at home doing agricultural work but occasionally, after the harvest, he goes to trade with nomads exchanging agricultural products for animal by-products.

Thondrup had organized his brothers' labor to maximize the household's income. One brother is mainly involved in animal herding. During the summertime, he herds the family's animals together with those of five other families in another county earning wages in grain. Two other brothers are carpenters who typically work in nomad areas for five months a year earning sheep and other animal by-products. The youngest brother is sent to the city to do construction work. He is the family member who brings in cash income. The three brothers together earn the equivalent of 6,000 yuan per year, a very substantial amount in Dechen. Thondrup's last brother became a monk and now lives in India. His two sisters married out to families in another village.

Thondrup and his brothers have five sons and one daughter at home. The family got 14 people's share of land, and still has the same amount of land per capita since their

new births were offset by death, and the monk and daughters married out without receiving any share of land. In the future, Thondrup plans for his three sons to marry polyandrously, and hopes to make the other two sons cadres by emphasizing their education. He plans to marry out his only daughter. After land division, the family expanded their house from 11 rooms to 16 rooms. They have a large number of animals and they have the largest amount of grain reserves in the village.

From these two examples we can see the abilities of a good household head and the impact he can have on the family's well-being and internal harmony. In Tenpa's case, his ability to run a business, train sons to be skillful craftsman and businessman, and arranging the marriages of his sons and daughters made his family unit productive and efficient. Similarly, villagers consider it impressive that Thondrup was not only able to see that good relation were maintained in such a very large family, but also through his decisions and planning have each member of the family become an active producer who brings wealth into the family.

In addition to the male head of household, there is another important leadership role in households that in Dechen is called nangma (t. nang ma), or "mother of the house." The nangma is in reality the female head of household (FHH) and generally has broad authority over the internal operation of the household. Her main responsibilities involve preparing the daily food for the family (or if it is a large family overseeing this work), looking after the small children, milking cows once a day, processing milk into butter, and doing kitchen and clean up tasks, etc. In addition, she also supervises and assigns tasks that are related to women's work and house chores, keeps the keys to the storeroom and is responsible for both keeping track of the food on hand and husbanding

the foodstuffs so the resources are used evenly and the family doesn't run out of food. This control of the storeroom keys is symbolic of her domination of domestic life, and her prestige is well illustrated by the Dechen wedding ceremony. When the in-marrying bride enters the gate of the groom's house, her parent-in-laws put a water carrying bucket on her back, a wool spinning spindle and a milking utensil in her one hand and the storage room's key on the other hand to symbolize that she will be the head woman in the future. The FHH's tasks, as indicated above, are varied, and she typically gets up early in the morning and goes to sleep late at night. When there is enough labor in the family such as in polyandrous families, she spends most of her time in the kitchen. But if there is not enough labor as in most monogamous families with no grown up children, she has to do both housework and farming.

The female head of household (FHH) has great prestige and exercises almost total power over female members of the family. Although she does not participate in public activities as much as her husband, she is the second most important person in the family and has a large influence on domestic decision making. The FHH also has an important role in providing food for the members of the family since unfair treatment regarding food is serious and will likely result in quarrels and possible partition.

Normally all family members have their breakfast and dinner together, and there is no difference in terms of the quality and quantity of food they consume. Lunch, however, may not be eaten together because of the different work schedules of different family members. Thus, in many households, the FHH has to send food to people like herders who can not come back for the lunch and also has to save some food for those who may be coming back home late. Moreover, due to the nature of the village economy,

people from the family frequently have to go to outside of the village for several days to several months at a time, and again it is the FHH's job to send good food with them. In addition, elderly members tend to stay at home and often need special care and attention because they can not eat their share of a meal at one time or they can not eat certain food because of their illnesses. Therefore, the role of the head woman is crucial in keeping households functioning smoothly.

Unlike the headman and his sons, there frequently is conflict and competition between the FHH and her daughter-in-law, and the decision as to when the FHH turns over her control to the daughter-in-law is potentially disruptive. This decision, however, is always in the hands of the mother-in-law. Generally, as long as the mother-in-law is physically active she will not transfer her authority to her daughter-in-law. This study found that among 33 mother-headed households, 30 of them (90%) responded that their daughter-in-law will become the FHH only after the mother is unable to work or dies.

In theory, both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are outsiders in the family, but their situations are somewhat different. When the mother-in-law becomes the FHH, her husband's parents and female siblings have generally either died or married out, and even if there is an in-law parent or a relative still staying with the family, most of the household's members are her children so she is not treated as an outsider. She is considered a core member of the household and the household members usually feel confident that she will treat her children and husband(s) fairly. On the other hand, when the daughter-in-law marries into the family, she has to live with in-laws and other relatives of her husband, so she initially is clearly an outsider. It is only with time that she

will be accepted as a good wife, good daughter-in-law, and good mother by the members of the family.

In Dechen village, there are 21 households where both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law live together. Of these, 13 cases (61.9%) are mother-in-law headed, 5 cases (23.8%) are headed by the daughter-in-law, and 3 cases (14.3%) by mother-in-law and daughter-in-law jointly. In the five cases where the daughter-in-law is FHH, the mother-in-law is physically inactive due to illness (2 cases) or age. In these cases, the mother-in-law was in her late 70's. In the 13 hh's where the mother-in-law is FHH, all are physically active and do not have serious health problems. They are also not very old, their ages ranging from 45 to 69 years of age.

The three cases where there was a joint FHH occur in the largest households that had between 14 and 18 people in the family. These also have two generational polyandrous marriages cohabiting together. In general, this "sharing" of FHH is rare in Dechen, and seems to occur when it is impossible for a mother-in-law alone to take care of all the members of the family because of the household's size. However, in these cases, the mother-in-law retained the greater power and authority.

Tension between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is one of the important factors leading to partition of families, although in Dechen there have been only a few cases where such discord resulted in the daughter-in-law and her husband(s) splitting from the family. Generally, mothers try to reduce the likelihood of partition by assigning lighter work to the daughter-in-law, taking special care of her during childbirth, and providing her with good clothes, etc. The son(s) also try hard to buffer the tension

between his mother and the wife. If partition occurs, it is usually only after the daughter-in-law has borne several children.

One of the factors that may create or exacerbate intra-household conflict is the presence of an adult unmarried daughter at home. Villagers think that when the mother-in-law and/or her daughter have a disagreement or argument with the daughter-in-law, they tend to back each other against the daughter-in-law and that this makes the situation even worse. Nevertheless, there are 21 households (23%) with adult unmarred daughters living together with daughters-in-law. However, there is no case in Dechen where the daughter becomes the FHH when there is a daughter-in-law present.

Of the households with adult unmarried daughters, in 7 (33%) cases the adult daughter is a (celibate) nun in the local Dechen nunnery. Traditionally the nuns in Dechen lived with their family instead of in the nunnery, and when the nunnery was rebuilt that tradition was maintained. Thus, at present the nunnery has no living quarters. The nunnery also has no economic resources since it does not have land and animals and people rarely visit it and donate money to it. Some nearby nunneries organize their nuns to go to beg grain alms from farmers during the harvest season, but Dechen nunnery has not done this. Nun's livelihood is totally reliant on their families and all seven nuns live at home and spend most of their time performing various household and farming chores.

Families in Dechen make daughters nuns for a number of reasons including religious conviction and the belief that the nun/daughter will take better care of the parents during their old age than the daughter-in-law. But there are important economic reasons as well. For example, since nuns are celibate and do not marry, the family does not have to spend money for their dowry nor do they have to give them a share of land,

but at the same time, since the nuns live at home, they provide an important source of free labor for the family. Making daughters nuns is actually preferable to simply keeping unmarried daughters at home because if an unmarried daughter has an illegitimate child they will often will ask for a share of land and other property from the natal family to establish their own household.

Household Structure

Household size in Dechen varies greatly from 1 to 18 people (in 1996). The average size is 7.5 members and 46.7% of households exceed the average (Table 5 - 2). Moreover, 22 households (24%) contain 10 or more people. Large households such as these are typical in rural Tibet where the ideal of three generations coexisting under one roof is strong and there has been a lack of strict family planning programs.

Table 5 - 2 Household Size in Dechen Village, 1996

# Persons in Household	# of Household	%
1	4	4.4
2	3	3.3
3	3	3.3
4	6	6.5
5	5	5.4
6	13	14.1
7	15	16.3
8	10	10.9
9	11	12.0
10	6	6.5
11	7	7.6
12-18	9	9.8
Total	92	100.1

Table 5 – 3 Number of Generation Within Households, 1996

# of Generations	# of Households	%
1	5	5.4
2	47	51.1
3	38	41.3
4	2	2.2
Total	92	100

The ideal form of the family in Dechen is a multi-generational extended family. In 1996, the number of the generations living in households fell between one and four, with most households having 2 to 3 generations (see table 5 – 3). In Tibetan culture, it is encouraged that family members should depend on each other no matter what age one is and no matter if they are rich or poor. This value is still maintained in rural areas and 87 (94.6%) of the 92 households in Dechen village are multi-generational. Among these, 47 (51.1%) households are two-generational families, 38 (41.3%) are three-generational, and 2 (2.2%) contain four generations. The low percentage of four generation households is partly due to the low life span in Dechen village where only 6.8% of the population (47 individuals) is 60 years and older, and only 3.2 % (22 individuals) is between 70 and 80 years of age. Such patterns are typical of Tibetan farming villages.

As Table 5 –3 indicates, there are only 5 single generation households (5.4%) in Dechen, 4 of which consist of single unmarried women. The fifth is a married couple who does not have any children.

Since most villagers consider it is terrible for either a man or woman to stay single and live alone without relatives or offspring, even this small number of individual households is surprising. In fact, it is mostly explained by unusual historical circumstances. Among the 4 single unmarried women, three were nuns in the Dechen nunnery before 1959. They are all over 60 years of age now. After their nunnery was closed in 1959, they set up their own households and became farmers but never married and maintained their celibacy since then. When the Dechen nunnery reopened in 1987, they did not join because the present nunnery is a different sub-sect of Tibetan Buddhism than the one they adhere to[3]. Today, they do not wear nun's garb nor conduct rituals for other households. During the commune period they worked the same as other villagers, but after decollectivization their relatives took care of their fields for them. After they die these relatives will inherit their land. The fourth single woman is also in her sixties. She was a single mother with several illegitimate children who died leaving her alone in her old age.

[3] The nunnery was Kagyu sect in the old society, but nowadays is Gelug (Yellow Hat). The reason for this is that there was no teacher available from the Kagyu sect and there was one from the Gelug sect so he was invited to lead the nunnery.

Marriage and Household Structure

The total elimination of the traditional feudal system in 1959 affected marriage as well as land tenure and taxation. Although important parts of the traditional marriage system continued, much changed. On the continuity side, marriages were still mainly arranged by parents and residence continued to be mainly patrilocal at marriage. However, after 1959, the new government in Tibet adopted standard Chinese marriage laws and these had a number of important new components. First, marriage became something that was sanctioned by the state rather than completely a private affair as in the past. The state now required couples to formally register with the state before marriage, in theory seeking the state's official permission before marriage. In the early years after 1959 this was not normally done, but by the time of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 the use of marriage certificates was enforced strictly in the city and with cadres. Villages, however, still ignored this rule.

When the "Cultural Revolution" was launched in Tibet, the political campaign of cleaning the "Four Olds" greatly damaged traditional Tibetan culture. The "Four Olds" are old ideology, old culture, old customs, and old habits, and the campaign refers to targeting these for destruction. This campaign was applied militantly and most parts of Tibet did not escape its consequences. Thousands of monasteries were destroyed, private religious activities and traditional holidays were forbidden and traditional customs for Tibetans were denied. Speaking Tibetan language, eating Tsampa (parched barley flour), drinking butter-tea, and wearing the traditional Tibetan dress were the only differences

that marked Tibetans off from the rest of the other nationalities of China. Some traditional customs that were integral to Tibetan values and cultural identity were forcibly changed. For example, in Benam, women were encouraged to break gender taboos by plowing fields. The county Women's Federation reported that women who were trained to plow fields increased from 150 in 1975 to 579 people in 1976[4].

As in the old society, class remained highly significant in marriage, but now what mattered was the political class/views of potential spouses. Marrying a bride or groom who was associated with the wrong "political line" would bring political criticism and a bad future for both individuals as well as their family and relatives. Thus, class was again important, but now the class system was the new one based on a system that placed the poor at the top and the former lords, landlords and wealthy elements on the bottom. People from the lower serf classes were now thought to be the best candidates for marriage. These changes had significant impact on Tibetan marriage decision-making and a precondition for seeking a marriage partner was that the partner should not belong to the "exploiting class" (e.g., aristocrats and landlords before 1959) who were the target of a nation wide class struggle. People from exploiting class family backgrounds were discriminated against and did not have basic rights and privileges. Their children had a difficult time finding partners and many of them could not get married. The only option left to them was to find a marriage partner who belonged to the same class. No matter how nice a person was and no matter how successful he or she was in work, if they had a bad class background they were treated as a "second-class citizen."

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[4] The annual Work Report of Benam County Women's Federation in 1975 and 1976.

A more important change concerning marriage involved state restrictions on the types of marriage that were legal. All plural marriages such as polygyny and polyandry were illegal under Chinese law, and the age of marriage was set at 22 for men and 20 for women. Adultery was also made illegal. And as mentioned above, all individuals were required to secure a marriage certificate from the local government (as well as one in cases of divorce). Although this was not adhered to by the villagers, it was enforced for rural government cadre. For example, if a cadre committed premarital or extramarital sexual relations, he or she could be criticized for having a "life style problem" (c. shenhuo zuofeng wenti) and could be demoted or even jailed.

In rural areas, the Chinese Marriage Law became a measure for testing the progressiveness of local cadres, Communist Party members, Youth League members, and activists. Anyone engaged in a polyandrous marriage was disqualified from being a member of the party or a local cadre, so socialist progressives resorted to getting a divorce from a polyandrous union and then remarrying in a monogamous neolocal household. For example, in Dechen village the first couple to seek a marriage certificate was a progressive couple, the husband of which was a Communist Party member and his wife a Youth League member. Both of them were political activists in the village. Their action was highly commended by the local party in public meetings at which time other farmers were encouraged to follow their lead.

However, for ordinary farmers, formally seeking marriage certificates before marriage never became a normal activity, and the requirement remained mainly a paper ideal discussed at the propaganda level. In Dechen, only five couples actually registered during the 1970s, and three of these were party members and/or local cadres at that time.

However, the prohibition on plural marriage had a significant impact. In Tibet, this rule affected primarily the ancient Tibetan custom of polyandry, although there were also a few cases of polygyny where a male married either sisters or a mother and daughter. In Dechen, such marriages were technically illegal, but there were never any fines and punishments per se etc. However, such behavior was labeled as "backward" and "feudal" so villagers did not feel comfortable taking the risk of openly practicing either polyandry or polygyny. Nevertheless, a covert accommodation was permitted in many areas such as Dechen where plural marriages were permitted indirectly. For example, a few people did marry polyandrously during this time but kept their practice a secret by saying that only the older brother was marrying monogamously. However, in reality the younger brother or brothers did not marry and continued to live in the same household which internally functioned polyandrously although the records would show them as unmarried adult males. Even though others in the village and the local cadre knew these cases were really married polyandrously and would among themselves talk of the individual's lack of political consciousness and their adherence to old society ideas, they did not take steps to end it. However, few villagers actually contracted polyandrous marriages during this period, and polyandrous marriages declined markedly.

Local officials and villagers indicate that one underlying reason for this was the political pressure against old customs, but they also feel that another important reason was that during this era land was owned by the commune not the household, and villagers' livelihoods mainly depended on work points that one earned individually from his/ her labor. Consequently, the household no longer owned productive resources that would benefit from either the concentration of labor or the prevention of fragmentation

into smaller parts. All income derived from individual's work and that was the same whether they were living alone or in a larger household. And finally, getting rich itself was negatively considered at that time — the value was placed on equality in economic class and being members of the proletarian class.

Under Deng Xiaoping's economic and social reform policy, Tibet has gone through dramatic social, economic, and cultural changes since 1979-80 (as mentioned in Chapter Four). The new policy allowed the nationality autonomous areas to exercise their own limited rights and formulate their own policies according to their local realities and minority cultures. This set of changes led the Tibet Autonomous Region in 1981 to adopt for the first time its own Marriage Law. This marriage law stipulated that no marriage shall be contracted before a man had reached 20 years old and a woman 18 years old, this differing from the national law by permitting marriage 2 years earlier for both men and women. With regard to polygamous marriages, the TAR law continued to prohibit polygyny and polyandry as did the national law, although it also stated that polygamous marriages that were contracted before the TAR law came into effect could be maintained.

In sum, although the TAR could have permitted polyandry on the grounds that it is a traditional Tibetan custom, there was no support for this among the elite. In fact, as was discussed in Chapter One, the leaders of the TAR had a conscious notion of trying to reduce polyandry since they felt it was a feudal, abnormal, and backward custom that was harmful to women and thus should not exist in a socialist society (Wuang, 1984; Xing, 1997). So the higher officials in general sought to reduce the amount of polyandry by placing greater emphasis on the need to secure marriage certificate.

However, the local officials who directly work in the villages are not interfering with this. While they may agree in principle with the views of the higher authorities, they also understand the functions of polyandry and treat it in a more positive way or turn a blind eye to it. Local officials know that polyandrous marriage is one of the effective means for farmers to help themselves get rich, and that preventing it could increase the rate of poverty. This could make it more difficult for the local officials to attain their targets of improving people's livelihoods. They also know that if they strongly prohibited the practice of polyandry, it would create more distance between themselves and the villagers. For these reasons, the local officials do not try to stop the practice of polyandry as will discussed later in the Chapters. There has been a major revival of polyandry.

Thus, while the TAR Marriage Law is said to have started in 1982, until recently it was not really enforced in rural areas where it remained a state set ideal that existed mainly at the propaganda level. However, the role of the government in marriage has come into play with regard to marriage licenses. In Benam, in1996, the county government tried to force villagers to register their marriages by ordering all couples who had married after 1994 to go to their local xiang government headquarters to register. The county threatened that couples who failed to register would be treated as having illegal marriages and would be penalized. In Mag xiang, the registration was to be done on November 3, couples being threatened with a penalty of an additional 400 jin of barley being added to their quota sales.[5] Registration for government cadres in towns usually requires the marrying couple to come in person, bring photos and their hukoubuo

[5] I was in the Mag xiang government at that time of registration and was able to observe this event. Later, I interviewed the Benam County People's Court about how they coped with marital disputes and reasons for taking this action.

(residence booklet), and have a health check done at a hospital/clinic. They also need to bring a letter of introduction from their work place. In Mag xiang, this was handled in a much simpler way. Both parties in the marriage were not requested to show up at the registration site and relatives were allowed to act on their behalf. Usually the secretary of the xiang government served as a "registrar" asking questions like the couple's names, ages and date of marriage, and then wrote this information on the certificate. After collecting 4 yuan ($0.50) for processing fee, the certificate was given. The whole process took only ten to fifteen minutes. This simple procedure is same for all rural area of Tibet. However, since the certificate only allows two persons' name (the husband and wife) on the form, villagers reported the names of the eldest son and wife for polyandrous marriage and the eldest wife and husband for polygynous marriages. The xiang officials who served in this district for many years knew their real situation but did not make any attempts to challenge the villagers about their false reports of the marital situation. Thus, the stricter enforcement of marriage licensing did not affect the practice of polyandry.

Another traditional marriage practice that is also strongly adhered to is arranged marriage. Though National and TAR marriage laws give individuals the freedom to marry whomever they chose, almost all marriages in Dechen are arranged. As in the old society, marriage normally is not only the concern of the couples but is also a matter for the families of the husband(s) and wife. And, as in the past, there are two types of marriage arrangements. The more common and more formal type of marriage is an arranged marriage which in Dechen is called "longwa" (t. slong ba). This literally means "begging" a bride from another family, i.e., going and asking them to give their daughter's hand in marriage to their son(s). It involves a series of formal rituals ending

with a marriage celebration in the groom's house. During the "begging" for the bride, the groom's family presents gifts to the bride's family and members of her family including such things as money, clothing, shoes, barley beer, grain, meat, tea, butter, and other foods to express the appreciation for their giving the bride. Conversely, when the bride leaves her family, the family usually gives her a dowry including one or more sets of clothing, bedding, grain, ornaments, and wooden boxes. Land and animals are rarely given as dowry. In Dechen, the marriage rituals are still performed in very traditional ways with the exception that modern vehicles are now used for transportation.

However, some change has occurred. Nowadays, before both parties are engaged, the head of the household or a negotiating relative will sometimes bring the marrying son (the oldest son in a polyandrous marriage) to visit the bride's family and to meet the future bride once. If the girl is not to his liking, he can refuse his parents' choice and the parents will stop the negotiation and search for another candidate. If the son agrees the marriage arrangements will be finalized. In polyandrous marriages, the younger son(s) has less to say in the decisions reached by the elder kin in deciding whom he or they should marry. Similarly, the mother of the bride will tell her daughter who will be her future husband(s), but she too can refuse if she disagrees strongly. Since the marriage is usually arranged within the county, both marrying sides may already know or have heard about each other.

The other type of marriage practiced in Tibet is an informal marriage called "khatugpa" (t. kha thug pa) or literally "meeting the mouth." It differs from longwa in that the couples rather than the parents make their own decision about their marriage. This is very close to what in the West is called "living together," and generally did not

involve a wedding rite in the traditional society. The woman simply moved in with the man. Today, however, these kinds of marriages also often involve wedding ceremonies, particularly in cities where these are elaborately and expensively performed. The couples usually consult with the parents before they marry, but occasionally they don't.

A study done by Tibet University in 1988 found that in rural agricultural areas marriages arranged by parents occurred 52.5% of the time (Wuang, Cheng, and Renchen 1993). Wuang and others also found that in nomad areas marriages arranged by parents' accounted for only about 20% of the cases, and in the cities, none of the marriages were totally arranged by the parents. They concluded that the rate of arranged marriage was high in agricultural area because young people were not economically independent and there was a dearth of social activities where youth could get together.

Another study found a very different result. It was conducted by Beijing University in 1988 (Ma 1996). In this study Ma reported that parentally arranged marriages for both men and women was 12.3% in rural Tibetan agricultural areas and 14.8% in Lhasa city (after 1980). Furthermore, he found that since the 1960's the rate of arranged marriage in rural areas had decreased. He attributed this to the state's introducing of freedom of marriage. On the other hand, in Lhasa city he found that the rate dropped in the 1970s and then increased in 1980s. He attributed the increasing rate in Lhasa city to a revival of traditional custom.

Table 5 – 4 Decision Making Patterns in Dechen of Children's Marriages After 1980

Decision made by	Son		Daughter	
	N	%	N	%
Parents	11	33.3	7	25.0
Father	8	24.2	6	21.4
Mother	2	6.1	2	7.1
Relatives	6	18.2	6	21.4
Self	6	18.2	7	25.0
Total	33	100	28	100

These studies were done with different methodologies and it is difficult to asses the reason for their different results. The data from Dechen reveal higher rates of arranged marriages than both of other studies. Arranged marriages were far more common than self-arranged marriages. In Dechen, for all marriages made after land division, 81.8% of son(s)' marriages and 75% of daughter's marriages were arranged by either parents or relatives (see Table 5 – 4).

Arranged marriage is highly valued by Dechen villagers because this was the traditional custom for the higher, landholding (taxpayer) families in the past, and because it suits the present situation well since most families have became the landowners. Families also think that this method allows the identification of a bride who meets the family's needs best. It also establishes a mutual agreement between parents, the son(s), and the bride, and creates an atmosphere in which the new marriage is well accepted by

all members. This builds a foundation for family harmony and, parents think, the prevention of future discord and partition. In addition to this, arranged marriages are particularly useful for polyandrous marriages since if parents select a bride for the set of sons this is more likely to prevent the bride from favoring one husband over the others. For example, if one son falls love with a girl and brings her to the family as a bride to share with the other brothers, there is a potential risk that the girl might show more affection to her initial lover and neglect the other husbands.

Arranging a marriage also allows parents to select a bride whose age best fits the span of ages of the set of brothers, for example, to avoid a bride being much older than the youngest brother. Today's youth in Dechen also agree that arranged marriages are the best for polyandry, but generally would prefer to pick their own bride in monogamous marriages. Parents, however, still try to arrange these marriages, although as was mentioned, the prospective groom and bride can refuse if they feel strongly about the choice.

The khatug or informal marriage is generally considered a marriage of love and has been greatly encouraged by the government. However, with the structural changes brought about by the new economic reforms, the number of informal marriages is decreasing in Dechen in favor of arranged marriage with polyandry.

The patterns of residence after marriage in Dechen village can be categorized into three types: patrilocal, matrilocal, and neolocal. In general, most Tibetan marriages are patrilocal and when a Dechen household has both sons and daughters, they choose to keep a son(s) at home and bring in a daughter-in-law. Conversely, they will send

daughters away at marriage.[6] This study recorded 120 marriages among the 92 households in Dechen, including persons divorced and widowed. Of these marriages, 55% (66 cases) are patrilocal, 17.5% (21 cases) are matrilocal, and 27.5% (33 cases) are neolocal in residence. Of course, residence patterns are not static arrangements. During the course of family development some initial arrangements change from one to another. There are cases showing that some patrilocal residences become neolocal residences when some of the polyandrous husbands with their wife split from natal families. Thus if we exclude the 15 cases where a household had only daughters from the 21 matrilocal residences, and similarly if we exclude the 10 cases of individuals who separated from patrilocal marriages from the 33 neolocal residences, the percent of patrilocal residence marriages would be much higher than that cited above.

Marital Characteristics of Dechen

Of the 690 people in Dechen, 255 (37%) are currently married and 435 (63.1%) are unmarried. Table 5 - 5 shows that the almost 18% more men are currently married than women (53.0 vs. 70.8%). The mean age at marriage for women is 23.3 (with a maximum age of 44 years of age and a minimum age of 17) and for males it is 24.4 (with a maximum of 48 and a minimum of 17).

[6] There are some areas like Phembo and parts of Gyantse where matrilocal residence at marriage is preferred (see, for example, Xu, 1996).

Table 5 - 5 Marital Status for Women and Men Age 17 and over, 1996

Marital Status	Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%
Married	105	53.0	150	70.8
Divorced	2	1.0	3	1.4
Widowed	11	5.6	8	3.8
Unmarried	80	40.4	51	24.1
Total	198	100	212	100

In Dechen, 37.8% (155 people) of the population 17 years of age and older were unmarried. Of the unmarried cohort age 17 and older, 60% were females (Table 5 - 7). All but three males in Dechen were married before they reached 30 years of age, the three exceptions being one man who never married, one celibate monk and one disabled man. By contrast, 30.6 % of the women age 30 and older were unmarried, and 21 % of these were never married. This supports the argument in the literature that contends that a consequence of Tibetan fraternal polyandry is a substantial corpus of unmarried women of marriageable age (Goldstein, 1971a). This issue will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Though divorce is not stigmatized in Tibetan culture and occurs easily, the number of divorced people who remain single is very low in Dechen, only about 1.2% of the individuals age 17 and older (Table 5 – 7). In most cases of divorce a second marriage was entered. Likewise, only 2.8% of the whole population are widowed, with slightly more females than males. All widowed men and all but one woman were age 55 and older (Table 5 – 7). The mean ages for the widows and widowers were 65.7 and 66.3.

Table 5 - 6 Number of Married Women and Men Age 17 and Older by Age Categories in 1996

Age	Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%
17 - 19	0		8	5.3
20 - 24	7	6.7	13	8.7
25 - 29	12	11.4	24	16.0
30 - 34	13	12.4	22	14.7
35 - 39	21	20.0	25	16.7
40 - 44	11	10.5	12	8.0
45 - 49	10	9.5	12	8.0
50 - 54	9	8.6	9	6.0
55 - 59	10	9.5	14	9.3
60 - 64	5	4.8	4	2.7
65 - 69	2	1.9	2	1.3
70 - 74	2	1.9	4	2.7
75 - 79	3	2.9	1	0.7
80 +	0		0	
Total	105	100	150	100

Table 5 - 7 Age-sex Breakdown of Unmarried, Divorced, and Widowed Women and Men Age 17 and Older in 1996

Age	Unmarried				Divorced		Widowed	
	Female		Male		Female	Male	Female	Male
	N	%	N	%	N	N	N	N
17 - 19	20	25.0	19	37.3				
20 - 24	24	30.0	23	45.1	1			
25 - 29	10	12.5	6	11.8		3		
30 - 34	11	13.8	2	3.9				
35 - 39	5	6.3	1	2.0	1			
40 - 44	0		0				1	
45 - 49	1	1.3						
50 - 54	1	1.3						
55 - 59	0						1	1
60 - 64	2	2.5					3	3
65 - 69	2	2.5					2	
70 - 74	3	3.8					1	2
75 - 79	1	1.3					2	2
80 +	0						1	
Total	80	100	51	100	2	3	11	8

The three basic marital types in Tibet are monogamy, polyandry and polygyny. All are found in Dechen village. Of these, polyandry has three distinct variants. The main form of polyandry (in terms of values and statistical averages) is fraternal polyandry. This refers to a marriage between two or more siblings and a woman.

A much less frequent form of polyandry is "bigenerational polyandry" which refers to the marriage of two or more males from different generations to a single woman, e.g., father and son marrying a woman. "Polygynandry" refers to the marriage of several

women to several men. In Dechen these are all in fraternal polygynandrous relations, i.e., two or more brothers.

Polygyny, of course, involves two or more females married to a male. The most common form of this is bigenerational polygyny, i.e., a mother and daughter married to a man. Next in frequency is sororal polygyny which refers to a male married to two or more sisters[7].

Two further complicating factors are also found. The first is the pattern of residence. Sororal polygyny, for example, can occur with matrilocal, patrilocal or neolocal residence. A second relevant factor is the sequencing of marriage. Sometimes all the males in polyandry and polygynandry marry together, but it is also not uncommon for a woman to marry the eldest son in a family and the other son(s) to join the relationship as they get older. Similarly, in bigenerational polygyny, the male always first married the mother and then brought her daughter into the marriage at a later time.

Statistically, monogamy was the most frequent of the four types of marriages. For ever-married and currently married women respectively, 46.6% and 54.3% were married monogamously (Table 5 – 8). Of the 57 currently monogamously married women, 47.4% of these were patrilocal, 29.8% were neolocal, and 22.8% were matrilocal.

[7] In other areas in Tibet non-sororal polygyny is also common.

Table 5 – 8 The Distribution of Marital Types for all Ever-Married Women and Currently-Marred Women, 1996

Marital Type	Ever-married Women		Currently-married Women	
	N	%	N	%
Monogamy	55	46.6	57	54.3
Polyandry	47	39.8	32	30.5
Fraternal Polyandry	45	38.1	30	28.6
Bigenerational Polyandry	2	1.7	2	1.9
Polygyny	12	10.2	12	11.4
Sororal Polygyny	4	3.4	4	3.8
Bigenerational Polygyny	8	6.8	8	7.6
Polygynandry	4	3.4	4	3.8
Total	118	100	105	100

Polyandry was the second most frequent form of marriage with 39.8% of the ever-married women and 30.5% of the currently-married women practicing this. Of the polyandrously married women, fraternal polyandry was the most common form with over 93% of ever- and currently-married women married in this way. By contrast, only two marriages amongst ever- and currently-married polyandrous women were bigenerational polyandry. One involved a father's brother and father's son who was adopted into his uncle's family, and the other was a father and son. Bigenerational marriages are normally done with monomarital principle in mind to avoid bringing two brides into a family, one for the father/uncle's and the other for the son. It is rare and only done in unusual circumstances. But it has no negative stigma in Dechen. With respect to residence patterns, all currently-married polyandrous women in the sample were initially patrilocal in residence, and 91% were arranged marriages.

Compared with monogamy and polyandry, polygyny was rare but was not absent in the study village. In 1996 there were 6 polygynous marriages that comprised less than 11% of the ever- and currently-married women. Of these women, 8 women (4 marriages) were involved in bigenerational polygyny. Six of these were involved in mother and daughter marriages, and 2 in a mother's sister and a niece marriage. Another four women (in 2 marriages) were part of sororal polygynous marriages.

These types of polygyny generally came about due to the following types of events. For the bigenerational marriages, these occurred when a woman's first husband passed away or divorced and then she remarried and later shared her husband with her daughter from the previous marriage. Sororal polygyny generally occurred after an older sister married and had several children. At some point her husband then had sexual relation with the wife's younger sister and later she was included as a co-wife in the marriage. All polygynous marriages were informal and matrilocal.

Of the marriage types present in Dechen, the rarest was polygynandry which comprised just under 4% of ever- and currently-married women. Four women were involved in two polygynandrous marriages. Two were sisters married to four brothers and two were unrelated wives married to two brothers.

The proportion of monogamy versus polyandry varies from village to village in Tibet based on the local and household situations that are encountered. Two villages with the same values regarding polyandry but with different proportions of households having two or more sons will end up having a different proportions of polyandry. Thus, to assess how prevalent polyandry is, it is important to examine the internal household

composition of each household in the study to ascertain whether there was a potential for polyandry, i.e., whether there were two or more male siblings present.

If we look at Table 5 – 8 we find 55 women were ever-married in monogamously marriages in Dechen in 1996, and 57 women were currently married in monogamous marriages. Of these, 27 of the women in ever-married monogamous marriages and 24 of the women in currently-married monogamous marriages were married to males who had no brothers, i.e., they did not have the possibility of being part of a fraternal polyandry marriage.

Thus, real percent of fraternal polyandrous marriages in Dechen is slightly higher when we examine just those households that had the potential for arranging a polyandrous marriage, i.e., those that had at least two male siblings on a generation. When this factor is taken into consideration, 45.6% of ever-married and 35.2% of currently-married women were married polyandrously.

In the remaining marriage cases (24 for ever-married women and 21 for currently-married women) more than one brother was present. However, in 13 cases the currently married women were initially part of fraternal polyandrous marriages but later they split from the polyandrous union with one of the brothers and ended up in a monogamous marriage. Similarly, some of the women currently in monogamous marriages were initially in polyandrous marriages but then experienced the death of one of their husbands or divorced and set up a neolocal household. Thus, there were really only a small number of cases with multiple brothers where a decision was made to marry each one monogamously.[8]

[8] In 5 cases brothers who might have been part of polyandrous marriages became monks, but in all these instances their other brothers were engaged in fraternal polyandrous marriages.

The number of brothers engaged in polyandrous marriages varied between two and five brothers. As Table 5 – 9 shows, in reality more than half of the instances of fraternal polyandry consisted of two brothers (59.4%) and 31.3 % consisted of three brothers. Four brother fraternal polyandry marriages accounted for only 6.3% and 5 brother marriages for 3.1 % of the polyandrous marriages. Although the most common form of polyandry involved two brothers, 57% of households in Dechen responded that three brothers was the ideal number for fraternal polyandry. Only 20% said two brothers was their ideal and another 19% said four brothers. Only 4% of respondents mentioned five brothers.

Table 5 – 9 Numbers of Brothers in Dechen Currently Married in Fraternal Polyandrous Arrangements*

	1996	
	# of Marriage	%
Two husbands	19	59.4
Three husbands	10	31.3
Four husbands	2	6.3
Five husbands	1	3.1
Total	32	100

* Two bigenerational polyandrous marriages are included in fraternal polyandry, each had two husbands.

Given this belief that 3 or 2 brothers are ideal for polyandry, it is not surprising to find that in almost half of the cases of fraternal polyandry not all of the brothers jointly married. Instead, in 48.2% of the cases one or more of the brothers married

monogamously leaving their natal household and going as "adoptive bridegrooms" to households with a daughter but no sons, i.e., going as matrilocally residing bridegrooms. In another 18.5% of the cases, one or more brothers became a monk, and in 7.4% of the cases, a son went to school outside of the area. Another 22.2% of the brothers were still staying with their natal families because they were too young to marry and their future had not yet been decided (see Table 5 – 10). We will return to this discussion of alternative solutions for extra sons in Chapter Six.

Table 5 – 10 Alternative Strategies for Extra Sons in Fraternal Polyandry in in Dechen

	# of Marriage	# of Extra Sons	%
Having No Extra Brothers	15		
Having Extra Brothers	17		
Married out as Magpa		13	48.1
Became Monk		5	18.5
Sent to Outside School		2	7.4
Joined Army		1	3.7
Not Married yet and Stayed at Home		6	22.2
Total	32	27	100

Normally, when a family had 2 or 3 sons only a few years apart in age they would arrange a fraternal polyandrous marriage for them at the same time. However, if a family had some sons too young to become sexual partners for the wife, they first arranged the

marriage for the older son(s). Later they would determine whether they should add a younger brother to the marriage or find another solution such as marrying them out matrilocally. This decision often depended on the sons' personal characters and the relationships between the brothers and parents. Table 7 – 3 illustrates the differences in age between brothers in polyandrous marriages.

The high prevalence of polyandry in Dechen raises the question of whether there has been a change since the end of communes in 1980. Data from this study shows clearly that there has been an important increase in the selection of polyandry as a marriage type. Of the 32 currently married fraternal polyandrous women, 81.3% (26 women, including one bigenerational polyandrous woman) were married after 1980. All 4 currently polygynandrously married women, and 8 out of 12 of the current polygynous women also arranged their marriages after the land division. However, of the 57 currently married monogamous women, only 38.6% (22 women) of them married after land division. Taking all current plural marriages, over 79% have occurred after the land division. This support the villagers statement that there has been a major revival of polyandry since the start of the new economic system.

In sum, although fraternal polyandry is still illegal in China, it is very common in the Dechen area, and has increased markedly since decollectivization. Thus, while there is no prescribed cultural rule mandating polyandry if a household has two or more brothers, the majority of households with multiple sons are now choosing this form of marriage. In the next chapter, we will examine why they do so—i.e., the underlying social and economic dynamics of practicing fraternal polyandry.

CHAPTER SIX

FRATERNAL POLYANDRY IN DECHEN VILLAGE

Two explanatory models of fraternal polyandry in Tibetan and Tibetan speaking societies were developed in the recent literature - a predominately politico-economic, materialistic explanation and a predominately cultural explanation. One of these, as discussed in Chapter One, emphasizes political and economic factors to explain the selection of polyandry, focusing on the "monomarital" principle and issues of land tenure, corvee taxes, fragmentation of estates, social stratification and the concentration of labor in traditional Tibetan society (Goldstein, 1971 a; 1971b; 1976; 1978). The other explanation (Levine, 1988) asserts the presence of a strong cultural value favoring fraternal polyandry and sibling solidarity as the main force underlying the prevalence of polyandry in Tibetan society. In this chapter, the factors related to revival of fraternal polyandry in Dechen will be examined in the context of these two explanatory models.

Polyandry in Dechen---Villagers' Point of View

Tibetans in Dechen (and Tibet in general) do not find it strange or immoral for brothers to share a wife and there is no pejorative connotation or feeling associated with its practice. Polyandry, therefore, is not a strange or disturbing form of marriage. To the contrary it is a valued option among a number of culturally appropriate marital types.

In order to assess how Dechen villagers think about polyandry and why they choose to utilize or not utilize it for their families, a number of methods were employed. Through participant observation and informal discussions while living in the village a substantial corpus of information about marriage and polyandry was collected. In addition, during the formal survey and the in-depth interview period of the research, specific open-ended questions were asked about polyandry.

Overwhelmingly, the Dechen villagers saw polyandry as an ideal method to maintain or increase their economic situation, much as they had during the old society before 1959. A total of 77.2% of the respondents (71 households) in the general survey answered a question about what they consider the idea type of marriage by stating fraternal polyandry. By contrast, only 14.1% (13 households) said monogamy, while another 8.7% (8 households) responded they did not know. No one mentioned polygyny, and in fact it was generally considered the least valued form of marriage.

The reasons provided by villagers for considering fraternal polyandry the ideal form of marriage fell into three categories: concentration of male labor in households, greater potential to exploit off-farm economic opportunities, and the preservation of a household's land intact across generations. In one form or another these reasons were repeatedly mentioned whenever the topic came up in conversation, as well as in the general survey. When survey respondents who answered that polyandry was the ideal marriage form were asked "why," 88.7% (63 households) explicitly said that this type of marriage could help a family since it would allow them to engage in various economic activities such as farming, herding, and working outside the village for cash income. Strikingly, no one mentioned anything about a value of keeping brothers together, and the

only "cultural" reason given was by 2.8% (2 households) who said that practicing fraternal polyandry was an old custom that would maintain the family's patrilineal line. Five respondents did not answer and one said that in polyandry sons could help each other. Similar views were conveyed in answer to another question that asked why people in this village practice polyandry? In response to this, 87.9% of respondents (80 households) stated that this was because families benefited economically and only 3.3% (3 households) mentioned polyandry was practiced because it was a traditional custom. None mentioned the value of sibling solidarity.

An example of the kind of comments one hears in Dechen was made by Tenzin, a Dechen farmer who also has taught in the village school for the past 27 years. When he was asked why he thought polyandry nowadays was practiced so widely in Dechen he said:

> In rural areas like Dechen the only way to develop the village as well as the individual families is to be fully involved in diverse economic activities. Thus, it is best for a family to arrange one wife for two or three sons. In farming areas like Dechen, fraternal polyandry is like a very important key that opens the gate of wealth to families since if each son marries to one woman, the family and the new couple would first have a hard time finding a place to build a house for themselves since there is no empty land in this village, and even if they did find a small place to build their house, they would still meet various difficulties and have to spend quite a long period of time building up their economic well-being and catching up with the other families in the village. Likewise, if a family arranges a polygynous marriage for their daughters, each

> daughter will give several births which will not only increase the burden of feeding more mouths but also exacerbate land shortages in the family. It will also increase the population of the village as whole.

Polyandry in Dechen, therefore, is seen as a means to secure an economic end, namely to enhance (or maintain) households' standard of living. As will be discussed later, Tibetans also understand that maintaining a polyandrous marriage is more difficult than monogamy, but the overwhelming consensus is that it is the preferred alternative because of the benefits they perceive it provides.

The importance of fraternal polyandry in the eyes of the villagers can be seen by their response to an open-ended question that asked, "What are the most important methods that a family can utilize to get rich at the present time?" In response to this, 90% (81 households) of the respondents mentioned that it was necessary to work hard on raising animals as well as on farming, and 54% (49 households) also mentioned that one needs to earn cash income outside the village by doing small-scale trading and/or wage labor. Consequently, villagers believe that it is difficult for a family to achieve economic well-being if they are only involved in farming, and that the ideal strategy for families is to be involved in two or three diverse kinds of economic activities. It also was their belief that fraternal polyandry could best fulfill this need by concentrating male labor in the family.

In order to see what guided particular families to practice fraternal polyandry, several questions were asked to all polyandrous households. When asked whether polyandry was something to be embarrassed at or proud of, all polyandrous families (including polygyandrous families) said they were proud about being in polyandrous

marriages because it was a mechanism that was making them capable of achieving economic success. They also stated that the better living conditions associated with polyandrous families provided social and political prestige for individuals and their family.

Villagers also believed that polyandry worked. Of the 31 polyandrous households (including two polygyandrous households), 93.5% (29 households) asserted strongly that their living standard had improved after arranging polyandrous marriages. Only one bigenerational polyandry household stated it became worse after polyandry, and one fraternal polyandry household said there was no change in their economic status. The explanations for this made a direct causal link between fraternal polyandry and economic success for the reasons discussed above.

The villagers' strong and almost universal belief in the economic advantage of polyandry is also seen in their plans for the next generation. For example, 55 households have two or more unmarried sons in the younger generation, i.e., are in a situation where they could select a fraternal polyandrous marriage. Of these, 85.5% (47 households) explicitly responded that they are planning to arrange a fraternal polyandrous marriage for their sons. When the 47 households who said they were going to marry their sons polyandrously were asked why, 97.9% (46 households) of them mentioned the economic/manpower reasons. Another 9.1% (5 households) of households said they will arrange monogamous marriage for one son, although in all these cases they planned to maintain the "monomarital ideal" of Tibetan culture by sending the other son(s) to higher education (and thus exclude them from competition over inheriting land). Another 5.5% of respondents (3 households) said that they did not have any plans for their sons.

When alternative solutions such as sending one or more sons to middle school or to a monastery (and creating a monogamous stem family) were suggested to the parents who said they planned a polyandrous marriage, they responded that keeping one son at home and finding alternative solutions for other sons would protect the land from fragmentation but would not meet their economic interests regarding the concentration of male labor and exploitation of non-farm income opportunities.

The emic advantages associated with polyandry were also expressed by unmarried women. We interviewed 22 women ranging in age from 18 to 29 years of age (this excludes 7 nuns) about their preferred future marriage type.[1] Of these, 77.3% (17) said they hoped their marriage would be fraternal polyandry and only 22.7% (5 women) responded that they hoped to marry monogamously. The explanations of those who wanted fraternal polyandry were the same as the ones mentioned above. The reason given by those preferring monogamy was that if there are many husbands in a marriage there will be disharmony and conflict.

From a woman's point of view, her interests will be better fulfilled by fraternal polyandry. Since she is the mother of all her co-husbands' children, she herself and her children could receive better and secure care from all her husbands. One two-husbands' wife said that " For long term I feel very secure because if one of my husbands dies in the future, there is another husband with me and my children. However, the monogamous wife has only one husband. In case of his death, she herself and her kids will have hard time." No wonder 87% (27 cases) of 31 polyandrous wives believe that in terms of food,

[1] Of the 41 unmarried women age 18-29, 22 were interviewed. The women not interviewed were unavailable at the time the interviews were being conducted.

clothing, and housework load their children are better nurtured than children in monogamous marriages due to better economic condition and sufficient adult labor. Only 13% (4 cases) of them think there is no difference between children in polyandrous and monogamous households.

Villagers, therefore, consciously expressed a strong economic motivation for their marital behavior. Although all recognized the danger of conflict between brothers and between the wife and the various brothers, they felt that the potential benefits of fraternal polyandry far outweighed the potential negatives. In order to understand why they hold such views so strongly, the current social and political environment will be examined. At the core of the Dechen economy is farming, so let us begin by examining land and land tenure

Land Ownership and Demography

The changes in China and the TAR that were described in Chapter Four have produced a socio-economic and political environment that enhanced the utility of fraternal polyandry versus monogamy. The key reform in Tibet (and Dechen) was decollectivization, that is to say, the division of all the commune's lands and animals (and most farm implement/tools) among member households. The farming household became the basic unit of production, although the state retained ownership rights over the land. Each household had long-term usufruct rights to the land and was in turn responsible for providing products to the government through a quota and tax system

With regard to the land, a critical aspect of the new system was the state's prohibition against any buying or selling of land. With the exception of giving an inheritance to one's children, the land a household received on a per capita basis at the time of decollectivization was fixed. Thus, a household that received two person's share of land but increased to ten people through marriage and birth could not get an additional allotment of land from the government nor could they buy any more land. The state's reason for this was primarily a continuation of the ideals of socialist equality in land and the desire to prevent the reemergence of large landlords, especially absentee landlords, but the result was the creation of a fixed resource based. Thus, to the extent that population was increasing in Tibet and Dechen, this meant that the amount of land per capita would decrease over time.

Although China is well known for its activist population control polices as exemplified by the "one-child family" program, in actuality, in minority areas like Tibet strict family planning controls were not implemented energetically, at least until very recently. Family planning policy in Tibet was initially based on the idea that "first propaganda and then implementation; first for Chinese [who live in Tibet] and then for minority nationalities; first for cities and townships and then for agricultural and nomad areas; strict for Chinese but loose for minority nationalities" (Tanzin and Zhang, 1991: 495). Thus, when family planning began in Tibet in 1975, Tibetans were not affected. In fact, the regional government's family planning document did not specifically mention Tibetan cadre or farmers. It stated limits only for Chinese cadres and for Han Chinese cadre married to Tibetans. These limits were phrased as follows, "One [child] is not few,

and two [children] is appropriate." However, this policy was not strictly implemented for Han, and it was not applied at all to Tibetans (Ibid).

In 1983, Tibet's family planning policy was for first time explicitly applied to Tibetans. The regional government stated that all urban Tibetan residents (cadres, workers in government enterprises, and other urban residents) could have only two children. Cadres and government workers were also instructed to space birth intervals at three or more years. For farmers and herders who live in the central areas of Tibet, each couple was encouraged to have only one or two children but was permitted to have a third child. For farmers and herders who lived in remote border areas there was no birth limit.

Beginning in 1984, this new policy was implemented among Tibetan cadres and workers in government factories and cooperatives. However, it was not enforced for either other urban Tibetans or for farmers and herders. Though some local cadres and reporters state that 80% of Tibetan farmers and herders had started to practice family planning in early 1980s, this is hyperbole that does not reflect the reality of Tibet. It was disingenuous hype meant to enhance the reputation of local officials. (Ma, 1996). For example, field research in several rural areas in 1987 – 88 revealed that no birth limits were being imposed on farmers and herders there (Goldstein and Beall, 1991).

However, starting in the early to mid 1990s, stricter family planning policies were employed. These new policies were linked to the Tibet Autonomous Region's major campaign aimed at alleviating poverty by the year 2000. For example, in Benam county, from 1992 to 1996, the Tibet government's "one river, two streams" development project invested more than 86 million yuan to implement a large development project that included building water reservoirs and irrigation facilities, improving low yield fields,

opening new fields, and planting trees. Related to this campaign of eradicating poverty and developing the regional economy was a shift in demographic policy that involved emphasizing the implementation of family planning policies in rural areas. An official document on family planning in the Tibet Autonomous Region promulgated on May 22, 1996 stipulated that:

> ... Presently, in the whole region about 480,000 people have not overcome their poverty, and in poor areas it is a common situation that 'the more poor, the higher the births; and the higher the births, the more poor'. ... In 1990, when the fourth population census was carried out, the whole region had a population of 2,196,000. This had increased to 2,389,000 people by 1995. According to this growth rate, Tibet's population will increase by 250,000 people before the end of this century. This will create new pressures on the backward Tibetan economy. If we do not pay attention to the matter of population, and if we do not carry out family planning, and do not speed up taking steps to increase population quality, it will definitely affect the goal of achieving progress and prosperity of the Tibetan nationality.
>
> ... From early 1980s to the present our region has made family planning in cities and towns its priority. At present, among people in cities and towns, the concept of giving birth has radically changed, and the birth rate is close to the national rate. The family planning work has basically led us onto the correct path. However, the population in cities and towns is only 12% of whole region's population and about 88% of the population are living in agricultural and pastoral areas. The development of the agricultural and pastoral population determines the population

> development of the whole of Tibet. Therefore, the key to solving the matter of Tibetan population and development is to rationally adjust and control the increasing speed of agricultural and pastoral population, and to improve the quality of agricultural and pastoral populations. Therefore, along with stabilizing family planning work in cities and towns we must turn the priority of our work promptly onto agricultural and pastoral areas and actively and safely implement family planning work in those areas (Party Committee of TAR Document, 1996).

Although this document made no explicit mention of any new birth limit for couples in agricultural and nomad areas, it was taken to mean that the previous 1983 limit of three per family was operative.

This new program emphasis is starting to create changes in rural Tibet because it is increasing family planning work and making contraception more available. It is also beginning to implement disincentive programs wherein women who exceed the birth limit are fined. However, the pace and intensity of this work varies considerably across Tibet, and in many areas there are no fines. In fact, in Benam county the three-child rule has been modified and replaced with a more flexible rule that links the number of children per couple to the socio-economic status of the parents. Their rule states that it is acceptable to have four children if a family is rich, three if middle income, and two if poor. However, even this more liberal limit was not strictly enforced and the county/xiang has not fined women who exceed the number of births. Not surprisingly, in the 15 years since decollectivization, fertility has remained high and population is increasing. Table 6 – 1 reveals the high completed fertility of women in a large study of three rural Tibetan counties that included Dechen (Goldstein, Beall, Ben Jiao, Tsering, ms.). In this study,

currently married women age 50 – 54 had borne an average of 6.9 births and those age 55 – 59 had borne an average of 7.1 live births.

Table 6 - 1 Mean Number of Live Birth to Currently-Married Women Age 20 - 59 (by 5 year age-categories) in Lhundrup, Metrogunga and Benam Counties as of 1997

Age Category	# of Women	Mean # Live Births	S.D.	Median # Live Births
20-24	73	1.1	0.8	1
25-29	144	2.3	1.2	2
30-34	142	3.4	1.4	3
35-39	137	4.1	1.7	4
40-44	93	5.7	2.4	6
45-49	85	6.5	2.7	6
50-54	78	6.9	2.7	8
55-59	63	7.1	2.8	7
Total	815	4.3	2.8	4

Not surprisingly, population has increased. According to a local document, in 1996 Mag xiang had 4,561 people and 580 households. By comparison, in 1980 when the commune's land was redivided, there were 3,502 people and 570 households. Thus, in the 16 years between 1980-1996, the xiang's population has increased by 30% and households by 1.8%. The rate of natural increase for the area was 1.3%, a doubling time of 54 years.

Population growth occurring in a system in which the amount of land is fixed should decrease the amount of land per capita, and it has. Comparing the amount of land in Mag xiang in 1996 (8,842 mu; 1.9 mu per capita) with the land present in 1981 (9145

mu; 2.5 mu/per capita), reveals that the total amount of land has decreased by 3.4% and the per capita land holdings have decreased by 0.6 mu or 24%.

Similar trends are also found in Dechen village where the land per capita decreased 24% from 2.1 mu per capita in 1980 to 1.6 mu in 1996. These decreases are actually higher since roughly 5% of the farmland listed in the 1996 government records had been lost either to new houses built on what had been arable fields or as a result of floods. The total population for the same period increased by 32.7% (170 people) and the average size of household increased from 6.2 to 7.5 persons. The total number of households increased by 9.5% (8 households) during this sixteen year period. On a per capita basis, 79% of the households decreased in per capita land holdings, 14% increased, and 7% stayed the same. This process is likely to increase in coming years as the children who did not receive a share of land in 1980 begin to marry and have children of their own. The specter of decreasing per capita land holdings is a major concern of rural villagers.

Theoretically, there are several options villagers could use to compensate for their decreasing per capita amount of land. One option would be to lease land from other households who have excess land. However, this is not a viable alternative because farming households in Dechen do not have excess land and do not want to lease fields. Thus, in reality, no one leases any land in Dechen.

Another possible compensatory avenue would be to increase the yields of fields. Agricultural technology, however, has not changed very much since the end of the old society, and farming methods in Dechen are much the same as before 1959. Families still use plowing animals and mostly thresh their grain by driving large animals like yaks back and forth over the grain. The utilization of new chemical fertilizers/insecticides and some

new seeds has improved yields somewhat, but villagers are unanimous that their gains since land division have been modest. Consequently, increased agricultural yields are not seen as a viable mechanism for producing increases that could balance decreases in land and increases in population because of the poor quality of land in Dechen and the absence of extensive new irrigation works in all but a few special areas.

Villagers, are, however, compensating for these factors by focusing on concentrating labor and land in households and using that labor power to generate non-farm income in a variety of ways. There are two dimensions of this strategy: 1. precluding fragmentation of a household's land by returning to a traditional emphasis on unequal inheritance to prevent the division of family land across generations. 2. engaging in wage labor outside of the farming economy. Fraternal polyandry is the optimal method villagers use to try to achieve both of these.

Polyandry

In the years since decollectivization, fraternal polyandry has become a key strategy households are using to cope with the consequences of decollectivization. By having brothers marry a single bride, only one set of heirs per generation is produced and the likelihood of several sons each marrying out and taking portions of the land for their neolocal households is reduced. Equally important, fraternal polyandry concentrates free, energetic labor in one's household. It enables members of a family to maintain the core agricultural activities without having to hire laborers as well as operate larger animal husbandry operations by allocating one brother to look after animals, and critically, it also allows a household to send one or two of its members to participate in the off-farm labor

market for parts of the year. For these reasons, as seen in Chapter Five, polyandry has increased dramatically in Dechen in the years since decollectivization.

Inheritance

In addition to polyandry, villagers are also employing traditional inheritance values that give preference to the main family and emphasize the unity of the family estate across generations in order to cope with decreasing per capital land holdings. In traditional Tibet households did not give land as part of dowries and rarely divided property equally when fission occurred. As explained in Chapter Two, the absence of a land market and the heavy corvée labor demands of the feudal estate system produced a strong value on keeping the family estate intact. Today, although Chinese national inheritance laws stipulate that each member of a household should receive an equal share if they leave the family, in reality, unequal inheritance is the norm.

Inheritance norms operate in three types of situations. In the first, there is inheritance between generations when the parents die. In the second there is inheritance when family members leave the household, e.g., to marry or join a monastery/nunnery. And in the third, there is inheritance when a family partitions into two or more new units. Tibetans in Dechen utilize slightly different strategies for each of these.

When the father/head of household dies, there is no question of immediate division of land. Property remains in the household with the eldest son normally assuming the position of household head. If the eldest son is too young to assume this role, the mother acts as household head until he is old enough to take charge.

When sons or daughters from Dechen go as brides or grooms to another households *outside of* the village they normally get no share of land, although they almost always receive a dowry of other items such as clothing, grain or animals. Monks and nuns similarly do not receive a share of land. This, by and large, is true all over Tibet.

However, when marriages occurs within the same village, the out-marrying child is more likely to get some share of their natal family's land. However, it is very unlikely they would get a full share. What they receive depends, in part, on the economic status of the household into which they are marrying. For example, if a son or a daughter marries into a household in the same village and that household is very poor, sometimes their family will give them a small amount of land, but if the household they are marrying into is rich they are more likely not to give any land.

Sons or daughters from Dechen who marry within the village but set up their own neolocal households usually receive a more substantial share of land ranging from half to two thirds of what should be their share. They also typically receive a few animals, furniture, and grain from both of their families. In addition, their natal families usually provide some construction materials to help the new couple build a simple house.

Table 6 - 2 Destination of Individuals Who Married and Left the Natal Households in Dechen Who Married Since 1981

	Male		Female		Total
	N	%	N	%	N (%)
Married Within the Village	2	14.2	10	19.6	12 (18.5)
Married Outside the Village	12	85.7	41	80.3	53 (81.5)
Total	14	100	51	100	65 (100)

Table 6 – 2 reveals that 2 males and 10 females married within the village since decollectivization. Of these, only 5 females received any land as dowry, and they received only 1 mu on average (i.e., less than half of the share distributed at the time of decollectivization). The other males and females who married outside of the village did not get any share of land even though 69.8% of them (37) married into villages adjacent to Dechen. Table 6 – 2 also reveals that villagers were less likely to arrange their children's marriages within the village because of the land division issue. Only 18.5% (12) of marriages were contracted within the village while 81.5% (53 cases) were arranged outside of the village.

If an out-marrying boy or girl objects to the share s/he is given and tries to claim a full share of the family land, the local xiang government will not support the out-marrying child's claims. In theory, the objecting child could sue their natal family in the County Peoples' Court, and if he or she did this would probably get a fairer amount of land, but they rarely do so. Court records and interviews with judges revealed that until now very

few people actually have taken their natal family into court over inheritance. A neolocal family in Dechen who did not get an equal share explained their reason for not going through the legal procedure saying that, "If we do that (taking their natal family into court), we will not get any help from our families in the future. Without their help our life will be much harder over the long run. In addition, taking our families into court will ruin our reputation in the village and neighbors will keep a distance from us."

In cases of household partition, land division usually occurs, but the amount varies. As Table 6 – 3 illustrates, the segment that partitions from the natal family generally gets a share, but one that is less than that retained by the main/original household.

Table 6 – 3 Land Division Occurring in the Ten Cases of Partition Since 1981

Case	Natal Household			New Household		
	# of people	Amount of land (in mu)	Per capita amount of and (in mu)	# of people	Amount of land (in mu)	Per capita amount of land (in mu)
1	5	10.8	2.2	5	6.0	1.2
2	5	10.8	2.2	5	6.0	1.2
3	3	6.6	2.2	6	8.4	1.4
4	2	8.4	4.2	4	2.1	0.5
5	4	6.3	1.6	1	0.0	0.0
6	5	8.6	1.7	2	2.4	1.2
7	7	14.7	2.1	4	4.3	1.1
8	2	3.9	2.0	6	10.8	1.8
9	4	8.6	2.2	5	6.5	1.3
10	2	6.5	3.3	5	7.6	1.5
Total	39	85.2	2.2	43	54.1	1.3

In the ten cases that occurred in Dechen since decollectivization, the splitting household received only 38.8% of the land even though these new households contained more people. In 80% of these cases, the natal households were able to keep either the same or more land per capita that what they received during the land division. In contrast, none of new households were able to reach the previous per capita share.

In the above cases, the members partitioning had received a share of land at the time of decollectivization. However, very soon individuals who were born after land division will be involved in such partitions and it is not clear what will happen to them in terms of inheritance of land. When queried about this, the majority of households, 62% (56 households), said that their children who did not receive a share of land at the time of land division have no rights to any land. 29% (26 households) stated that these children will have the same right as other members of the family and 9% (8 households) said they were not sure what they will do.

In cases where an in-marrying bride who did not bring a share of land as dowry wants to split off from her husband's family, she will get no share of land, although she will be allowed to take her dowry with her. However, if she takes all or some of her children with her, some families will give her (and the children) an equal share of animals and grain based on the increased amount of animals and grains that occurred after her arrival in the family. However, this depends on the relationship between the person who is splitting off and the family.

The difficulty individuals who partition face is illustrated by the case of Drolma who married in 1985. Although she was from Dechen, her family did not give her any land, animals or cash, but did give her a dowry of 320 jin of barley, 7 sets of clothing and

1 set of bedding. After two years in the family, she gave birth to her first son. However, she did not get along well with her mother-in-law and ultimately she and her husband and two children (one son and one daughter) split from the family and set up their own household. They obtained her husband's share of the land and Drolma's dowry but no land for her or their children even though the main family kept four people's share of land for only two people (mother-in-laws and younger son).

Drolma and her husband had a hard time since they did not have a house, and for a year had to borrow a small room from one of the rich families in the village. During this year, they found a small piece of land on which to build a house and they prepared all building materials such as soil, stone, and earth-bricks themselves. Since Drolma did not get any share of land from her natal family, her family now provided them free labor and some building materials such as timber to help them build a new one-room house. Later, also with her relative's help, they were able to gradually build three additional rooms. Until 1995, the family had no milking or plowing animals, both of which are considered a basic necessity for farmers. Because of this, each year her husband had to work for other families as payment for using their animals for plowing.

Consequently, families in Dechen place great emphasis on preserving their land intact, and individuals who initiate partition have a hard time subsisting since they will not receive an equal share of the original family's land (or other wealth). On the other hand, there are clearly a number of different situations where parents are expected to give children land. Polyandry is considered an important strategy because it avoids the most common of these situations—sons marrying monogamously and setting up neolocal households.

However, village Tibetans also believe that polyandry is more difficult to sustain if there are four or more sons involved. In Chapter Five we saw that Dechen parents generally consider that 2 or 3 brothers are ideal for polyandry, and that in almost half of the cases of fraternal polyandry not all of the brothers jointly married. In 48.2% of the cases one or more of the brothers went as "adoptive bridegrooms" to a household with a daughter but no sons, i.e., went as matrilocally residing bridegrooms. In another 18.5% of the cases, one or more brothers became a monk, and in 7.4% of the cases, a son went to school outside of the area. Thus Tibetan polyandry is far more complicated than all brothers jointly taking a bride. As Goldstein (1976; 1978) has discussed, sibling age, personality differences and the history of relations between sons and parents all play a role in how parents decide to organize their household's human resources. Parents, for example, usually keep the eldest sons, but sometimes send the eldest as an adoptive bridegroom or make him a monk, and on rare occasions will even keep a daughter in the family and send sons out (although there were no such cases in Dechen).

Monogamous families with 2 or more sons in Dechen also try to avoid dividing their land holdings among the sons. If there are two or three sons, the lives of the second and third sons are arranged so that they are not in situations where they would have to be given land. This could be accomplished, for example, by making one a monk or by marrying one as an adoptive groom to another village. Or it could be accomplished by providing them good education so that they end up government officials who do not receive land.

How successful have these strategies been, and do polyandrously married households have more land and income per capita? Table 6 – 4 reveals that there has been

a decrease in per capita land in all forms of marriage. There was a trend in the predicted direction showing that the decline was smaller in polyandry than in the other marriage types.

Table 6 - 4 Comparison of Changes in Land Per Capita in Mu Between 1980 and 1996 by Marriage Type*

Marriage Types in 1996	# of Households	1980		1996		# mu per capita reduced
		Mean # of mu per capita	S.D.	Mean # of mu per capita	S.D.	
Polyandry/polygynandry	28	2.1	0.1	1.8	0.4	0.3
Monogamy	37	2.1	0.1	1.6	0.5	0.5
Polygyny	6	2.1	0.1	1.4	0.7	0.7
Total	71	2.1	0.1	1.6	0.5	0.5

ANOVA of mean reduced land per capita,
*Df = 3, F = 4.58, .05< p <.10.
Note: The 5 monogamous and 3 polyandrous households established after 1980 are excluded from this table.

Table 6 – 5 compares the size of land holdings in 1996 by marriage type. There was a trend in the predicted direction, suggesting an advantage for polyandrous households since the per capita land holdings of polyandry is higher than that of monogamy and polygyny.

Table 6 - 5 Comparison of Per Capita Land Holdings by Marital Type in 1996*

	# of Households	Mean # of mu per capita	S.D.	Range
Polyandry/ Polygynandry	31	1.7	0.4	0.9 – 2.5
Monogamy	42	1.5	0.5	0.6 – 2.7
Polygyny	6	1.4	0.7	0.3 – 2.2
Total	79	1.6	0.5	0.3 – 2.7

ANOVA of mean land per capita,
*Df = 2, F = 2.8, .05<p<.10.

However, it is difficult to access the real efficacy of polyandry for land fragmentation because of several factors. First, the time that households have been managing the land by themselves is too short. Decollectivization occurred only 16 years ago so most people born around the time of the land division have not reached marriage age. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that the extent to which polyandry retards land fragmentation will be clearer ten years hence when these children mature and marry.

Off-farm wage labor

As mentioned in Chapter two, difficult climatic and geographic conditions in rural areas like Dechen make it difficult to increase farm production even though villages are increasingly using chemical fertilizers and some new strains of seeds. In general, villagers in Dechen contend that the yield from 2 mu of land is barely enough for one person's basic subsistence. At the time of land division each person got only 2.1 or 2.2 mu. Thus, villagers started off close to the subsistence minimum at the time of decollectivization.

Data from single woman households supports this. Such households are living at the edge of self-sufficiency and their lives have not changed much for the better during the past 16 years. For example, they rarely buy luxury items such as rice, butter, meat, new clothing and new furniture. In addition, they have not built new houses or expanded their old houses. Consequently, Dechen villagers believe that the only way they can attain (and/or sustain) a higher standard of living, given the current conditions and rules is to have their households engage in diverse economic activities outside of farming. Included in these options is raising animals, working in the non-farm manual labor sector, and engaging in skilled crafts and in trade/business.

Since households are free to increase the number of animals they own through both natural reproduction and purchase in the market, one way that households try to improve their standard of living is by raising large number of animals. The additional products from these animals such as butter, meat and wool are mainly consumed by the household but this reduces the need to purchase these items. In addition, in some cases animals or animal skins are sold on the market to generate cash income or in exchange for other products.

However, raising more animals is not easy due to a shortage of pastureland in Dechen village and the consequent need to move animals to pastures in other areas and allocate a person to look after the herd. In general, from late April to late September, Dechen villagers gather their large livestock (such as dzo, yak, and horses) into several herds and send them to other counties to graze, paying a pasture fee of three yuan per animal. Since the herder has to travel several days to reach these pastures and then lives there alone taking care of the animals for roughly 5 months, villagers consider it is not

safe to send a female herder to such a faraway place. Consequently, if a Dechen household does not have enough male members to utilize one of them as a herder, they have to pay to leave their animals with another herder, for a substantial fee of 5.6 jin (equals to 4 yuan) of barley per livestock head per month. Consequently, only 20% of households in Dechen are involved in large-scale herding and it is mainly polyandrous households that maintain such herds. Thus, while 39% of polyandrous households were engaged in herding, no polygynous household and only 10% of monogamous households were.[2]

Table 6 – 6 reveals the domination of polyandrous households in the animal husbandry economy. Polyandrous/polygynandrous households that were in existence in 1980 to 1996 have increased the value of their animals by 24.7% since decollectivization whereas monogamous and polygynous households have seen the value of their animals decline.

[2] Other animals such as cows, sheep, and goats are herded in mountains surrounding the village by young children (and sometimes by adult males or females).

Table 6 - 6 Comparison of Animal Value Per Capita in Yuan in 1980 and in 1996 by Marital Type*

Marriage Type in 1996	# of Households	1980 Animal value in yuan		1996 Animal value in yuan	
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Polyandry/polygynandry	28	1337.9	248.2	1669.3	704.6
Monogamy †	37	1394.7	336.6	1322.4	568.1
Polygyny †	6	1384.6	492.9	959.9	413.9
Total	71	1371.4	316.5	1428.6	646.3

ANOVA of mean reduced animal value per capita,
*df = 2, F = 5.2, p < .05.
† p< .05 (Fisher's LSD) significantly different from polyandry/polygynandry.

Table 6 – 7 confirms the contrast and reveals a statistically significant difference in the mean value of animals by marital type in 1996 in all households.

Table 6 - 7 Comparison of Per Capita Mean Animal Value by Marital Type in 1996*

Marital Type	# of Households	Mean per capita animal value in yuan	S.D.	Range of per capita animal value in yuan
Polyandry/ Polygynandry	31	1634.3	711.1	500.0 – 3115.6
Monogamy †	42	1324.3	621.0	250.0 – 2940.0
Polygyny †	6	959.8	413.9	457.1 – 1460.0
Total	79	1418.3	669.1	250.0 – 3115.6

ANOVA of mean animal value per capita,
*df = 2, F = 3.7, p < .05.
† p< .05 (Fisher's LSD) significantly different from polyandry/polygynandry.

In addition to increasing animal husbandry, the development of the new (socialist) market economy in Tibet has led a number of Tibetans villagers to start new small scale businesses, particularly in villages that are close to cities and county seats. Dechen has not engaged in this business economy to any significant extent because it is relatively remotely located in the upper part of a valley. A few households tried to start small shops in the village but only one has succeeded. By and large, in the business realm, Dechen villagers nowadays prefer participating in a more traditional trading system that involves trade in mustard seed oil, a crop grown widely in this area. In this trading system, mustard oil from their own fields is first bartered with nomads in a neighboring county for animal by-products such as wool, butter, cheese and meat. These by-products are then exchanged for agricultural products in another faming area, after which the trader goes back to the nomad area to exchange these products for more nomad products. Each bartering circle takes 10 to 15 days traveling by horse or donkey cart. Traders typically make one to three trips a year (after the harvest). Historically, this kind of trade was done by the male head of the household for a number of reasons such as the danger of being attacked by robbers, the heavy work required to take care of the horses or donkeys, and the skills needed to barter effectively. Today, although the danger of bandits is gone, villagers still adhere to the tradition and this is a male activity.

The most common avenue for supplementary economic resources outside of farming is migrant wage labor. Dechen villagers engage in three kinds of outside wage labor: manual labor on construction projects (usually in urban areas), work as skilled craftsmen (e.g., in carpentry) and, for a very few males, work playing the traditional Tibetan lute in restaurants/clubs in Lhasa and Shigatse.

Work on various building sites and road construction projects outside of the village is considered the most suitable job for the majority of male and female villagers since one does not need to have a special skill. These are manual labor jobs. This work is normally done during the early summer after spring planting has ended. Most villagers return to the village in Fall in order to assist with the harvest.

At this time young men and young women (only unmarried daughters) travel to the cities and towns to search for work on construction projects. Typically, a group of villagers go together, but sometimes individuals go alone. Although both males and females engage in this work, in general, Dechen parents are somewhat reluctant to send their daughters since they fear they will get pregnant because construction projects bring together young people from all over Tibet. Consequently, unless there are no other male members available in the family and the family really needs cash income, daughters are not sent (and married young women are never sent).

Table 6 – 8 reveals that only 10 women (7%) engaged in off-farm wage labor and all of them were unmarried young girls from monogamous, polygynous and single person families who lacked male labor. In such cases, it is normal for the household to stop sending the unmarried daughter once a male becomes old enough to work. This pattern may change as contraception becomes more widespread, but at present it is mainly males who go to work for wages. However, it should also be noted that other factors favor sending males, namely, wages are higher for them, and construction contractors are said to prefer to hire male workers.

Table 6 - 8 Non-farm type and laborers by Marital Type and by Sex in 1996

	Monogamy		Polyandry/ polygynandry		Polygyny		Single		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Outside Wage laboring										
Households not Involved	15	35.7	3	9.7	1	16.7	8	61.5	27	29.3
Households Involved	27	64.3	28	90.3	5	83.3	5	38.5	65	70.7
#Males *	21		34		4		4		63	86.3
#Females**	7		0		2		1		10	13.7
Total	28		34		6		5		73	
Herding										
Households not involved	38	90.5	19	61.3	4	66.6	13	100.0	74	80.4
Households Involved	4	9.5	12	38.7	2	33.3	0	0	18	19.6
Male †	3		11		1		0		15	83.3
Female††	1		1		1		0		3	16.7
Total	4		12		2		0		18	
Trading										
Households not involved	21	50.0	3	9.7	4	66.7	13	100.0	41	44.6
Households Involved	21	50.0	28	90.3	2	33.3	0	0	51	55.4
Male‡	21		28		2		0		51	100.0
Female	0		0		0		0		0	0
Total	21		28		2		0		51	

* $x^2 = 26.4$, df = 6, $p < .05$; ** $x^2 = 8.5$, df = 3, $p < .05$.
† $x^2 = 13.5$, df = 3, $p < .05$; †† $x^2 = 4.0$, df = 3, $p > .05$.
‡ $x^2 = 33.1$, df = 3, $p < .05$.

The same domination of males in wage labor can be seen in the gender distribution of craft labor. In Dechen, skilled workers such as carpenters, blacksmiths, stonemasons,

and tailors were traditionally dominated by males and still are. Females predominate only in the occupations of weaving woolen cloth and rugs.

Consequently, for households to accomplish their goal of economic diversification they need labor over and above that which is needed to operate the farm and run the household, and that normally means more male labor. In fact, as Table 6 – 8 illustrates, 91% (129) of the individuals earning outside income were males. Chi Square tests in Table 6 – 8 also demonstrated a statistically significant difference between marital type and male workers in the three types of off-farm activities (wage laboring, herding, and trading activities). Consequently, fraternal polyandry is seen as the preferred strategy for households seeking to engage in the non-farm economy since it concentrate males in the household.

The data presented in Table 6 – 8 also reveal that polyandrous households have more members working at non-farm activities. 90.3% of polyandrous households had at least one person working for wages whereas only 64.3% of monogamous households did so. Similarly, for herding activities, 38.7% of polyandrous households were involved versus only 9.5 % of monogamous households did, and for trading and business, 90.3% of polyandrous households were engaged in this versus only 50% of monogamous households.

Table 6 – 9 Male Non-farm Income Earners in Households by Marriage Type in 1996*

Marital Type	# of Households	# of Males	Mean # of Males	S.D.	Range
Polyandry/polygynandry	31	73	2.4	0.9	1 – 4
Monogamy †	42	45	1.1	0.8	0 – 3
Polygyny †	6	7	1.2	1.0	0 – 3
Single †	13	4	0.3	0.5	0 – 1
Total	92	129	1.4	1.1	0 – 4

ANOVA of mean actual male worker per household,
*Df = 3, F = 24.0, $p < .05$ level (ANOVA).
† $p < .05$ (Fisher's LSD) significantly different from polyandry/polygynandry.

Table 6 – 9 examines the relationships between marital type and the actual number of male income earners. It reveals that polyandrous households have double the number of wage earners than either monogamous or polygynous households and that this difference is statistically significant. The data also revealed that of the households that had three persons working at non-farm activities, 78.6% were polyandrous compared to only 14.3% for monogamous households.

A key issue in assessing the utility of polyandry is whether polyandrous households earn more income from off-farm labor than monogamous and polygynous households. Table 6 – 10 presents these data demonstrating that polyandrous households earned 76.7 yuan more per capita (43%) than monogamous households and 171.7 yuan per capital (208%) more than polygynous households. Thus polyandrous households earn significantly more income.

Table 6 – 10 Income Per Capita (from Outside Wage Laboring, Trading and Herding) by Marital Type in 1996*

	# of HH	Mean Income per capita in yuan	S.D.	Range	Sig
Polyandry/polygynandry	31	254.3	130.6	41.7 – 642.9	
Monogamy †	42	177.6	175.8	0.0 – 833.3	.031
Polygyny †	6	82.6	55.6	0.0 – 157.1	.011
Single †	13	104.1	98.1	0.0 – 300	.003
Total	92	186.8	155.8	0.0 – 833.3	

ANOVA of mean income,
*Df = 3, F = 4.58, p< .05.
† p< .05 (Fisher's LSD) significantly different from polyandry/polygynandry.

Finally, polyandrous households have also fared much better in terms of overall economic status. Table 6 –11 reveals there is a statistically significant difference between marital type and socio-economic status[3]. 87.5% of the rich households in Dechen and 71.4% of the upper middle households are polyandrous/polygynandrous whereas only 8% of the poor and lower middle households are polyandrous/ polygynandrous. By contrast, only 2.4% of the rich households and 10% of the upper middle households are monogamous.

[3] Socio-economic strata were established through focus group interviews conducted after the main fieldwork during follow-up research in July to August of 1999.

Table 6 – 11 Socio-economic Status by Household Marriage Types of 1996*

		Monogamy	Polyandry/ polygynandry	Polygyny	Single	Total
Rich						
	N	1	7	0	0	8
		(2.4)	(22.6)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(8.7)
	%	12.5	87.5	0	0	100
Upper Middle						
	N	4	10	0	0	14
		(10.0)	(32.3)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(15.2)
	%	28.6	71.4	0	0	100
Middle						
	N	18	11	2	0	31
		(42.9)	(35.5)	(33.3)	(0.0)	(33.7)
	%	58.1	35.5	6.5	0	100
Lower Middle						
	N	14	2	3	7	26
		(33.3)	(6.5)	(50.0)	(53.9)	(28.3)
	%	53.9	7.7	11.5	26.9	100
Poor						
	N	5	1	1	6	13
		(11.9)	(3.2)	(16.7)	(46.2)	(14.1)
	%	38.5	7.7	7.7	46.2	100
Total	N	42	31	6	13	92
		(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)	(100)
	%	45.7	33.7	6.5	14.1	100

* $x^2 = 47.4$, df = 12, $p < .05$.

In conclusion, the revival of polyandry in rural Tibetan communities like Dechen is being generated by the advantages it offers villagers in the face of a new set of socio-economic forces created by decollectivization. By concentrating male labor in households, Dechen villagers believe that it is easier and faster to achieve economic well-being than is the case in monogamy. The data from Dechen support the validity of this view showing that polyandrous households have more males engaged in non-farm work, earn more non-farm income and are better off economically.

However, Tibetans do not see polyandry as a simple strategy and there is universal understanding that there are problems with regard to managing inter-personal relations in polyandrous households. In the next chapter, these problems and the manner in which individuals interact in polyandry will be examined.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INDIVIDUAL RELATIONS AND ATTITUDES REGARDING FRATERNAL POLYANDRY

As discussed in the last chapter, the combination of limited resources and population pressures has led families to increasingly adopt the traditional practice of fraternal polyandry to enhance their economic well-being since they believe it discourages division of their land while concentrating male labor in the household. This view of polyandry, moreover, was shown to have brought benefit to the families that have selected it. The revival of polyandry in Dechen, therefore, is being driven by materialistic and socio-economic forces much as it was in the old feudal society, albeit different ones.

However, managing households in which multiple brothers share a wife is considered by Tibetans to require care and attention, and in this chapter we will discuss how individuals think about and cope with issues such as inter-personal relationships, paternity, and sexuality.

Cultural Ideals for the Roles of Individuals in the Fraternal Polyandrous Marriages

In contemporary Tibet, marriages are mutually agreed upon by all parties to the marriage, even when parents arrange them, although in truth there is pressure on children to obey their parents and children find it very difficult to go against their wishes.

Brides are informed that a marriage will be polyandrous and will not be forced to participate in such a marriage if they object. Similarly, if a brother does not want to join a polyandrous marriage and share a wife with his brothers, he can refuse. He can, for example, ask to be sent as an adoptive bridegroom to another household or can set up a neolocal household. Or if he is already married polyandrously, he can split from the marriage union and set up a household of his own. Thus, sons have a range of choices in term of non-polyandrous marriage arrangements and Tibetan villagers have clear ideals about how individuals in such relations should act to ensure that a polyandrous marriage is sustained.

Dechen villagers state emphatically that to make polyandry work well harmonious relations between members of the household, especially strong solidarity between brothers, is essential. To achieve this rural Tibetans emphasize the importance of equality in treatment for all household members, and value highly household heads who manage their household so that this is achieved in practice. In trying to understand local attitudes and values about the role of individuals in polyandrous marriages, the members of 31 polyandrous/ polygynandrous households were asked what kind of behavior the eldest brother, younger brothers, wife and parents should exhibit. This was part of a broader in-depth interview that generally consisted of the household head, the wife and a younger husband.

In response to a question regarding the ideal for the eldest brother in a polyandrous marriage, 96.8% (30 cases) of the polyandrous households (including polygynandrous households) responded that he should be someone capable of directing/managing (t. skul) younger brothers effectively. Another 3.2% (1 cases)

mentioned that he should not be jealous of younger brothers sharing the wife and that he should have be even tempered. Regarding younger brothers, 71% (22 cases) stated that younger brothers should obey their eldest brother, and 29% (9 cases) responded that they should get along with other brothers in the fraternal polyandrous marriage. For polyandrous wives, 83.9% (26 cases) stated that she should treat all husbands equally so as to ensure that they all stay in the marriage/family. Another 16.1% (5 cases) stated that she should treat both her parents-in-laws and husbands equally. Finally, for parents in fraternal polyandrous households, 93.5% (29 cases) of the respondents said that parents should be able to educate their children (particularly their sons) as well as their daughter-in-law about their obligations and the values of family harmony. Another 6.5% (2 cases) responded that parents should treat all sons and daughter-in-law equally.

These responses highlight the villagers' concerns about the need for fairness and equality in maintaining polyandrous marriages. At the same time, they reveal that Tibetans believe that in order for polyandry to work, individuals need to fulfill different roles with unbalanced authority positions in the marriage, i.e., the younger brothers should be subordinate to the eldest. As was indicated earlier, the eldest brother becomes the household head taking authority from his father when he gets older. Villagers consider the role of the eldest brother critical with respect to managing successfully both the marriage and the household's affairs. He has the authority and power to arrange the household's livelihood and make decisions on family affairs. Furthermore, the eldest brother is the representative of the family in the public sphere.

When villagers say that the elder brother should be able to direct his younger brothers, they mean that he should have both technical and interpersonal skills. The elder

brother should have good knowledge about farming and herding, know how to budget the family's livelihood, be able to do trading and business, and be able to take the responsibility of managing the household. The eldest brother ideally must also maintain his position of authority in the household by earning the trust of his younger brothers so that they obey his direction. Such authority and trust is gained by his efficient use of the household's manpower, his public stature in the village, and most importantly, by treating the members of his family—his younger brothers, wife, children and any other kin members in the household—fairly. In particular, Dechen villagers emphasize the need for fair treatment toward the younger brothers with respect to sharing the wife, making work assignments, and distributing food and clothing.

On the other hand, villagers stress the younger brothers' subordinate position in the family. Younger brothers do not enjoy the same authority as the eldest brother does, and will never do so unless he dies and one of them assumes the household head position. In Tibetan culture it is widely believed that it is the eldest brother's responsibility to take care of his younger brothers. Conversely, it is the strong cultural expectation that younger siblings should obey the eldest brother's authority. This dependency between the eldest and younger siblings is usually built up long before their marriage, and generally it means that from youth the eldest performs heavy household chores and takes more household responsibilities while the younger brothers are assigned to do light tasks and take less responsibilities. Villagers generally state that sons are more precious than daughters, and the eldest son is even more precious than the younger sons. This practice psychologically builds an image for younger brothers while they are young that the eldest brother is the second most influential man in the family besides their father. Consequently, local norms

require that the younger brothers obey the eldest and depend on his care. In the end, they are expected to unconditionally accept his headship of the family. This ideal, in fact, is normally what occurs and as long as the eldest brother is alive and stays in the marriage, the younger brothers are always under his authority. However, as younger brothers mature, their obedience becomes more conditional on skillful management and fair treatment by the eldest brother and their joint wife.

People in Dechen also place great emphasis on the wife's supporting and mediating role in fraternal polyandrous marriages. As the wife of co-husbands and the mother of the co-husbands' children, she is expected to support the eldest husband as he exercises his authority and help him to retain the other husbands in the marriage by buffering tensions between the co-husbands and by treating all her husbands fairly in terms of sexuality, affection, food provision, and taking care of their children. In most responses, her interpersonal role is treated as being as important as her eldest husband's role because any favoritism she shows toward one of the husbands would create a potential risk for partition. Tibetan norms, therefore, consider that the wife should not openly show her preference toward a particular husband even if she has such a preference. The critical role of the wife is reflected in the local saying that if one sees a good fraternal polyandrous marriage that has lasted a long time it means there is a good wife. Polyandrous wives who can accomplish this are highly respected in the community.

The parents' role as educator and mediator is similar to that of parents in all households regardless of marital type. In polyandrous households, it is the parents' major task to make sure that the marriage is properly sustained. In day-to-day life, the parents normally try to give their sons and daughter-in-law as much privacy as possible, and in

cases where tensions and quarrels arise, they are expected to make every attempt to mediate fairly so that the sons and daughter-in-law will stay together. They are required to take steps to redress anything that might jeopardize the sons' marriage and the unity of the household.

In polyandrous households, there is no differentiation in term of foods and clothing among the members of the household. However, since the eldest brother often represents the family at important public and community activities such as weddings, funerals, religious rituals, and village ceremonies, he typically has better clothing to wear at public events. Other family members and the villagers at large do not think such treatment is unfair. On the contrary, they feel it is necessary because through such behavior the household will not lose face and will clearly show its economic strength. When the public praises the eldest brother as a model head-of-household, the whole household feels honored.

However, any misconduct and abusive behavior by the eldest brother is considered a tragedy for a polyandrous household and will most likely precipitate household fission. While not common, such misconduct by the eldest brother is not unknown, and sometimes individuals violate these basic norms and precipitate fission, as the following case illustrates.

> Nyima, the eldest son of a household, went to serve in the military at the age of 19 for five years. When he reached marriage age, he left the army giving the excuse that his parents were in poor health. His family had received 16.8 mu of land for 8 people during the land division and had 6 people living in the household when he returned (his parents, his two younger brothers and a sister).

Soon after returning, his parents arranged a polyandrous marriage for him and his two younger brothers. At the same time, his father passed the headship of the household to him. As is the custom, Nyima spent most of his time at home doing farm work and managing the household's affairs. His younger brother went to Shigatse city to engage in small business and the youngest son took care of the animals. For several years after their marriage, the brothers got along well and their living standard improved a lot. However, after they had three children (one son and two daughters), Nyima started drinking homemade beer heavily. He also began to treat his younger brothers unfairly because he was jealous of sharing the wife with them. The wife also breached local norms by showing more attention and affection to Nyima than to the other two younger husbands. Consequently, the two younger brothers felt mistreated and started arguing with him and challenging his work assignments. Furthermore, when the younger brother returned from Shigatse, he did not give all the profit he earned to the household. Nyima felt that his authority was threatened and that his two brothers were being disrespectful. Arguments continued, and although the parents attempted to act as a buffer to reduce the tension, advising Nyima to change, his drinking problems got worse and worse.

Once he got very drunk and beat a man from his neighborhood so severely that the man was hospitalized for almost one year. For this reason Nyima was jailed for over 10 days and his family had to pay all the victim's hospital costs and other penalties. This incident angered his family members but did not change

Nyima's abusive behavior. Finally, the quarrel between the brothers turned into physical fighting.

At this point, the family had to split up. The parents stood by the younger sons while the wife supported Nyima. They could not agree on how to divide the land, animals, house and other property mainly because Nyima's parents and younger brothers disagreed with his insistence that all property be divided equally between all family members. The parents felt that since Nyima was wrong and was leaving the main household he should get substantially less. The village committee and the xiang government were unable to mediate this domestic dispute, so it was finally referred to the Benam county people's court. It sent someone to the village and he settled the dispute. According to the final agreement, Nyima, the wife, and three of the four children (the two daughters and one younger son) set up their new household using the one side of main house that had three rooms. Nyima's parents, his two younger brothers, and one child (the 9 year old son) stayed together in the main house (with five rooms). With regards to property, Nyima (now having 5 in his household) got a little less than 3 people's share of land, animals, and other property. His parents and brothers (with 5 in the household) got more than five people's share.

Nyima was satisfied with the result since he felt he obtained almost what he had demanded. However, after the partition, his new family faced numerous difficulties, especially a shortage of labor, and their living standard decreased dramatically. On the other side, although his parents had to give more than they wanted, and although their living standard decreased slightly from what it had

been, they still had two sons actively working for the family and a young boy who would be able to play a role in a few years.

The most typical causes of dissatisfaction and fission in polyandrous marriages are situations where the eldest brother does not treat the younger brothers fairly or where the wife favors one or another of the brothers (as illustrated above). Of the 92 households in Dechen in 1996, 10 are the result of household partition. Among these cases, 9 involved fraternal polyandrous households and one a monogamous household. Four out of the 9 fraternal polyandry cases occurred when, like Nyima above, the oldest brother, the wife and children split off from rest of the household. In 3 of these cases, all the brothers, the wife and all children split from the parents when the wife did not get along with the mother-in-law. In yet another case, the younger brothers left with the wife, and in one case the wife and one of her children left the family. In all of these cases, individual personality conflicts were at the heart of the discord and division.

One factor that Tibetans feel increases the likelihood of conflict is substantial age variation between husbands and wife. In general, when parents select a bride for their sons they tend to pick a bride whose age is younger than the eldest son but older than the younger sons since this, it is felt, would make the interpersonal relations easier. This occurred in Dechen in 27 of 32 cases (84%). However, many factors go into selecting a bride including availability, and in Dechen in 5 out of 32 fraternal polyandrous marriages (16%), the wife was older than all of her co-husbands. In cases where the younger brothers are not mature enough to join the marriage at the time of their older brothers' marriage, the family may add him to the marriage when he matures, but depending on the

personality of the siblings and wife, the family may find other solutions such as sending him as a matrilocal bridegroom.

On average, the wife's age was 2.6 years younger than her first husband, and respectively 3.7 and 8.1 years older than the second and third husbands' ages. The age difference between the wife and the fourth and fifth husbands were more substantial—about 12 and 22 years on average (see Table 7 – 1). These data reveal one of the main problems Tibetans perceive in operationalizing polyandry, namely, that the more brothers who are included in the marriage the harder it is to sustain because of the very large differences in age. Tibetans expressed the view that the relations between the wife and her first and second husbands is usually closer than the relations between the wife and the third, forth and fifth husbands because of the age gap. In fact, at the start of the marriage when those younger brothers are physically and sexually immature, the wife treats them as members of the family instead of her husbands. When the immature husbands reach maturity, the wife is almost always over 30 years old. For example, in a marriage with five brothers, when the youngest brother reaches twenty years of age the wife will probably be in her mid forties. Because of this the younger husband might find her less attractive than a woman his own age. Dechen residents believe that the bigger the age gap that exists, the more dissatisfaction is felt by the younger brothers.

Table 7 - 1 Mean Age Differences Between Husbands and Wife's Ages in Fraternal Polyandry in 1996*

	# of husbands	Mean difference in years between the husband and wife	Range	
			younger	Older
First husband	30	+ 2.6	– 5.0	+ 23.0
Second husband	30	– 3.7	– 13.0	+ 3.0
Third husband	13	– 8.1	– 16.0	– 1.0
Fourth husband	3	– 12.0	– 15.0	– 9.0
Fifth husband	1	– 22.0	– 22.0	– 22.0

* Two bigenerational polyandrous marriages are excluded.

Table 7 – 2 reveals that there was also a substantial range of age differences between the brothers in the polyandrous marriages.

Table 7 - 2 Mean Age Differences in Age Between Younger Brothers and Eldest Brother in Fraternal Polyandry in 1996

	# of Brothers in Sample	Mean number of years younger than eldest brother	Range	
			Maximum # of years younger	Minimum # of years younger
Second Brother	30	6.27	– 20.00	– 2.00
Third Brother	13	9.15	– 17.00	– 4.00
Fourth Brother	3	12.00	– 13.00	– 10.00
Fifth Brother	1	23.00	– 23.00	– 23.00

* Tow bigenerational polyandrous marriages are excluded.

In addition to internal differences in age, there were also differences in education levels and a clear division of labor. The eldest brothers were traditionally considered more capable than younger brothers because when there was no school in the village in the old society, the special training the father gave his eldest son was important. At the present time, although the eldest brothers are still regarded as more capable in terms of farming and household management and have more education, the new education system has reduced the education gap among the brothers. For example, as Table 7 – 3 reveals, on average, the eldest brothers attended school for 3 years while the younger brothers averaged 2.5 years. The illiteracy rate for eldest and younger brothers are almost same, about 15%.

Table 7 - 3 Comparing Education Levels Between Individuals in Polyandrous and in Monogamous Marriages

Marriage Type		Number of Years in School							
		0 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 year	6 & more years	
Polyandry									Total
	First Husband								
	N	5	0	13	6	0	2	8	34
	%	14.7	0	38.2	17.6	0	5.9	23.5	100
	Second Husband								
	N	4	3	17	3	2	3	2	34
	%	11.8	8.8	50	8.8	5.9	8.8	5.9	100
	Third Husband								
	N	3	0	6	0	3	2	0	14
	%	21.4	0	42.9	0	21.4	14.3	0	100
	Fourth Husband								
	N	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	4
	%	25	0	50	0	25	0	0	100
	Fifth Husband								
	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	%	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	100
	Wife								
	N	25	3	4	2	2	0	0	36
	%	69.4	8.3	11.1	5.6	5.6	0	0	100
Monogamy									
	Husband								
	N	30	2	14	4	0	0	7	57
	%	52.6	3.5	24.6	7	0	0	12.3	100
	Wife								
	N	45	1	6	2	0	0	3	57
	%	78.9	1.8	10.5	3.5	0	0	5.3	100

With almost the same educational benefits and less responsibility in the household, younger brothers have more time and more energy to compete in the wage labor market. For example, in fraternal polyandrous households, 88.2% (30) of the younger brothers work at non-farm jobs for wages, but only 11.8% (4 males) of the eldest brothers do. Moreover, in order to become more competitive and generate more cash income, polyandrous families often train the younger brothers in crafts by arranging apprenticeships wherever teachers are available in the region. Thus, most skilled workers such as carpenters, stonemasons, and tailors are primarily younger brothers. Thus, of the skilled laborers, 75% (9 males) are younger brothers and 25% (3 males) are eldest brothers. Correspondingly, 90.9% (10 males) of herders are younger brothers and only 9.1% (1 male) are eldest brothers. However, as mentioned above, farming and trading tasks are dominated by the eldest brother. For example, 89.3% (25 males) of trading is done by eldest brothers, as are 86.2% of the farming tasks such as plowing, planting and selecting seeds. None of the polyandrously married women engage in outside wage labor.

These variations in the division of labor and education among members of the polyandrous households has shaped each individual's attitudes, values and way of thinking. The younger brothers generally are more experienced in crafts and wage earning occupations, and at the same time are more exposed to the outside urban life style. In contrast, the eldest brothers are more experienced with farming and traditional trading and village affairs. Since the shared wives are also engaged in domestic related chores, this means that the eldest brother and the joint wife are used to living in the village and to the village lifestyle. In most cases, therefore, they develop a close relationship since they spend most of their time in the village together.

All of these issues are potential tension spots in polyandrous families. When all such households were asked whether is it easier to practice polyandry now or in the past (before 1959), they thought it was easier in the past — 31.9% answered it was easier now and 44.7% stated it was easier in the past. Another 10.6% and 12.8% responded it was same or they were not sure about it. The reasons they provided clearly reflect the respondents' different concerns about various aspects of the different periods of time. Those who thought it was easier now explained that the government's policy of reallocating the land and animals to the individual households provided a good environment for families to improve their living standard through their own efforts. Thus, there is competition between the households to improve their standard of living, and villagers believe sons are more willing to share a wife together at present because of their economic aspirations. In the past, they argue, most households were landless serfs (dü-jung) so they had little motivation for polyandry.

On the other hand, those who said it was better in the past said that at that time it was easier for parents to control their children's marriage and their behavior, and the younger brothers commonly obeyed the eldest brother due to the poor living conditions and the absence of a school education system. Now with the availability of schooling and the opportunity of earning cash income in urban areas, the younger brother's eyes have been opened. They have become smarter and more helpful to the family than before, but at the same time they are losing their traditional family values. They see things differently and also manage things differently from the elder people's perspective. So it is hard for either parents to control their children or for brothers to get along with each other, and there is now a higher risk for household partition.

These perceptions from two different angles show that the new socio-economic change has created the grounds for practicing fraternal polyandry, but at the same time it has also created new obstacles and challenges regarding sustaining the inter-personal relationships that are key to maintaining this type of marriage. Brothers in polyandry have to weigh the costs and benefits of staying with the marriage, and it is the younger brothers who are most disadvantaged in this marital system since they are always under the authority of their elder brother. Nevertheless, after land reallocation, no younger brothers from polyandrous marriages have split and married a woman of their choice.

There are several factors that influence younger brothers to stick with polyandrous marriages. First, as mentioned earlier, is the fact that if one sets up a neolocal monogamous household it is quite difficult to reach an adequate standard of living due to the shortage of land, labor, income, and the difficulty of finding a site on which to build a house. In such cases, the younger brother has to stay at home to take care of farming and thus can not work at wage labor. It is, therefore, virtually impossible for him to achieve his previous living standard by depending on the small plot of land he obtained. Thus, until his sons grow up, marry polyandrously and expand the household income, he is likely to lead a life without affluence or luxuries (according to local standards).

But even if a younger brother decided to seek wage labor between plowing and harvest and leave the rest of the farming tasks to his wife, it is hard to do well economically because of the difficulty in securing good paying wage labor jobs. For Dechen villagers, their wage labor market is limited to Tibet. They are unable to go to mainland China in search of employment since they can not speak Chinese and they do

not have special skills to compete with thousands of better educated and skilled Chinese in the job market in urban China. Plus, rural Tibetans have little understanding of Chinese culture and contemporary norms. Even within Tibet, compared to the rest of China, there are relatively fewer economic opportunities in cities and towns and, in addition, a huge number of non-Tibetan migrant laborers have come to Tibet and compete with Tibetans in trade and wage labor. Those Han (Chinese) and Hui (Muslim) workers at all levels have advantages since they are more skilled and capitalized, and have more experience than Tibetans.

On the other hand, working at wage labor while a member of a polyandrous household gives younger brothers a great sense of freedom. They spend part of their income on purchasing better clothing for themselves and eating better foods in the restaurants and their sexual tension and dissatisfaction can be eased by having affairs with unmarried women they meet while working. Such behavior is tolerated by the villagers so long as the relationship does not cause him to break away from the joint family and so long as the extra-marital sexual relationships are not flaunted. At the same time, younger brothers' important input of cash income brings them respect from the senior members of the household. The eldest brother and the wife have to treat them well. So while the potential for household fission is always present, the norms for land inheritance and the limitations of non-farm sources of income, lead most younger brothers to remain in the household rather than leave and marry someone of their own choice.

Another source of discord that has been said to cause fission in polyandrous marriages is the attribution of paternity. Levine (1980; 1987) reported that in an ethnic

Tibetan area in N.W. Nepal, partition is "mostly due to men's desires to have children of their own" (1987:272). However, others scholars who have studied Tibetan polyandry state that paternity is not specified and all brothers consider all children as their own. Goldstein (1990) has suggested that the reason for Levine's deviant finding is that the group she studied are at the edge of the Nepalese culture zone and are using the Nepalese rather than the Tibetan system of inheritance. The Nepalese inheritance system is based on a *per stirpes* inheritance in which sons inherit based on their father. For example, if one brother is said to have fathered 3 sons and another, 1 son, the one son inherits half of the estate and the other three sons together inherit half. Thus, in this community paternity is allocated among the co-husbands and is a major concern. But this is the case nowhere in Tibet (or in other Tibetan areas such as Ladakh and Limi), and is also not the case in Dechen.

Paternity in Fraternal Polyandrous Marriages in Dechen

In fraternal polyandrous households in Dechen, neither co-husbands nor their wife/children distinguish the identity of the biological father or genitor. Nor are they interested in paternity. However, as in most areas in Tibet, they differentiate the co-husbands terminologically. Generally in Tibet, the eldest co-father is called "ba," the kinship term for "father" (t. pa') and the rest of the co-husbands are called "paternal uncle" (t. a gu) by all children produced in the marriage. This is the case even when it is known that the genitor of one child is a younger co-husband, for example, if the elder husband was on a trip when conception occurred. In Dechen, the eldest brother is also

called "ba" but the second co-husband is called by a non-standard term, "a-chog" (t. a cog). According to the villagers' interpretation, the meaning of "a-chog" is similar to paternal uncle. However, it is only used for the second oldest brother regardless of whether he is part of the marriage or not. This word can not be found in any existing Tibetan dictionaries. However, while the pronunciation of "a-chog" is very close to "a-cho" (t. a jo) which means an older brother or elder male of same generation, local people state that these two words are not same. Moreover, the third, forth and fifth brothers are all referred to as "a-chong" (t. a chung) which means "junior A-chog." Sometimes, they use "A-chong chongwa" (t. a chung chung ba) to refer to the forth and fifth brothers. This means the "junior of junior a-chog." The standard term for younger brothers in polyandrous marriages in other parts of Tibet, "A-gu" or father's brother (t. a khu), in Dechen refers only to monk brothers. In bi-generational polyandry (such as father and son, father's brother and father's son), the eldest husband is called "E-mi" (t. a mes) which is normally used to refer to father's father. The junior husband is called father ("ba"). Dechen, therefore, like other Tibetan communities terminologically distinguishes between the co-husbands, although in a somewhat more complicated fashion. The reason for this is unknown, but Dechen is like other Tibetan communities in that the terminological distinctions do not reflex biological paternity.

Several measurements were used to see if the co-husbands, wife and other members of the family identify the precise genitor of individual children. First, an attempt was made to draw a genealogy of each household by interviewing the members of the family. It was found that once brothers simultaneously marry and have sexual relations with their common wife, all of them were considered as joint fathers to all

children born by their wife. In other words, they would not specify a particular co-husband as the genitor of a specific child. This was true in bi-fraternal and tri-fraternal polyandrous where brothers were part of the marriage from the start. It was also true in cases where brothers in tri-fraternal, quartri-fraternal, and penta-fraternal polyandrous marriages were wed simultaneously but some older brothers had sexual relations with the common wife for some time before the younger brothers matured. All brothers in these instances were also considered as the fathers of all children born in the marriages. Thus, Dechen families as well as the public at large paid no attention to the paternity of fraternal polyandrous children.

The only deviance from this was in two cases of bi-fraternal polyandrous marriages where the eldest brother first married and had sexual relation with the wife, and then at some later point the younger brother joined the marriage. In these two cases, the eldest brother was referred to as the biological father and the younger brother was not. However, once the younger brother joined the marriage, both the eldest and younger brothers were regarded as joint fathers for the subsequent children. In this cases, joint fatherhood began from the onset of younger brother's sexual and marital relationship with the wife.

Second, this issue was explored via in-depth interviews with all polyandrous wives. Their comments followed the same pattern and attitudes that were described above. Women articulated that while it often was not complicated to calculate the child's genitor since all brothers were usually only at home at the same time during the busy farming season, none of them ever specified which husband was the real father (of each child). Thus, no brother had the exclusive right to claim to be the biological genitor of a

particular child or children, even though he knew he was the father. Women stated emphatically that both they and all their co-husbands also do not differentiate between their children in terms of daily treatment. Correspondingly, their children do not ask to have their own real father identified and treat the co-husbands the same. The only exception to this is the custom of children respecting their eldest father more than the younger father because he is the head of the family. Some also may express more closeness to a particular co-father but this is not due to the belief that he is their genitor. Rather it is due to relationships that evolve through day-to-day interactions.

Third, when one examines the history and process of household partitions, neither co-husbands nor their wife ever tried to claim the paternity of a child to gain more share of property. When children are divided (as is common and was the case in the Nyima example), the solution of which children go with whom is usually negotiated among the co-husbands and their wife. In general, Tibetan custom holds that daughters go with the wife and sons stay with the father, but in polyandrous households where some brothers and the wife leave, the norms are less clear. In two out of 9 polyandrous household that experienced partition, the eldest sons remained in the natal household. In the remaining cases, all children went with the partitioning mother and father(s).

In general, Chinese law states that inheritance in cases of household partition should be carried out according to a *per capita* basis among all the members of the family, but as indicated above, the natal family most always retains a larger than per capita share.

Dechen villagers, therefore, emphasize the social aspects of fatherhood (the pater role) rather than the biological one. They strongly held the opinion that if they identified

each child to their biological father this would create a potential risk in that the father might begin to treat his son with favoritism. For example, women in Dechen consistently state that all their children are parts of their flesh and they do not want some children to get better treatment than others. As one of them explained, "If I tell my husbands who is the real father of which child, the children's fathers may not get along with each other and may fight over their own children's interests." Thus, Dechen villagers feel that the advantage of joint social fatherhood is that it strengthens the brothers' solidarity by preventing quarrels and disagreements over the children. At the same time, their equal identity of paternity and their mutual social and moral responsibilities and obligations toward the children buffers other tensions among the brothers which helps to ultimately bind the brothers to the marriage. These ideals were born out ethnographically and none of the examples of polyandrous household partitions were caused either by a disagreement over differential treatment of children, or of a male feeling he was sacrificing his reproductive interests since he had not "fathered" a child of his own.

Thus, Levine's assertions of the importance of individual paternity were not supported by these data. In Dechen, as in all other Tibetan areas that have been examined, a lack of acknowledgement of individual paternity and a strong value on joint social fatherhood were found.

Sexuality in Fraternal Polyandry

In Dechen, brothers who marry polyandrously all have equal sexual rights to their wife. Similarly, the common wife has sexual rights to all her co-husbands. A balanced

and fair sexual relationship between the wife and her co-husbands is the core ideal for preventing jealousy among the husbands.

Ideally, women should distribute their sexual attentions fairly evenly amongst co-husbands so that no accusations of favoritism will occur. Tibetans believe that the main burden for this rests with the wife, who they feel has the power to control the marriage's sexual life. In actuality, we also found this to be the case. In interviews with 29 polyandrous married women regarding their sexual arrangements, 79.3% of them (23 cases) said that their sexual life was arranged by women themselves while 13.8% of them (4 cases) indicated that it was arranged by both wife and the eldest brother. Only two cases indicated that this was arranged by the co-husbands themselves. Thus, women play an important role in their sexual activities within the marriages and normally, but not always, determine when to have sex and with whom.

All polyandrous women indicated that at the time of the wedding ceremony the bride slept with the eldest husband the first night, the second night with the second husband, and the third night with the third husband, and so on. With arranged marriages, a custom called "pag nyel jar wa" (t. bag nyal sbyar ba) or "attaching to the bride's bed" is usually done. This involves offering barley beer and singing songs just before the bride and the groom sleep together as encouragement for their sexual engagement since this might be a first time for them to have sexual relations. If the marriage is not arranged, it is likely that the spouses already have had sexual activity before the wedding, and this custom might not be done. It is also common for a wife to place priority on sharing her bed with younger brothers when they return home from outside work or travel.

The organization of sleeping arrangements in polyandry is important. Most Dechen houses, especially polyandrous households, are two stories with human living quarters on the second floor and animals kept on the first floor. Normally, the wife has her own bedroom and each married brother also has his own room to sleep. Other family members including their children, parents, and other unmarried members sleep in the main family living room or under a balcony. Such housing arrangements make it convenient for the wife to arrange whom she spends the night with. At the same time, it provides privacy for their sexual life. In most cases, the wife visits one of her husband's rooms at night so there is little chance of confusion among the co-husbands. In a very few cases where the husbands visit the wife's room, husband's leave their boot strap on the doorknob as a warning to the others.

Of the 29 polyandrously married women, 89.7% of them (26 cases) state that when all co-husbands are present at home, they did not have intercourse with all the co-husbands on a single night. Instead, the wife said they had sexual relation with one particular husband on one night. However, 10.3% of the wives (3 cases) said that they had sexual relations with all her husbands on a single night. These three women are involved in bi-fraternal polyandrous marriages.

Although polyandrous marriages are positively considered, they are difficult to maintain and are not valued as an end in themselves. As Goldstein stated, "Although one might expect that Tibetans would have valued polyandry highly and have held it as the preferred form of marriage, this was not the case. Certainly, 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." (1971a: 73) This notion is explicitly expressed in the

views of the majority of polyandrous women in Dechen (including polygynandrous women). 72% (26 women) of these women answered that although the monogamous family may not have the advantages of manpower that polyandrous families do, the couples in monogamous marriages have less quarrels and difficulties with sexual aspects, and they have an easier time getting along with each other since there are only two persons in the marriage. One woman, for example, said, "Discord between a monogamous couple is usually less intense and their anger goes away easily in a short time. However, in a polyandrous marriage such anger will not easily go away and it take a much longer time to solve the discord simply because there are many people involved in the marriage." The other 28% (10 women) of the women said it was the same in both kinds of marriage and that ultimately it depended on the personal character and qualities of the spouses.

Similarly, when these same women were interviewed on more specific issues regarding whether being a polyandrous wife was more difficult physically and mentally compared to a monogamous wife, all women stated that physically the monogamous wife has a harder time than her counterpart because she has to work very hard inside (housework) and outside (farming) due to lack of male labor in the family. By contrast, a polyandrous wife does not have to perform a heavy labor, and there is always someone in the family who assists her with housework. However, with respect to psychological difficulties, 92% of the women (33) considered that the polyandrous wife has more stress than the monogamous wife because she has to carefully cope with several husbands with different characters while monogamous wives deal only with one husband. As one of them said, "More husbands means more hands in the family. I usually do not need to do

heavy labor or farming tasks because my husbands take care of them. However, I have to be very careful to treat all three husbands fairly since the family has a high hopes on me and they consider that whether all my husbands stay at home and the family is undivided really depend on my relationship with the husbands and my ability to treat them fairly." Thus, polyandrously married women clearly feel strain and stress because of the need to manage sexual and affective relations simultaneously with several brothers. On the other hand, 8% (3) stated that psychologically, monogamous wives had more difficulties than the polyandrous since most monogamous families were poorer than polyandrous ones and the monogamous wife had to worry more about the family's subsistence and well-being than the polyandrous wives.

Although woman try to moderate the relations of the co-husbands so that none of them have are jealousy, in cases where there is a sexual tension in the marriage, one strategy is to buffer the tensions by being permissive of extramarital sexual relations for the husband in question. It is generally tolerated by the wife if a younger co-husband has an affair with an unmarried woman of his own age or a widow. In rare cases the wife and the eldest husband will bring an additional woman into the marriage so that the younger husband(s) could have their sexual needs met. This is clearly seen as less than ideal but if the alternative is immediate partition, households will often try this first. For instance, Medok first married four husbands who were brothers. Her two younger husbands worked outside the village earning income and were five and eight years younger than she. They had three children together and the family became one of the richer households in the village. For some time her third husband had an affair with a young woman while he was working outside of the village. In the beginning, Medok did not show jealous nor

did she criticize his behavior. But when he expressed a desire to partition and set up his own neolocal household, she feared that there was a possibility that he would take another younger husband with him and thus would split the brothers in half. In order to keep all husband at home and to maintain their present economic status, Medok suggested to her oldest husband (head of household) to let her younger 23 year old sister join their marriage. Her sister's age was ideal—she was one year younger than the third husband and two years older than the fourth husband. After Medok and her oldest husband talked to the younger husbands, Medok talked to her sister and her parents about this and they all agreed and brought Medok's sister into their marriage. After this, the third husband did not demand to marry his girlfriend and to establish a new household of his own.

In conclusion, while there was no single fixed custom of how to manage the sexual and inter-personal relations in polyandrous marriages, there were general rules that involve the wife controlling sexual access and younger brothers deferring to the authority of their eldest brother. Most village Tibetans consider polyandrous marriages difficult to maintain, but also believe that they are powerful mechanisms for improving or sustaining economic well-being, and this is the reason they choose it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has examined the revival of polyandry in rural Tibet and has presented the first ethnographic data on polyandry collected in Tibet per se. The dissertation is based on extensive fieldwork in one agricultural village in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China. A multifaceted research strategy was employed using a mix of traditional anthropological methods such as in-depth and open-ended interviews, formal and informal interviews, key informants, focus group, participant observation, and demographic and economic censuses.

The study examined the revival of polyandry in a rural Tibetan community. Although polyandry was the preferred form of marriage for land-holding peasants in the traditional era, it was uncommon during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) when all land was collectively owned by communes. Less than 4% (3 households) of households in Dechen practiced fraternal polyandry during this period.

However, dissolution of communes and the return to households as land holding units of production has led to a revival of polyandry. At present, over 33.7% of households in the study village practice polyandry. That percentage increases to 58.5% when non-polyandrous households that were not in a position to marry polyandrously because they did not have two or more sons are excluded.

One of the central goals of the dissertation is to examine why villagers in Dechen are choosing polyandry in such numbers. The literature on polyandry in Tibetan society, as discussed in Chapter One, has two major alternative explanations for Tibetans' use of polyandry—the socio-economic versus the cultural. The socio-economic explanation of Tibetan polyandry sees polyandry as a mechanism for preventing the division of a household's land among sons and simultaneously a means of concentrating male labor in the household. It argues that although Tibetan consider polyandry a valued part of their culture, at the emic level, Tibetans view it as a means-end strategy that households used to maintain or increase their economic status, not something they practiced to fulfill a cultural imperative.

In contrast to this explanatory model, the cultural explanation of Tibetan polyandry contends that Tibetans practice polyandry because of the existence of a strong cultural value and preference for this form of marriage. Tibetans, therefore, utilize polyandry primarily because it is what their culture dictates.

The findings of this study reveal clearly that although polyandry is a valued Tibetan marriage custom, and would not exist if it were not, Tibetans practiced polyandry predominately for socio-economic not cultural reasons. Dechen villagers consider polyandry a preferred type of marriage because it facilitates maintaining or increasing their economic situation. A total of 77.2% of the respondents in the general survey answered that they consider fraternal polyandry the ideal type of marriage. By contrast, only 14.1% said monogamy, while another 8.7% responded they did not know. The reasons provided by Dechen villagers for considering fraternal polyandry the ideal form of marriage fell into three categories: concentration of male labor in households, greater

potential to exploit off-farm economic opportunities, and the preservation of a household's land intact across generations. In one form or another, these reasons were repeatedly mentioned in the general survey and whenever the topic came up in conversation. For example, when survey respondents who answered that polyandry was the ideal marriage form were asked "why," 88.7% (63 households) explicitly said that this type of marriage was beneficial to families because it allowed them to engage in various economic activities such as farming, herding, and working outside the village for cash income. Significantly, no one mentioned anything about a value of keeping brothers together, and the only "cultural" reason given was by 2.8% (2 households) who said that practicing fraternal polyandry was an old custom that would maintain the family's patrilineal line. Consequently, one of the important findings of this dissertation is that no evidence was found to support the "cultural" explanation of Tibetan polyandry as argued by Levine (see Chapter One). Tibetans in Dechen, the first Tibetan village to be studied ethnographically with respect to polyandry, clearly were not deciding to marry their sons polyandrously because of a deep-seated cultural value that prescribed that form of marriage. In fact, the study found no legends or folktales in Dechen that praise fraternal polyandry as an institution. To the contrary, the data from this study confirmed the "socio-economic" explanation of Tibetan polyandry (see Chapter One). Tibetans were utilizing polyandry because of materialistic, means-end calculations that they perceived made polyandry more advantageous to their household in terms of standard of living and stature in the locality.

Underlying the logic of this decision making process was a radical change in the socio-economic structure of rural life that occurred 20 years ago. At that time, communes

were ended and arable land was divided among the commune's member households which again became the basic unit of rural production. However, land was restricted as a fixed resource in the sense that the state banned any commerce in it. Households, therefore, did not own their land and could not buy or sell it. Rather they had long term usufruct rights to the land.

In this new situation, households faced serious problems. Increasing population decreased the amount of land per capita. In Dechen, for example, the population has increased 33% since decollectivization in 1980 while per capita land has decreased by 24%. With no way to obtain more land, families have begun to utilize a number of compensatory strategies. One such mechanism involved a return to a traditional emphasis on the primacy of the main household in inheritance. Parents now actively try to keep their household's land intact across generations by not giving children who leave the family a share in land, or if they give land, less than an equal share. Another mechanism they have emphasized is sending household members (usually males) to engage in non-farm wage labor for part of the year. To facilitate both of these strategies, fraternal polyandry is being selected by households with two or more sons since villagers consider this an ideal way to avoid the issue of dividing land between sons when they marry while at the same time concentrating male labor in the household so that one or more males can be sent to work for wages. Thus, the new household responsibility system created structural conditions that acted in concert with increasing population and inflation and made fraternal polyandry the preferred marriage type.

The study also examined the extent to which fraternal polyandry actually affords households the socio-economic advantages they claim for it. The study found that

polyandry was, in fact, economically more efficacious than monogamy and polygyny. Households that practiced polyandry had significantly more male members than other types of marriage and had significantly more males earning off-farm wages. Such households also had a higher total value of animals owned, and critically, had significantly higher per capita income. Polyandrous households had 43.2% higher income than monogamous marriages and 207.8% higher income than polygynous marriages. Moreover, the study found that 54.8% of polyandrous households were in the upper middle and wealthy social strata (according to local classifications) whereas only 11.9% of monogamous households and none of the polygynous households were. By contrast, only 9.7% of polyandrous households were in the poor and lower middle social strata while 45.2% of monogamous and 66.7% of polygynous households were ranked in these. Thus, for the first time in the literature, this study has empirically demonstrated that Tibetan villagers' understanding of the advantages of polyandry is borne out by the actual data.

The study also addressed and shed new light on another important controversy in the anthropological literature on polyandry, namely, how polyandrously married Tibetans view paternity. In fraternal polyandrous households in Dechen, members are not interested in discussing or speculating about paternity and neither the co-husbands, the wife nor the children distinguish the identity of a biological father or genitor. Over and above formal and informal interviews and discussions, several methods and types of data were used to examine this question. First, an attempt was made to draw a genealogy of each household by interviewing the members of the family. This method found that once brothers simultaneously marry and have sexual relations with their common wife, all of

them are considered as joint fathers to all children born by their wife. Consequently, family members would not specify a particular co-husband as the reputed genitor of a specific child. This was true in bi-fraternal and tri-fraternal polyandrous marriages where brothers were part of the marriage from the start. And with the exception of two cases, was also true in marriages where brothers in tri-fraternal, quatra-fraternal, and penta-fraternal polyandrous marriages were wed simultaneously but the older brothers had sexual relations with the common wife for some time before the younger brothers matured. In the other two instances, the younger brothers were only considered the father for children born after they joined the marriage sexually.

Similarly, in no cases where partition of a polyandrous households occurred did any of the brothers (or wife) ever raise the issue of paternity in deciding which children should go to the new household and which should stay in the original one. Thus, Dechen villagers paid no attention to the paternity of fraternal polyandrous children and children did not identify which of the co-husbands was their reputed biological father.

These findings contradict the conclusion of Levine (1980; 1987) who reported that in an ethnic Tibetan area in N.W. Nepal, partition in fraternal polyandrous families is "mostly due to men's desires to have children of their own." (1987: 272). Rather, it reinforces others scholars such as Goldstein (1971a; 1976; 1990) whose data revealed that paternity was not specified and all brothers consider all children as their own.

Another major contribution of this dissertation is its examination of the internal relations among members of polyandrous households. The study elicited villagers attitudes and opinions and found that villagers clearly considered polyandry a complex form of marriage that was more difficult to sustain than monogamy. All considered that

the key responsibility for managing relationships in successful polyandrous marriages fell on the eldest son and the wife.

Although there was a strong value of fairness between co-spouses, a key feature of polyandrous marriages was a clear authority structure in which younger brothers were always under the authority of the eldest brother who functioned as household head. So long as the eldest brother stayed in the natal household, the position of his headship remained unchanged and there was no chance for younger brothers to change their status in the household. The household's well-being, therefore, was primarily the responsibility of the eldest brother. The public as well as members of the household attributed the success and failure of improving a household's living standard to his skill and capability. However, the elder brother also was obligated to treat his younger brother and other household members fairly, and failure to do so was considered grounds for partition.

The study also revealed that villagers considered the role of the wife essential to the success of polyandry. Whether brothers remained within polyandrous marriages depended heavily on the wife's ability to treat all her husbands equally with respect to affection and sexual access. Since she was dealing with several husbands and various personalities and different ages, a polyandrous wife had far more pressures than did her monogamous counterparts. Villagers recognized this and believe that because of this couples in monogamous marriages were likely to have less quarrels and have an easier time getting along with each other than those in polyandrous marriages. Consequently, polyandrous wives who were able to maintain tranquil relations in their family were highly respected and valued. Tibetans in Dechen and elsewhere do not practice polyandry because it is simple or easy. They choose it because it is beneficial.

Finally, the study also expanded Goldstein's (1976) theory of the fragility of Tibetan polyandry. Because it is fundamentally seen by Tibetans as a means to an end, changes in the socio-economic matrix in which polyandry exists can rapidly decrease the prevalence of polyandry. For example, Goldstein cited the case of a Tibetan refugee camp in India where land was handed out on an individual basis for the life of each person. At death, the land reverted to the community and was reallocated to individuals born after land division. Thus, the land conservation functions of polyandry were not useful. On top of this, labor needs in the refugee camp were also low since plowing and threshing were all done by machine, and, of course, there were no feudal corvèe labor taxes as in the old society. Moreover, Tibetans were also prohibited from engaging in business or trade. Consequently, despite the fact that only 5-6 years had passed since the refugees had fled Tibet where polyandry had been the preferred marital type for land-holding households, now no new marriages chose fraternal polyandry. Goldstein saw similar transformations occurring in Tibetan areas in Ladakh and China (under communes) and thus was pessimistic about the future of Tibetan polyandry.

This study supports this theory of the susceptibility of polyandry in Tibetan society to socio-economic changes but expands it to show that changes in the socio-economic environment not only lead to a decrease or discontinuation of polyandry but can also quickly lead to increases in polyandry if the socio-economic conditions shift to make it be perceived as useful. That is what the study found to have happened in Dechen following decollectivization.

In summation, the study found that despite the illegality of polyandry in the People's Republic of China, polyandry has made a remarkable comeback because it is

seen by villagers as an ideal strategy for giving households competitive economic advantage in the post-commune era. Because of this, local officials have not tried to forcefully prohibit polyandry. They understand the advantages it conveys to villagers facing serious structural problems and are well aware of how it helps households to improve their living standard and overcome poverty. And while there certainly is criticism of polyandry by some Autonomous Region-level government officials and the media where it has been labeled as a "backward" marriage form, for the present, it has grown in importance and is now the preferred form of rural marriage.

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