

Tibetan Transitions

Historical and Contemporary
Perspectives on Fertility, Family Planning,
and Demographic Change

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CHAPTER THREE

POLYANDRY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: LAND TENURE, MARRIAGE, AND FERTILITY IN HISTORICAL KYIRONG

Introduction to Kyirong

Kyirong lies at the border between Tibet and Nepal in what is today the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China. Unlike most Tibetans who inhabit the high and arid Tibetan Plateau, the people of Kyirong live on the southern slope of the Himalayas in one of the few river valleys that penetrates the massive Himalayan barrier. It is a lush, thickly forested area that reminded one foreign visitor of Switzerland (Harrer 1953). Dawa Dragpa, formerly a local official from Gyeypug village in Kyirong, described the area in the following terms:

Regarding the name of the place known as Kyirong, it is famous for being a pleasant village situated in [the region called] Mangyul, and hence it came to be known as Kyirong [‘Pleasant Village’]. Kyirong extends from the border with Nepal in the south to Dzongga in the north. It takes two days by horse and one on foot to traverse [everything] between the rocky soil [i.e., the Tibetan Plateau] and the realm of darkness [i.e. the deep valleys of Nepal]. Travelling from Genyen Leru [a sacred mountain] in the east to Jowo Lundrup [a sacred mountain] in the west takes about four days by horse. Therefore, from south to north and from east to west the area of Kyirong District would take from 12 to 14 days to cover by horse. Within that area live about 10,000 people, including subjects of the government, the aristocracy, and religious estates. (Dawa Dragpa 1997)

In Tibetan religious history Kyirong is renowned as a place frequented by great saints, including Guru Rinpoche, Atisha, Padampa Sangye, and Milarepa (Aufschnaiter 1976). The town of Kyirong is particularly well-known for the Pagpawati temple that used to house a revered statue of Buddha (Ehrhard 2004). In addition, the landscape is dotted with smaller temples, hermitages, and pilgrimage sites as well as one relatively large celibate monastery, Tashi Samtenling (see Aufschnaiter 1976; Schuh 1988; Dawa Dragpa 1997; Ehrhard 2004).

Following the Fifth Dalai Lama’s consolidation of political power in Central Tibet during the latter half of the seventeenth century, Kyirong became a *dzong* (*rdzong*; district level administrative unit) under

the Tibetan government based in Lhasa. More importantly, because Nepal held a monopoly over most trans-Himalayan trade between Tibet and South Asia, Kyirong became an especially strategic locale due to its close proximity to Kathmandu. As a result, kingdoms based in Gorkha and Kathmandu often laid claim to Kyirong from the 1630s to the 1850s (Stiller 1975; Uprety 1980; Shakabpa 1984). Two wars with Nepal proved especially disruptive. The first involved a dispute over Nepal's minting of Tibetan currency, which led to the outbreak of hostilities between the two countries. In 1788 Kyirong was occupied by a Gorkha force that after several battles was pushed back to Kathmandu with the help of Tibet's Manchu allies in 1792 (Stiller 1975, 204–206). The second war concerned trade issues and commenced in 1855 (Shakabpa 1984, 181–182; Sever 1993, 88–91, 1996, 172–175). Nepali troops under Jang Bahadur Shah once again occupied some border areas in southern Tibet, including Kyirong. Nepal held a long-standing defense objective of securing territory up to the Himalayan watershed (Sever 1993, 89) and believed that Kyirong was part of its territory (Rana 1980, 172–191). Through a series of negotiations Nepal eventually withdrew in exchange for monetary compensations and trade privileges (Uprety 1980, 71–81). Kyirong remained a vital station in trans-Himalayan exchange until the British in India broke Nepal's monopoly over commerce with Tibet by opening a new trade route through Sikkim in the late 1800s. As a consequence, the volume of goods that flowed through Kyirong diminished greatly along with Kyirong's prominent geopolitical position.

The situation in Kyirong changed dramatically in the 1950s when communist China asserted control over Tibet. After a failed uprising against Chinese authority in 1959, the Tibetan administration in Lhasa collapsed and the Dalai Lama fled to India. The ensuing turmoil left Kyirong relatively unscathed; after all, it was remotely situated from the centers of power and conflict. According to oral accounts, families in Kyirong hedged their bets during the early years of Chinese rule. People sometimes responded to news that Chinese soldiers were approaching by moving their cattle across the border into Nepal—where they remained until word came that the coast was clear. Eventually China imposed more direct control over Kyirong, commenced land reforms, and persecuted the local elite. With the onset of China's Cultural Revolution, religious institutions came under attack as well; many were sacked. By the late 1960s a large percentage of Kyirong's residents had fled across the border into Nepal.

Today the people of Kyirong are dispersed. Many remained in their homeland, especially the poor who were the primary beneficiaries of land reform. Among those who left, some still live in refugee camps around Shebrubensi, Nepal, from where they can clearly see the mountains that tower over their natal villages. Others settled in Kathmandu or continued onward to India. More recently some have moved to the USA and Canada. Despite being scattered across the globe, the people of Kyirong maintain contact with each other and preserve a strong sense of their regional identity.

Administering the Domain of Historical Tibet

Land Tenure and Land Settlements

Mongol overlords undertook the first census of Tibet in 1268 (Petech 1980). Under Khubilai Khan, who ruled over China and Tibet from 1260 to 1295, the Mongols sought to enumerate their subjects for the purpose of levying taxes. Although they may have planned subsequent censuses, only the 1268 one was completed (Petech 1980, 237). The Mongol's basic unit of enumeration was the household (*hor dud*, literally "Mongol smoke"), which consisted of,

[A] house with at least six pillars supporting the roof; a strip of land sufficient for sowing twelve bushels (*khal*) of Mongol seed (*hor son*; probably referring to Mongol unit of measuring grain); husband, wife and children with male and female attendants, six in all; three plowing bullocks; two goats and four sheep. (Petech 1980, 234)

Petech interprets this description to represent the typical peasant farming family. The Mongol census counted 37,203 households in Central Tibet (Ütsang, Ngari, and Yardrog). Using six members as the average size of a household, as stipulated in the above description, Petech estimates 223,000 people as the total population for Tibet at that time (Petech 1980, 234). Based on the omissions of large geographical areas and nomads, among others, Goldstein (1981) reasons that the Tibetan population must have been closer to one million. Unfortunately, further details of the census do not survive, so the number cannot be conclusively determined.

Mongol control over Tibet lasted until 1368. The next centralized administration arose in the seventeenth century when Ngawang Lob-sang Gyatso (1617–1682), the Fifth Dalai Lama, unified much of the

Tibetan-speaking world with the military support of his Mongol ally Gushri Khan (Shakabpa 1984, 100–124; Snellgrove and Richardson 1980, 177–203). He appointed ministers to form a new government known as Ganden Phodrang, named after his palace at Drepung Monastery outside of Lhasa. He also sent officials to Eastern Tibet to collect taxes and census the population (Shakabpa 1984, 111–113; Dungkar 1991, 72–73), and ordered the collection of data on monasteries and their estates (see Dungkar 1991, 73–76).

In the late 1600s, a period of chaos followed the announcement of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death. By the 1720s, the Manchus, who had established the Qing Dynasty in China, restored order in Tibet and reorganized the Tibetan administration. Although Tibet was initially ruled through Manchu representatives, by 1751 the Dalai Lamas once again assumed temporal control over the country (Petech 1973, 17; Dungkar 1991, 86–87). Just prior to that time the government formalized a land tenure system that remained intact until 1959. Areas under Lhasa's jurisdiction were divided into districts (*khul*, commonly referred to as dzong), which had a fort (also called dzong) that served as district headquarters (Petech 1973, 12). However, the government was not the only landlord in Tibet; it granted land tenure privileges to monasteries and the nobility who were entitled to collect their own taxes (Surkhang 1986). Each district was therefore comprised of a combination of three estates: government estates (*gzhung gzhis*), aristocratic estates (*sger gzhis*), and monastic estates (*chos gzhis*). Most of Tibet's people were classified as *miser* (*mi ser*): legally bound subjects of whichever estate held the land they farmed. These subjects incurred the burden of supporting monasteries, lords, and the Tibetan government through an onerous tax system, described in more detail below.

The Iron-Monkey [Year] Land Settlement (*lCags spre zhib gzhung*) of 1740 documented the amount of taxable land held by the Tibetan government (Surkhang 1966). The basic unit of taxation is the *kang* (*rkang*), a measurement of land “for which one full tax unit had to be paid” (Goldstein 2001, 36). A tax unit refers to a set of obligations (e.g., grain tax and corvée labor) that a household had to fulfill in order to retain the right to till an estate's land. Due to the expansion of land placed under cultivation the Iron-Monkey [Year] Land Settlement was amended in 1830. The amendment, titled the Iron-Tiger [Year] Land Settlement (*lCags stag zhib gzhung*), has been republished in its entirety (Yeshe Tsultrim et al. 1989). Each district has a separate entry in this document. From this we know that in 1830 Kyirong District contained

approximately 432 kang of government land. In addition, about 42 kang of land was held in private estates (*sger gzhiś*).

Government Administration in Kyirong

The central government in Lhasa entrusted the administration of each district to a *dzongpön* (*rdzong dpon*, District Commissioner), a position held jointly by a lay official (*shod drung*) and a monk official (*rtse drung*). Lay commissioners were drawn from the country's hereditary aristocracy, whereas monk officials were drawn primarily from the three large monasteries of Sera, Drepung, and Ganden (for more details, see Goldstein 1989, 6–10). They held three-year terms of appointment that could be renewed (Petech 1973, 13).

The principle town of Kyirong District, also called Kyirong, functioned as district headquarters. There were two forts in the town: the lay dzongpön inhabited the Eastern Fort while the monk dzongpön inhabited the Western Fort. A retinue of dzong servants (*rdzong gyog*) accompanied each dzongpön, including a chamberlain (*gzim dpon*), a secretary (*drung yig*), a security guard (*sgo gnyer*), a cook (*ma byan*), kitchen and household helpers (*gnyer pa*), a groom (*rtā pa*), and a man in charge of the pack animals (*mdzo pa*).

Most elderly people from Kyirong retain fond memories of Dragtönpa, the lay dzongpön during the 1950s. He is remembered as a fair-minded and capable administrator whose popularity was partially due to his willingness to provide rudimentary education to some children in Kyirong. He charged no tuition for this informal school. Parents only had to supply materials and food. In contrast, Dragtönpa's clerical counterpart, named Öpel, was summarily dismissed from office due to behavior unbecoming of a monk. The 1958 household register informs us,

During the transfer and at the time of working on the register, as per order, lay official Dragtönpa alone had to take the responsibility of the work, because the monk official Öpel was demoted in the Fire-Bird Year [1957].

Former Kyirong residents stated that he was dismissed because of his illicit relationship with a local woman. Their account is confirmed in the memoirs of a monk official's assistant who worked in Kyirong at the time, and who documented Öpel's flagrant corruption (Tashi Kedrup 1998, 61–68). Offended villagers petitioned the central authorities in

Lhasa, who ultimately relieved Öpel of his duties following an investigation. Snellgrove and Richardson write of this event,

We have the recent case of a monk-official at sKyid-grong [Kyirong], appointed for the usual three years, but whose behavior was so outrageous that within twelve months the people had petitioned to Lhasa and secured his replacement. (1980, 230)

Kyirong District was subdivided into eight administrative units called *dingwog* (*lding 'og*). Four leaders represented each dingwog. The highest position, *dingpön* (*lding dpon*), was held on a rotating basis with the three other local representatives who were known as *tümi* (*'thus-mi*). None of these local officials drew a government salary. Thirty-nine dingpön and *tümi* can be identified in the 1958 household register. All were males ranging in age from 29 to 77 with a mean age of 52. These men generally came from prestigious families, had knowledge of local laws, and were respected by fellow villagers. Although literacy was a preferred attribute for local officials, it was not always possible to find men who were both able to read and willing to take on the responsibilities of the job. According to one woman's recollections,

My father was the only man in our household, so he had a lot of work to do. Although he did not know how to write, he had a very pure heart so people wanted him to be dingpön. A letter was sent to the dzongpön saying that he should be the dingpön. My father said, "I am the only adult male in the household. I do not have an elder brother or younger brother with me, nobody to share the work. I am ignorant; I do not know how to write. I do not want to become dingpön." But they refused his pleas. They told him he had to do it. He had no chance to refuse the position. Poor father, afterwards he had difficulty paying his taxes.

The dingpön's primary responsibility was to act as an intermediary between the villagers and the District Commissioner. He mediated disputes, referred cases to the dzongpön when mediation failed, assured that taxes were collected and delivered to the dzong in a timely fashion, and collected the raw data for the compilation of the household register. At tax time a dingpön could act as a character witnesses for a constituent who had problems meeting his annual assessments. According to one man's recollection of the time when taxes came due,

Everybody would have to go to the dzong wearing nice clothing. Some went on horse, some on foot. The *tümi* would ride proudly upon their horses with the dingpön and genpo in the middle. When we arrived at the dzong they [the dzong officials] would check the barley to see whether

it was good or bad. They would say to some people, “What is this? This is not good barley!” When such trouble arose, the dingpön would rise to defend the person and say, “He is poor and does not have much land. His land is not good; he was unable to plant enough [grain].”

Taxation and Social Stratification in Kyirong

Kyirong society was divided into three distinct classes of people (*rig*): hereditary lamas, commoners, and those who were marginalized based on their hereditary occupations (e.g., butchers and blacksmiths). One person explained the hierarchy in the following terms:

The highest rig was Labrang [*bla brang*, literally palace, in this case a term that connotes a lineage of married lamas]. They were different from us; they were more pure. Blacksmiths were considered polluted because they worked with iron. They could not marry with us, enter our houses, or drink from our cups, and we could not eat food from their hands. All of us in the middle were the same rig, we could drink from the same cup.

The above statement reflects Tibetan purity concepts; those of the same rig are able to share eating and drinking implements because they are ‘of the same mouth’ (*kha gcig pa*). Blacksmiths bore the stigma of impurity because of their occupation, and therefore were prohibited from engaging in many of the social interactions that commoners took for granted.

The government distinguished most commoners according to their status as subjects (*mi ser*, which has also been glossed as serfs, see Goldstein 1986). Those who held a formal document referred to as a *treten* (*khral rten*; tax basis) were called taxpayers (*khral pa*). A household holding a *treten* retained the heritable right to farm the amount of land specified in its land tenure document, and could only lose that right if it failed to fulfill the concomitant tax obligations. Those tax obligations ranged from relinquishing a percentage of the grain harvested on the government’s land to making a household member available for a set number of days of corvée labor (Surkhang 1966, 1986; Goldstein 1971a; Dargyay 1982).

Most taxpayer households in Kyirong identified themselves by house names. The wealthier ones typically had names to designate their high status, such as Lower Wealthy (‘Bar ’og; in this case Lower refers to its location relative to other houses in the village). Less established households bear names that refer to their comparatively recent origins such as New Taxpayer (Khral gсар) and New Household (Khyim gсар).

Some house names are descriptive, alluding to their geographical setting, for example Ridge Top (Sgang thog) and Solitary Household (Khyim rkyang). Other names refer to some physical attribute of the house, for example Slate House (G.ya' khang), and perhaps the most famous house in Kyirong, White House (Khang dkar). According to a former resident of this house, the name originated in the following manner:

Originally the name was not White House (Khang dkar), but White Meadow (Spang dkar). In the past the village of Dra was spread out over a wide area encompassing much forest. The houses were situated within the forest. The name White Meadow was given to this place by Atisha [an Indian monk (980 to 1052) who spent much time in Tibet during the eleventh century.] He came to Kyirong and stayed at a place called Ney, near Samtenling Monastery. Then he came to Dra where he gave a sermon at a place called Chökor, located a bit above the village. We live in the lower part of the village. There was a small path through the forest within the village. When Atisha came down this small path he emerged from the forest into a small meadow, White Meadow. Atisha stayed there and thought that it was a good place to establish a village. So our house was built upon White Meadow. At one point in the past many people died within our house. Each time someone died the house would be white-washed, so eventually the name changed to White House.

In addition to taxpayers, a large proportion of the population consisted of landless agricultural workers known as *düchungba* (*dud chung ba*, small householders). On the one hand these people had few if any tax obligations; on the other hand they had no long-term security associated with land tenure. Some small householders paid an annual fee to their lord in exchange for the right to move elsewhere and as such were classified as 'human lease' (*mi bogs*) (Goldstein 1971a, 1971b; 1986). However, most were tied to a specific estate and supported themselves by working for taxpayer households in exchange for a daily allowance of food. One former *düchungba* spoke of her precarious existence,

Life was difficult since we did not have fields. After taxpayer households had harvested their potato fields, we would go dig for whatever we could find. We would excavate the potatoes and radishes that had been left behind.

Düchungba could also lease land from taxpayer households. Payment was arranged on a case by case basis. Usually the small householders were only given marginal fields to till. Sometimes they incurred other obligations in lieu of rent. According to one former taxpayer,

We had a lot of land, so we would lease some to düchungba. We did not take any payment. They kept whatever they harvested. But when we needed workers for our own fields they would have to come and work for us for a few days. We would not have to pay them salaries.

Although economically interdependent, relations between taxpayers and düchungba were often strained. Taxpayers viewed small householders as being free and unfettered because they incurred no tax obligations, while small householders complained that taxpayers did not pay adequate compensation for their labor. While taxpayers strived to retain their position in society, düchungba looked for opportunities to ascend the social hierarchy. For example, in Kyirong there was an outpost near the border with Nepal called Mam, a place where government representatives would stay to monitor trade. Every few years the government selected a düchungba family to reside there and till the land. If the head of that family managed the property well, then he would be in the position to petition the government to become a taxpayer if a land lease became available. That could happen if a taxpayer household defaulted on its tax obligations, in which case its lease would be given to another family, referred to as a 'substitute' (*tshab*). Or it could happen if a taxpayer family failed to produce offspring. For example, one household in Langchu was known as New Taxpayer (Khral gsar). According to a former resident of this village, the previous title-holders 'had their lineage severed' (*mi rgyud chad*), meaning they had no heir. As a result this household's land deed was passed along to a düchungba family who the government reclassified as taxpayers.

In summary, although one's rig was determined at birth and was immutable, a degree of social mobility was possible within the commoner stratum. Much pressure was placed on taxpayer households to meet their annual tax obligations. Failure to do so could result in loss of their land holdings, a punishment that relegated them to düchungba status. Düchungba who had proven their worth could then be rewarded by the government through the granting of these delinquent properties. Each instance of upward mobility to taxpayer status was thereby predicated on a case of downward mobility to düchungba status.

Kyirong's 1958 Household Register

As previously mentioned, the dzongpön (District Commissioner) of each district was required to keep careful records of the taxpaying subjects under his jurisdiction. To accomplish this duty, when a new

commissioner was appointed the outgoing official conducted a census of his domain (Surkhang 1966). The technical term for this procedure was *Gotra Temgen* (*sgo khra them gan*). Henceforth, I will refer to the resulting document as a household register, since it literally means a counting of households for tax purposes.¹ According to a former resident of Kyirong,

A household register lists how many people there are, how many have died, how many were born. It was made by the dingpön of our own village. He would not go to every house, but would call us to his home where he would record each household's residents. Then the dingpön had to go to the dzong where they would compose a household register. They would calculate how many people were born, how many had died, and how many were alive.

According to this account, each dingpön would compile the raw data on his constituents and then gather at district headquarters to collate the information into a single document. Kyirong's 1958 household register records the names of 2,846 people living in 30 villages. Since one person was enumerated twice, the actual number of individuals is 2,845. This tally only includes those households and individuals who were classified as government subjects, so it does not comprise the entire population of Kyirong District for the simple reason that not all residents were government subjects. Those who are not listed include subjects of various monasteries that held private estates in the region, monks and nuns of those monasteries, outcastes such as blacksmiths and butchers, and Nepali citizens who resided in Kyirong for trade purposes.

One answer to the question of why the government kept detailed demographic records is that it had a vested interest in maintaining control over its subjects. The tripartite land tenure system meant that every commoner was beholden to either a government, monastic, or aristocratic estate. Because a village's landholdings were often comprised of fields belonging to two or more estates, government taxpayers typically lived side by side with the subjects of a monastery or a nobleman. Complications arose when people belonging to different estates decided to marry. For example, the village of Neynub in Kyirong District had eight government subject households and 12 households under nearby

¹ See Appendix 1 for more details on this document. See Appendix 2 for a table listing all of the relationship terms found therein and a discussion on how these terms were used to reconstruct relationships within each household.

Samtenling Monastery. If a female government subject married a subject of Samtenling and moved into his household, then either the government would lose a subject or a paradoxical situation would result, as taxpayers beholden to different institutions would be residing under a single roof. To reconcile matters, the government required subjects to submit marriage petitions to the dzongpön. If the dzongpön granted permission, then the woman's status could be legally changed so that she became a subject of Samtenling Monastery. In compensation, one of the monastery's subjects would have her affiliation transferred to the government. Both the government and the monastery kept careful records of all such 'human exchanges' (*mi brjes*). According to one man from Kyirong,

We were Samtenling Monastery's taxpayers, whereas Tashi [his brother-in-law] was a government taxpayer. When my sister married him she became a government taxpayer. In exchange the government had to give one person to Samtenling. The person who became a Samtenling taxpayer was my wife. My sister went to them, and my wife came to us.

Dieter Schuh (1988) published several human exchange documents from Kyirong.² Government officials recorded, among others, the following exchanges during the 1920s and 1930s:

Puntsok from the government taxpayer household Tagonangpa of Pangshing Village married the 22 year old Purbu, daughter of Dorje Tsering of the Ngöpug Baro household which belongs to Samtenling Monastery. In exchange the monastery received the 15-year-old Gonpo Dorje from Pangshing.

Tsering Dolma who belongs to Samtenling married Nyima Dorje, a government taxpayer from Kyirong Village. In exchange the monastery received the government taxpayer Gyatso's son from Pangshing Village.

By compiling household registers, the Tibetan government, land-owning monasteries, and members of the aristocracy not only obtained demographic data on their populations, they also accumulated records to keep track of who was beholden to which institution, records that could facilitate the orderly exchange of subjects in cases of intermarriage between estates.

² See Findbuch 361–62, 364, 369, 386–90, and 402–04 in Schuh 1988.

The Household Economy of Taxpayers

The inhabitants of Kyirong pursue a common Tibetan economic strategy that combines farming, herding, and trade. This subsistence strategy, referred to in comparative studies as *Alpenwirtschaft* ('alpine economy', see Rhoades and Thompson 1975; Guillet 1983; Orlove and Guillet 1985), relies on the seasonal exploitation of vertical zones, communal control over pastures, individual control over farmland and haying fields, and the regulation by social institutions of movements over space and time. Households are the primary units of production. Most have secure rights to arable land and pastures for their cattle.

Farming

Kyirong's taxpayers fit Netting's (1993) description of intensive farming smallholders. They continuously cultivate each plot of land (no fallow period) and carefully manage the soil through the creation of natural fertilizers (leaf base and bovine manure), annual crop rotation, deep tillage (with the aid of animal traction), and intercropping. Most fields were rain fed, except in the town of Kyirong which had an irrigation system. Some swidden agriculture was practiced in the communal forests by small householders. Fields were classified as superior (*rab*), middling (*'bring*), and outlying (*mtha'*) according to their soil quality and proximity to the village. Wild pigs and bears raided outlying fields around harvest time, necessitating that villagers build temporary shelters where they would stay up all night to keep the animals at bay. The staple crops consisted of wheat, buckwheat, and two types each of barley and potatoes. Farmers practiced crop rotation by alternately planting grain and potatoes on the same field. Farmers also intercropped radishes with barley and cultivated small garden plots of seasonal vegetables near their houses.

Herding

Cattle were an integral component of the rural economy. Their manure was the primary fertilizer for fields. At night bovines were kept in stalls that had a bedding of leaves gathered from nearby forests. Twice a year people excavated the manure and compost, piled it in the fields for further composting, and then spread it about before plowing.

The primary bovines in Kyirong were yaks (yak is the male, *dri* the female), cows, oxen, and the crossbreeds of cows and yaks (males

are called *dzo*, females *dzomo*). Herd compositions varied according to altitude; only the higher villages (e.g., Magal, Drotang, Karpang, and Drog) supported yaks which could not survive in the lower villages. Each settlement, with the exceptions of Magal and Gyeypug, had recognized pastures within Kyirong District. These were communal property that could be used by all residents of the respective villages. People in Magal and Gyeypug herded their cattle in the neighboring district of Dzongga, for which they had to pay a grass tax.

People herded their cattle to the highlands and back down to the village on a seasonal basis. At least one member of each household (or a servant in the case of some wealthier households) needed to accompany their herd. Often a festival, such as an archery contest, marked the commencement of the transhumant trek to the highlands. Once at the highland pasture (*yar sa*), herders dedicated their summer months to butter production. According to one former resident of Kyirong,

All of us from the same village went to the same summer pasture. We would all go together, but we had separate houses that had roofs made of slate. We also had a communal storehouse. Everybody's milk was measured and placed in a single container where it was churned into butter by six people. The household that contributed the most milk would be the first to receive the butter. Then others would receive their butter in order of who contributed the most milk. If small householders had cattle and milk, then they were treated precisely the same as taxpayers.

Herders would spend roughly three months in the high summer pastures, after which time they would gradually return to the village. Village leaders regulated herd movements by suspending stones from trees to indicate the point below which no bovines were permitted. At the completion of the harvest, herders brought their animals to the village and left them in the fields to feed on crop residue and to deposit manure which helped regenerate the soil. After grazing on the harvested fields, the herds were sent to winter pastures (*dgun sa*) situated in close proximity to the village.

Because Kyirong was sacred ground, locals were prohibited from slaughtering their animals for meat. According to one man,

Because our land is filled with holy sites, killing and butchering was never done. We had regulations about sentient beings; we were not permitted to kill any of them born to our household. We were not permitted to perform sinful acts. If an animal broke its limb or became old and died, we could eat it. But we could not kill any of them.

Herders did intentionally cull specific animals from a herd, albeit through starvation rather than dispatching them by more direct means. The offspring of dzomo were the primary targets of culling due to their limited value in the local economy. According to one man,

We herded many dzomo. We did not kill their calves, but they could not survive because we took the milk from their mothers leaving them with none. If they managed to survive, that was up to them, but most calves could not survive. Nonetheless, we were never allowed to kill them.

Another man concurred,

We did not give milk to the calves of dzomo because that would be like giving them butter. There is no benefit in raising these calves because they do not produce much milk. Therefore, they die.

Note how neither man actually admitted to killing the animals. That would be an unequivocal violation of local prohibitions that derive from Buddhist principles and are associated with the sacredness of Kyirong's landscape. Nevertheless, their words leave no doubt as to the intention to cull certain bovines from their herds. In this case, economic pragmatism countermanded religious proscriptions.

Trade

Trade was also an important part of the local economy, although it had diminished in volume since the 1880s when the British opened a new commercial route connecting Tibet with India. Nevertheless, people maintained a lively local trade network, and several families of Newari merchants from Nepal ran stores in the town of Kyirong.

Not all families engaged in trade. The determining factors seemed to be access to capital and a household composition that enabled some members to be absent for long periods of time. In general, the job of trading was delegated to the eldest brother in a household. His younger brothers were then responsible for herding the animals and tending the fields. Some of the wealthier households even had servants to assist with trade, or else they employed düchungba to carry loads for a daily wage.

In the summer, traders from Kyirong would take their pack animals to Dzongga, located at a walking distance of eight to ten days, where they met nomads from the north with whom they exchanged rice, barley, and wood for salt, butter, wool, and meat. In the autumn and winter Kyirong's traders would travel down valley to Nepal to exchange salt

for rice in places such as the ethnically Tamang villages just across the border and Trisuli Bazaar a week's walk away. Some men even traded with merchants in Kathmandu with whom they held lines of credit.

Taxation

The tax system throughout Tibet was quite complex and subject to many local variations. Taxation in Kyirong was no exception. First and foremost, each taxpayer household had to pay a land tax (*rkang 'gro, sa 'bo* in the local vernacular) to the government during the tenth month of the Tibetan calendar, which falls in November and December shortly after the harvest. The tax was paid in grain according to the amount of taxable land specified in one's lease (i.e., the amount of kang) and according to the amount of grain harvested in a particular year. For example, a bountiful harvest obligated a household to pay ten to twelve standard government measures (*bstan 'dzin kha ru*) per kang of land holding. During especially lean years the government permitted households to give cash in lieu of grain (Dawa Dragpa 1997).

Family members carried the grain on their backs to the dzong where government officials inspected it to ensure that the right amount had been given and that the quality was good. According to one man, "We had to make sure that the barley was very clean. Otherwise we would have to give more grain. If it was not good barley, they would scold us, or beat us." Some households contrived means to evade their full tax burden. One member of a very wealthy taxpayer household stated,

Our house held four and a half kang. Long ago, perhaps four or five generations ago, my ancestor went to Lhasa. He was very clever. He went to make a document with the government in which it was recorded that he had no more than three and a half kang. Therefore, when it came time for paying taxes, we only paid tax on three and a half kang of land.

In addition, the people of Kyirong had to provide corvée labor (*'u lag*) to each of the two dzongpön. According to a former dingpön, the people of Kyirong had to supply a kitchen servant (*thab gyog*), a person to fetch water (*chu len pa*), a household helper (*khang gnyer*), a servant for herding (*mdzo gyog*), and approximately 24 people to tend the dzong's horses and mules (*rta pa*). They also had to supply food, wood for fuel, horses and mules for transportation, and hay for the cattle owned by the dzongpön (Dawa Dragpa 1997). Proximity largely determined who would have to supply the obligatory labor for the dzongpön and his staff. A disproportionately heavy burden fell on the people of Kyirong

Town because that is where the two dzong were located. Two *genpo* (*rgan po*, literally “elders”) assisted in recruiting by circulating throughout the villages to call people to specific tasks. The position of caller rotated from year to year and could be held by either a taxpayer or small householder. One woman recalls,

We were small householders. We had no land, but we did work for the government. My father was a village caller. He would go around shouting out the work that needed to be done for the dzong. On behalf of the dzong he would cry out, “Come to cut grass! Come to fetch water!” My mother would do this as well.

Another person said,

During the evening a person would call us to work for the following day. He would go through the village calling out names, such as, “Dorje, come to do this work at the dzong tomorrow.” If we did not go, the dzong officials would immediately come and beat us. So we would abandon our own work and go work for the dzong. We would have to perform chores such as milling barley, cutting wood, and fetching water.

To complete major public works projects, another tax obligation, the dzongpön demanded the labor of people from more distant villages. For example, in the late 1950s the dzongpön Dragtönpa commenced building a new dzong. According to one man,

The old dzong at Kyirong was distant from the town. During the time of Dragtönpa a new building was erected. We commoners did the construction. The work was mandatory corvée labor (*'u lag*). All taxpayer households from every division of Kyirong had to participate, but not small householders. The government did not give us anything for this. We provided our own food. Those who came from afar, like from Gyeypug or Dra, stayed with friends. The work was mostly done during the winter, during the first month of the Tibetan year (January–February) when there was less agricultural work.

Tax obligations also included supplying the dzong with certain natural resources, which varied according to local availability. For example, a special soil that people use to whitewash buildings was found near Dra, so the residents of that village were required to supply this soil to the dzong. Gyeypug was surrounded by an extensive forest, so each household had to give sixteen loads of wood annually to the government per kang of land holding. Bamboo grew in lower villages such as Chang, so people from that village wove baskets as part of their tax obligation. Highland villages with large herds of cattle were required to give butter, and so forth.

The government also taxed local trade. During the summer months, government representatives stationed themselves at a bridge demarcating the border between Kyirong and Dzongga Districts. There they collected one measure (*phul*) of salt for each pack animal transporting trade items into their district. During the winter they relocated to the border between Nepal and Tibet where they collected a tax of one measure of grain for every porter-load of rice transported from Nepal. The proceeds were given to the treasury office of the central government in Lhasa (Dawa Dragpa 1997).

Every third year an official (referred to as *rten bzhengs pa*) was dispatched to Kyirong from Lhasa with the task of exchanging salt for rice with the government of Nepal. Locals had to assist him and his retinue in many ways, including portering loads between Kathmandu and Nepal (Dawa Dragpa 1997). Tamangs on the Nepal side of the border were also forced to carry loads during this exchange. Moreover, the 108 loads of goods transported between Kyirong and Kathmandu contained not just salt, but also walnuts, yak tails, dried meat, butter, and other items. Taking these goods to Kathmandu may have been a form of tribute paid by Tibet as part of the settlement following the war that concluded in 1856 (Holmberg, March, and Tamang 1997).

Most of my interview subjects concurred that the tax burden in Kyirong was burdensome and caused hardships on families. One man recalled,

The nobility was corrupt. They were very wealthy but did not pay any taxes. The poor people paid all the taxes. If we were ordered to do transport tax (*rta bskul*), we had to come quickly. If not, they would beat us. The District Commissioners were no good. They caused much trouble for us commoners.

Those who were unable to meet their tax obligations either fled to Nepal or were relegated to *düchungba* status. In either case, their land would be given to a substitute, usually a small householder who would be promoted to taxpayer status.

The Household Division of Labor

The complex economy of Kyirong necessitated a strategic division of labor within the household. The eldest brother was typically classified as the head of the household (*kyimdag*); therefore, he was the official holder of the household's land lease and representative in all matters of taxation. In the ideal scenario, if there were three brothers in a

household the youngest would be responsible for herding, the middle for farming, and the eldest for trade and tax obligations.

Households, especially those with few members, used various strategies to manage chronic labor shortages. One strategy was a direct exchange of labor (*gla bu*). If Household A sent an adult female to Household B for two days to help with the harvest, Household B would then reciprocate at a later date by sending an adult female to Household A for two days of comparable work. Another strategy involved hiring *düchungba* and paying them a daily wage of food for their services. People referred to this manner of hiring labor quite literally as ‘person rent’ (*mi gla*).

The diversified household economy and the burdens of the tax system combined to give distinct economic advantages to households with numerous adult members. The following sections detail household-level strategies designed to maximize economic production of land and herds and to fulfill tax obligations. I will start by describing the corporate nature of the taxpayer household in Kyirong and how this made polyandry a sensible marital strategy.

Corporate Households and the Family System

Goldstein (1971a) points out that in pre-1959 Tibet families operated as ‘corporate households’, meaning that all members contributed their labor and earnings to a common pool and individuals subordinated their personal desires to the good of the family. The principle of the corporate family holds true for Kyirong as exemplified by polyandry, the preferred marital arrangement among taxpayers. Polyandry was a logical solution to the economic constraints and opportunities inherent within Tibet’s system of land tenure and taxation. Keeping adult brothers together in one household was a means to ensure a reliable labor force that could engage in diverse economic activities such as farming, herding, and trade. Furthermore, taxes, including mandatory *corvée* labor, were assessed on a household basis regardless of how many family members lived together. The more adults in the family, the more able it was to fulfill tax obligations.

Kyirong’s taxpayer households functioned according to Skinner’s definition (1997) of a stem family system. They practiced what Goldstein has labeled a ‘monomartial norm’ (1971a), meaning there was only one marriage per generation. Although the position of household

head customarily passed from eldest father to eldest son, all brothers in both generations actually shared the household's assets and had a vested interest in maintaining the household's economic viability. In the ideal scenario multiple generations lived under the same roof. If we consider polyandrously married brothers and their wife to be a single conjugal unit, then most Kyirong households contained two to three conjugal units depending on how many adult generations were present. However, households often divided into two or more sub-units even though, for taxation purposes, they were considered to be a single entity. People distinguished between a 'one hearth' (*thab gcig*) household in which all members resided together and cooked over a single fire, and a 'two hearth' (*thab gnyis*) household that included both the main household and a subsidiary residence. The subsidiary household could be classified as either a 'residence for the elderly' (*gentsang; rgan tshang*) or an 'adjunct house' (*zurkhang; zur khang*) depending on how it was formed and who resided therein.

A *gentsang* was a type of retirement home inhabited by elderly people who had moved out of the main house. Some elderly people felt that their households became too crowded and chaotic with the birth of grandchildren, prompting them to seek greater peace in a *gentsang*. Often they took with them an unmarried daughter. Others moved into a *gentsang* due to disputes with a daughter-in-law. According to one person:

Some parents liked staying together [with their sons], especially if the bride served them well. But if the bride was not good, or if she did not take good care of the parents, then the parents would take some of the cooking implements and move into a *gentsang*. The household then became a two hearth household. Some of the household's assets remained with the father and mother until they passed away. Afterwards these reverted to the main household. Whatever the household possessed, from gold to kitchen pots, was under the control of the main house, that is, under the control of the sons and their wife.

Zurkhang were fundamentally different from *gentsang*. The term *zur* can connote something that is a part of, but separate from, a larger entity. For example, *zurpa* (*zur pa*) means 'a secondary branch of a family' (Goldstein 2001, 961), referring to a branch that is created when one member separates from the main family and sets up his own household. In the words of one man from Kyirong,

In Tibetan customs if you move out to the zurkhang, you are referred to as zurpa. If you are not compatible with the bride [of the main household] and take your own wife, then you move out to the zurkhang.

A zurkhang could thereby be created by a brother in a polyandrous union taking his own spouse. More typically, a zurkhang was formed by an unmarried adult daughter moving out of the main house upon the arrival of her brothers' wife. Tibetans consider it inappropriate for an unmarried daughter to reside under the same roof as her sister-in-law due to the tensions that can arise between the two. Other women moved into zurkhang after bearing illegitimate children or so that they could cohabit with a düchungba man in a stable, yet informal relationship. In such cases, the zurkhang provided women with a degree of independence that they would not otherwise have.

In summary, the ideal taxpayer household consisted of a stem family where all members resided under a single roof and cooked over a single hearth. In reality, divisions commonly occurred; however, split households were still considered to be a single entity for tax purposes and still functioned in that capacity.

The Normative System of Marriage

General Principles

The taxpayer households of Kyirong engaged in both forms of plural marriage (polyandry and polygyny) as well as monogamy, with demographic factors typically being the deciding factor. Those with a single son practiced monogamy, those with two or more sons engaged in polyandry, and those with no sons but multiple daughters sometimes contracted polygynous marriages. The general principles of marriage among taxpayers can be summarized as follows: people should marry within their social class (e.g., taxpayers should marry taxpayers); no more than one marriage should be contracted for each generation in a household (the monomartial principle); the legal heirs to a household's assets should remain in their natal homes and bring a spouse in to join them; others of the same generation should marry out or reside in a zurkhang.

Because a son always took precedence over a daughter when it came to inheritance, the third principle translated into a norm of patrilocal post-marital residence. However, not all households had sons. Those

that did not had two options. They could adopt a boy, referred to as a ‘substitute son’ (*bu tshab*) who would be raised as the household’s successor. More commonly, they could bring in a matrilocally resident husband (*magpa*; *mag pa*) to marry one (monogamy) or more than one (polygyny) of the household’s daughters. In these cases the daughter(s) would be the legal heir, not the magpa.

Before proceeding further, an important distinction needs to be drawn between formal and informal marriages. In Kyirong, a formal marriage among taxpayers involved the approval of the dzongpön and the movement of a bride or matrilocally resident groom from one household to another. Marriages were elaborate affairs involving rituals and the exchange of goods between families, such as a dowry of cooking implements, jewelry, and clothing. In addition to formal marriages, many couples in Kyirong simply lived together and had children without undergoing rituals or exchanging goods between families. Informal unions typically stemmed from love relationships (*kha thug*; literally, ‘mouths meet’) that led to cohabitation. Such monogamous couples generally lived in an adjunct house (*zurkhang*). In some cases their unions were socially recognized through an abbreviated ceremony performed by a village leader in which a blessing of butter (*gyar kha*) was placed on the forehead of the man and woman. After a woman was discovered to be pregnant, this abridged ceremony was often performed as a means to legitimize the forthcoming child. Throughout the rest of this chapter, the term ‘formal marriage’ refers to the legally and socially sanctioned unions among taxpayer families, while ‘informal marriage’ refers to all other unions that are socially recognized by means of the brief ceremony described above.

Polyandry

The following household represents the ideal in Kyirong, that is, a stem family where two generations of brothers married polyandrously.³

Dolpo #1

Ngawang, the head of household, age 75; Tamdin, the brother, age 74; Tsetan, age 61; Wangmo, the wife, age 70; Kunchok, the village representative, age 40; Puntsok, the son, age 37; Diki, the bride, age 42; Yangchen,

³ Refer to Table A2.1 in Appendix 2 for a list of the Tibetan relationship and status terms that appear in translation in the following household examples. All names in the household register have been changed because many people listed therein are still alive.

the daughter, age 17; Sritar, the son, age 14; Sherab, the son, age 10; Tinley, the son, age 8, Dargyay, the son, age 1; Jampa, the son, age 5.

The three senior males (Ngawang, Tamdin, and Tsetan) married Wangmo. Their two sons (Kunchok and Puntsok) married Diki who had six surviving children in 1958. According to one of those children, Sritar, he and all of his brothers were expected to take a common wife when they came of age. That plan never came to fruition because the family fled to Nepal during the early 1960s.

There were rare cases of non-fraternal polyandry as well. For example,

Dra #12

Tashi, the religious practitioner and head of household, age 37; Lhamo, the bride, age 37; Lobzang, the third spouse, age 45; Samten, the son, age 4; Pasang, the daughter, age 1; Puntsok, the son, age 10; Tsetan, the son, age 6.

In this case Tashi allowed his former servant Lobzang to join in his marriage. According to one informant,

Tashi was the real son of the house. Lobzang was an outsider from Lende who first came as a servant (*gyog po*). They referred to them as being polyandrous (*bza' gsum*) because the three of them stayed together for so long.

Polygyny

Polygyny was commonly practiced when there were no sons but only daughters in a household. In such cases a matrilocally-resident husband (magpa) was brought into the household to marry one, or more than one, of the daughters. For example:

Gyeypug #3

Tenzin, the daughter and head of household, age 39; Tashi, the magpa, age 29; Nyima, the daughter, age 34; Buti, the daughter, age 4; Dawa, the daughter, age 2; Dolkar, the daughter, age 2; Norbu, the son, age 11.

The sisters Tenzin and Nyima inherited their father's household. Their common husband, the magpa Tashi, had children with both of them. Buti and Dawa are Tenzin's children; Dolkar and Norbu are Nyima's children.

Dolpo #2

Yankyi, the female head of household, age 54; Lhamo, the daughter, age 29; Rigzen, the magpa, age 36; Gyaltzen, the son, age 10; Dolma, the

daughter, age 10; Dolkar, the daughter, age 6; Dawa, the daughter, age 4; Diki, the daughter, age 1.

The magpa Rigzen hails from a family of eight brothers. Six of them married polyandrously while Rigzen was sent outside to marry two sisters, Lhamo and Gyalmo, in a household that had no male heirs. Both sisters bore a child in the same year; Gyaltzen is Lhamo's son and Dolma is Gyalmo's daughter. All the other children are Lhamo's. Gyalmo was not listed in this household in 1958; before then she had moved out to live with another man, leaving her daughter Dolma behind. In this case, what began as a polygynous marriage became monogamous when one of the sisters departed.

Polygynandry

Polygynandry is a combination of polygyny and polyandry. A polygynandrous household is one in which two or more brothers have two or more wives in common. This arrangement is different from households where two brothers live together but have separate spouses. Polygynandrous households usually arose when the original wife in a polyandrous household failed to bear children.

Kyishöl #30

Gonpo, the head of household, age 50; Gyurme, the son, age 46; Purbu, the wife, age 51; Pema, the woman, age 28; Norbu, the son, age 7; Zangpo, the son, age 2.

Purbu is the original wife of the brothers Gonpo and Gyurme. She never became pregnant. To compensate for her infertility, Purbu's younger sister Pema was brought into the household as a junior wife. By 1958 she had two surviving sons, Norbu and Zangpo. Pema was brought into the household at a relatively young age, perhaps twenty or even younger. This means that Purbu was well into her forties and clearly infertile by the time Gonpo and Gyurme married Pema.

Monogamy

In some cases demographic realities left no option other than monogamy. The following is an example of a prominent household that had a polyandrous marriage in one generation followed by a monogamous marriage in the subsequent generation.

Kyishöl #46

Norbu, the head of household, age 58; Jamyang, the brother, age 60; Döndrup, age 55; Tsewang, age 55; Rigzen, age 47; Kunzang, the wife, age 53; Tsetan, the son, age 34; Pema, the daughter, age 32; Buchung, the son, age 11; Nyima, the wife, age 35; Diki, her daughter, age 13; Tinley, age 1; Dargyay, the man, age 55; Samdrup, the servant, age 35; Ngawang, the man, age 20.

Five brothers (Norbu, Jamyang, Döndrup, Tsewang, and Rigzen), married Kunzang. The brothers remained together, did not take separate wives, and did not divide the household's assets. Kunzang bore twelve children, only three of whom survived (Tsetan, Pema, and Buchung). Tsetan married Nyima (Diki and Tinley are their children), but the age gap of 23 years meant that his brother, Buchung, was too young to join in this marriage. Pema was supposed to go as a bride to another household but she refused to comply. She remained in her natal household and never bore children. Three servants, Dargyay, Samdrup, and Ngawang are listed in the household as well.

Summary

Fraternal polyandry was the preferred form of marriage among taxpayer households in Kyirong. As a general rule, all brothers who remained within the household married jointly with a single bride. If there were too many brothers in the household, or if the age gap was too large between one of the brothers and the bride, then one or more males would be sent to other households as *magpa*. Monogamous marriages occurred when a taxpayer household had a single male heir, or when a *magpa* came to marry an only-daughter or the sole daughter who was kept at home by her parents. Polygynous marriages were rare but occurred when a *magpa* married two sisters. Finally, polygynandrous marriages typically began as polyandrous ones, but evolved with the addition of a second wife after it was determined that the original wife could not bear children.

*Demographic Profile of Kyirong**Population*

As mentioned previously, in 1958 there were 2,845 government subjects in Kyirong (see Table 3.1). In addition, roughly 270 individuals

in Kyirong were subjects of Samtenling Monastery (Schuh 1988, 112–119).⁴ Samtenling monks, who numbered approximately 75, were also excluded from household registers, as were a few dozen celibate nuns in convents scattered across Kyirong. There were also an estimated 277 people who were either subjects of Porong Monastery, an institution north of Kyirong that had small landholdings in the villages of Ragma and Neyshar (Yeshe Tsultrim et al. 1989, 337), or of lamas holding private estates.⁵ A few families of blacksmiths (*mgar ra*) and butchers (*bshas pa*) were not included on the basis that they held no land rights. Finally, the town of Kyirong included a sizeable population of merchants who were citizens of Nepal. As per the terms of the 1856 Tibet-Nepal treaty, these merchants lived outside the jurisdiction of the Tibetan government and could engage in trade without incurring taxes (Upreti 1980). Known as Balpo, these members of the Newar ethnic group often took local wives. Sons from such unions were considered Nepali citizens; daughters (identified by the term *shag mo* in the 1958 household register) were Tibetan citizens. According to one source there were 221 Nepali citizens living in Kyirong in 1914, the majority of whom were of mixed heritage (Adhikari 1997, 84–87). That number may have diminished over time. Two elderly merchants who lived in Kyirong during the 1950s recalled that there were only about 22 households of Newars.

Based on all the evidence at hand, I estimate that roughly 70 percent of Kyirong's residents were government taxpayers who were recorded in the household register. If my estimate is accurate, then the total population of Kyirong in the late 1950s was less than 4,000 individuals, which is considerably below previous estimates of 10,000 (Mongtomerie 1868; Dawa Dragpa 1997).

⁴ Samtenling's household register of 1949 lists 397 individuals (Schuh 1988). Of those, 133 lived in villages outside of Kyirong District.

⁵ The method I used to arrive at this estimate was as follows. There were 432 kang of government land and 2,845 government taxpayers in Kyirong District. That gives us a ratio of 6.6 individuals per kang. There were 42 additional kang in Kyirong that were not held by the government, but that belonged to either Porong Monastery or one of the small temples controlled by married lamas. Multiplying the average number of individuals per kang (6.6) by 42 (the non-government kang) yields an estimate of 277 individuals.

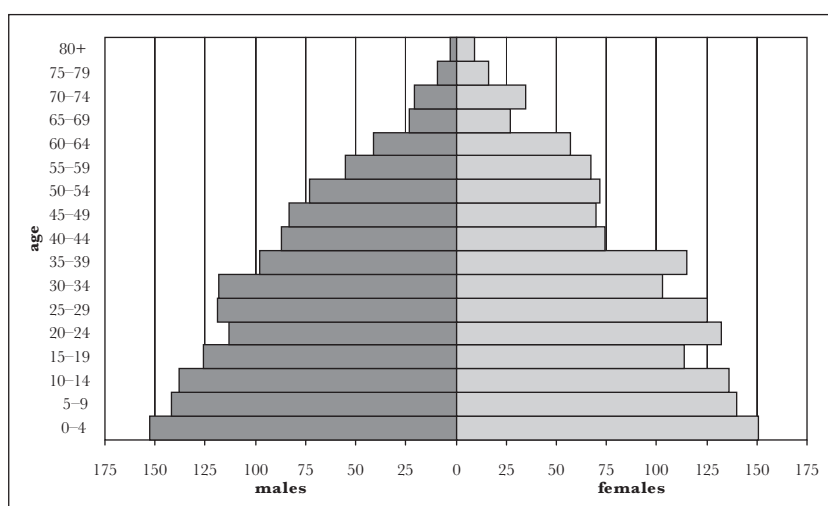
Table 3.1: Kyirong's Government Taxpayers by Administrative Division and Village

Iding 'og	Village	Taxpayer HHs	Males	Females	Total
Kyishöl (sKyid zhol)	Kyishöl	71	254	285	539
	sub-total	71	254	285	539
Tödgo (sTod sgo)	Drotang	9	19	17	36
	Ragma/ Pembar	17	48	53	101
	Magal	16	78	73	151
	sub-total	42	145	143	288
Pangshing (sPang zhing)	Pangshing	24	86	79	165
	sub-total	24	86	79	165
Tsongdü (°Tsong 'dus)	Tsongdü	6	20	21	41
	Neynub	8	12	20	32
	Neyshar	21	51	57	108
	Nya	4	19	23	42
	sub-total	39	102	121	223
Dra (Gra)	Langchu	6	33	22	55
	Dra	38	147	146	293
	Tromse	10	30	49	79
	sub-total	54	210	217	427
Latö (La stod)	Pom	2	8	10	18
	Kogley	7	46	34	80
	Lungkyong	2	8	7	15
	Karpang	12	51	53	104
	Drog	3	29	24	53
	sub-total	26	142	128	270
Lamey (La smad)	Bramkang	9	36	48	84
	Saley	13	57	63	120
	Pangchey	6	23	28	51
	Ko	6	25	33	58
	Sechung	3	13	16	29
	Lapyi	12	89	84	173
	sub-total	49	243	272	515
Gyeypug (Gyes phug)	Chang	18	72	61	133
	Gyeypug	36	123	113	236
	Dolpo	9	24	25	49
	sub-total	63	219	199	418
TOTALS		368	1,401	1,444	2,845

Source: 1958 Kyirong Household Register

Age and Sex Composition of the Population

Figure 3.1 presents data on the age-sex composition of government taxpayers. The shape of the pyramid is characteristic of a stable population.⁶ In small populations, such as Kyirong, the assumption of stability is problematic. For example, periodic epidemics can cause major fluctuations in the death rate. Nevertheless, the shape of the pyramid does not provide evidence that the birth rate far exceeded the death rate. If that had been the case, we would see a wider base that tapers off rapidly, similar to the age-sex structures of many developing nations today that are in the early phases of demographic transitions and have rapidly growing populations. From this analysis, it appears that the population of Kyirong was stable during the first half of the twentieth century.



Source: Childs 2003

Figure 3.1: Age-Sex Composition of Kyirong's Government Taxpayer Population, 1958

⁶ Stability implies a closed population experiencing constant birth and death rates over a sufficient period of time to result in an unvarying age distribution and a constant rate of population growth or decline. The concept is defined in the following terms: "[I]f, in any population, mortality and fertility remain constant for a long period, and if there is no migration, then eventually a fixed age structure will develop..." (Newell 1988, 120).

Fertility

Table 3.2 presents age-specific fertility rates and total fertility rates calculated under different assumptions of mortality by using model life tables in conjunction with the own-children method.⁷ Figure 3.2 plots the ASFRs by age and shows an unmistakable pattern of natural fertility (see Chapter 2). The fertility estimates presented in Table 3.2 are somewhat low for a natural fertility population, yet they fit within the range of TFRs recorded in other Tibetan populations (see Chapter 7). Moreover, fertility was sufficiently high to generate a slow but steady rate of population growth in Kyirong during the first half of the twentieth century (Childs 2003), a finding that is consistent with Schuh's analysis of two sequential household registers (1939 and 1949) from Kyirong's Samtenling Monastery (Schuh 1988). Comparing my own findings with stable population models (Coale and Demeny 1983), I estimate that the population of Kyirong was increasing by slightly less than 0.5 percent per year (Childs 2003), meaning that it would take 150 years for the population to double in size.

Marital Complexities and the Proximate Determinants of Fertility

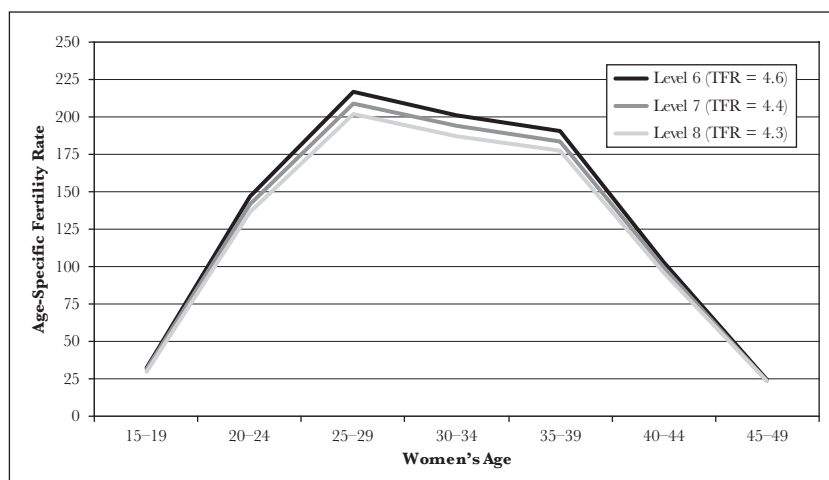
Proximate determinants such as lactational amenorrhea no doubt exerted a fertility-moderating influence in Kyirong. Elderly women

Table 3.2: Age-Specific and Total Fertility Rates, Kyirong 1943–1958

Age	ASFR		
	South Level 6	South Level 7	South Level 8
15–19	32.3	31.1	30.1
20–24	146.6	141.2	136.5
25–29	216.4	208.7	202.1
30–34	201.3	193.9	187.4
35–39	190.6	183.5	177.3
40–44	103.0	99.3	96.1
45–49	24.5	23.8	23.2
TFR	4.6	4.4	4.3

Source: Childs 2003

⁷ As argued elsewhere (Childs 2004), I consider the Coale and Demeny South Level 7 model life table to best represent mortality patterns in Kyirong during the 1950s.



Source: Childs 2003

Figure 3.2: Age-Specific Fertility Rates, Kyirong 1943–1958

who were interviewed stated that they typically breast fed their children for up to three years, stopping only when pregnant with their next child. However, quantifying the fertility-depressing effect of lactational amenorrhea cannot be done solely on the basis of data contained within the household register. In this section, therefore, I will focus primarily on intercourse variables, in particular those associated with marriage and non-marriage.

Polyandry, Marriage, and Fertility

Polyandry was by all accounts the normative form of marriage for taxpayer households in Kyirong. If on average two men take a single wife, and if the sex ratio is balanced (in Kyirong the ratio in the 15–49 age category was 101.6 men per 100 women), then many women should theoretically be excluded from marriage. This seems to be precisely what was happening in Kyirong. Table 3.3 presents data on female marriage and non-marriage by age. The implication for aggregate fertility seems obvious when we focus on the highest fertility cohorts (25–39) among whom 47.5 percent of women (162 of 341) were not formally married. Based on this evidence alone, the logical conclusion is that polyandry acted as a restraint on population growth by creating a marriage squeeze.

Table 3.3: Percent of Females Non-Married and Ever-Married by Age, Kyirong 1958

Age	Percent non-married (n)	Percent ever-married (n)
15–19	96.5 (110)	3.5 (4)
20–24	81.1 (107)	18.9 (25)
25–29	57.3 (71)	42.7 (53)
30–34	49.5 (51)	50.5 (52)
35–39	35.1 (40)	64.9 (74)
40–44	31.1 (23)	68.9 (51)
45–49	28.6 (20)	71.4 (50)
Total	57.7 (422)	42.3 (309)

Source: Childs 2003

Which women were most likely to be excluded from marriage? People in Kyirong considered it inappropriate for a younger sibling to marry prior to her elder sister, so sisters tended to marry sequentially according to age. As a result, high parity daughters (those born late in the birth order) were less likely to marry than lower parity siblings. Evidence for this can be gleaned by examining marriage frequency according to certain names that indicate parity. Many women listed in the household register are identified by names such as Sumchog (gSum chog; Three is Enough), Shichog (bZhi chog; Four is Enough), and Ngachog (lNga chog; Five is Enough). A girl named Sumchog means that she was the third daughter in the household, so we know that she had at least two elder sisters alive at the time she was born. According to elderly people from Kyirong, the naming convention was an explicit appeal to higher powers to prevent subsequent births of girls because daughters with older female siblings were difficult to marry off.

Among the 20–49 age cohort, a significantly smaller percentage of women bearing the names Sumchog, Zhichog, and Ngachog (34.9 percent, n = 43) had married compared to those with other names (46.0 percent, n = 576). This difference is clear evidence that high parity daughters were less likely to marry than their elder sisters.

According to the proximate determinants model, a high proportion of females who remain unmarried during their prime reproductive years should exert a strong negative impact on aggregate fertility. The key to quantifying the rate of non-marital fertility lies in distinguishing ever-married women from never-married women, and then calculating

their respective fertility rates.⁸ This is made possible by the fact that all women listed in the household register as ‘bride/daughter-in-law’ (*mna’ ma*), ‘woman’ (*dman*), ‘wife’ (*za zla*, sic. *bza’ zla*), and ‘mother’ (*ma*) were either currently married or had been married at one time. They represent the ever-married population. In contrast, no matter how old she was, any woman labeled ‘daughter’ (*bu mo*) had never been formally married within a taxpayer household. The only exceptions to this rule are heiresses in households where there were no male successors. In such cases the daughter of the household brought home a spouse who was clearly designated in the document as a matrilocally-resident husband (*magpa*).

Table 3.4 compares fertility estimates for ever-married ($n = 461$) and never-married women ($n = 371$).⁹ The estimates were generated by the

⁸ Here, ever-married refers to those women who were formally married within taxpayer households. The category never-married includes women who never married as well as those who married informally, as previously defined. The term non-marital fertility, as used in the context of this study, therefore refers to the fertility of women who have never undergone a formal marriage within a taxpayer household. It covers (1) births to women who had never married either formally or informally, in which case their children are considered illegitimate, and (2) births to women who had not married into taxpayer households but who were involved in socially recognized relationships with men, in which cases their children are considered legitimate. Illegitimate births are therefore only a sub-set of non-marital fertility. A true illegitimacy rate is impossible to estimate due to the difficulty of distinguishing non-married women from informally married women.

⁹ A methodological clarification is needed here. With data from the household register, OCM uses reverse-survival to estimate fertility rates over the fifteen years prior to the time that the data was gathered. A problem therefore arises by disaggregating women into ever-married and never-married categories because a woman’s marital status could change over time. For example, consider the case of a thirty year-old woman who is listed as a ‘wife’ (*bza’ zla*) and has three children. From her reported status, we know that she was married in 1958, but we cannot determine when she married. In other words, based solely on the information provided by the 1958 document, we have no way of knowing whether she was married at the time that any of her children were born. One or more of them could have been born before she went to her husband’s household as a bride. Similarly, consider the case of a forty year-old mother of three who is listed as ‘woman’ (*dman*), the typical designation for a female who has been divorced or widowed. Based solely on the information in the document we have no way of determining whether one or all of those children had been born illegitimately after the dissolution of her marriage. In other words, separating ever-married from never-married women in the fertility analysis is methodologically problematic, but not as problematic as it may seem at first glance. For a female government subject in Kyirong a change in designation from never-married (*bu mo*) to ever-married (*mna’ ma*, *bza’ zla*, *dman*, or *ma*) *was* possible, whereas a change in status from ever-married to never-married *was not* possible. The official designation of a woman only changed from ‘daughter’ (*bu mo*) to something else if, and only if, she engaged in a formal marriage

Table 3.4: Total Fertility Rates by Marital Status, Kyirong 1943–1958

South Level	All Women	Ever-Married Women	Never-Married Women
6	4.6	6.4	2.2
7	4.4	6.2	2.2
8	4.3	6.0	2.1

Source: Childs 2003

own-children method using different mortality assumptions (South Levels 6–8 from Coale and Demeny 1983). On the one hand the evidence shows that ever-married women had a fertility rate approximately three times higher than never-married women. On the other hand, it confirms that formal marriage and childbearing were not mutually exclusive. According to this analysis, women who did not marry into taxpayer households still gave birth to more than two children on average. Therefore, a relatively high level of nonmarital fertility moderated polyandry's negative impact on aggregate fertility.

Resistance to Marriage

Fertility was also moderated, albeit only slightly, by the fact that not all women consented to marry and reproduce. In one case, a woman's prospective groom was a powerful dingpön, a widower more than 20 years her senior. She recalled,

with a taxpayer household. Even if she subsequently divorced or became widowed, she would never revert to her former designation as 'daughter'. Therefore, all women who had never been formally married into a taxpayer household, with the sole exception of those who brought a magpa into their own households, were identified by the term 'daughter'. Because I was able to identify those women who were married to magpa, they were included with the ever-married group for the purpose of data analysis. Beyond any doubt, all other women listed as daughter had never been married.

To confirm the validity of the fertility estimates for ever-married and never-married women, OCM was performed using only the data for children aged 0–1, which gives us a fertility estimate for the two years prior to the date the household register was compiled. Because mothers who bore children in the two years preceding 1958 were less likely to have changed their statuses during that time interval, this provides us with a cross-check on the original estimates that cover the preceding 15 years. The result for never-married women (2.13 births per woman) was almost identical to the result obtained in the more inclusive analysis (2.15). I am thereby confident that disaggregating women into ever-married and never-married categories for fertility analysis is a methodologically sound procedure that yields valid results.

I was sent as a bride, but I came back home. My parents told me to go back to my husband, but I did not like him. I never stayed with him. He said he needed me, but I refused to go. They put me in the jail in the dzong and beat me. I was in the jail for a week, but I never did marry him and I never gave birth to any children.

Difference in age was apparently also a factor in the following case involving a woman and her magpa.

Saley #8

Wangmo, the daughter and head of household, age 44; Dawa, the daughter, age 17; Gonpo, the magpa, age 28; Nyima, the daughter, age 14; Sumchog, the daughter, age 12.

Wangmo, the matriarch of the family, was widowed while her three daughters (Dawa, Nyima, and Sumchog) were still relatively young. Wangmo sought to rectify the economic hardships caused by not having an adult male in the family by bringing home a magpa, Gonpo, to be a husband for her daughters. However, things did not go according to plan. In Dawa's own words,

I had no desire for the magpa, he was older than me. I said [to my mother], "I do not want an older husband." My mother would not listen; she said we needed a worker in the house. I had no desire, but I still stayed for many years with this magpa whom I did not want. I was 15 when he arrived, and for five or six years I did not sleep with him. Then he [the magpa] said, "You have no desire for me. I have been shamed. If you want to leave, then get out of here! I will stay together with your younger sisters [Nyima and Sumchog]. If they don't want me, then I will bring in a bride from outside and still stay in your house." My mother would beat me. She said, "You must sleep with the magpa." I replied, "I have no desire for him, no desire whatsoever." My mother continually beat me, so I slept with him with no happiness or desire. Since there was no happiness I did not give birth to any children. Then I left at age 28, and he stayed as a magpa with my two younger sisters.

Divorce and Remarriage

Divorces can impact fertility by disrupting reproduction for some women. In societies where remarriage is prohibited, the divorce of a relatively young woman results in an early termination of her child-bearing. In societies where remarriage is permitted, such as Kyirong, divorce will only result in a temporary cessation of childbearing that resumes when a woman remarries.

Dra #33

Döndrup, the religious practitioner and head of household, age 28; Chönzom, his wife, age 36; Tsering, the daughter, age 13; Yangkyi, the daughter, age 4; Pelmo, the daughter, age 1; Wangmo, the woman, age 42; Rigzen, the son, age 26; Zangpo, the son, age 25.

According to Tsering, her mother Chönzom had originally married another man whom she divorced before marrying Döndrup out of love. Tsering was Chönzom's daughter from the first marriage, Yangkyi and Pelmo from the second marriage. Note the age difference between Tsering and her younger half-sisters. Döndrup's two younger brothers, Rigzen and Zangpo, were not part of the marriage, as indicated by terminology in the document which clearly identifies Chönzom as Döndrup's wife. Wangmo was the sister of Chönzom who resided in the house's zurkhang.

In some cases the failure to produce a male heir could be grounds for divorce. This was especially true among lamas who needed sons to perpetuate their lineages. According to one woman,

Long ago my mother and my father married. He was a lama so it was necessary to have sons. Daughters do not become lamas. The first born child was a son. He died after one or two days. Then I was born and survived, but my father and his family started saying that my mother is of no benefit [since she had not given birth to a surviving son]. So while my mother was pregnant with her next child, my father looked around for another wife. Mother became angry. We Tibetans have a saying, "If there is a quarrel among people, there will be a quarrel among the gods." When the child was eight months in the womb, it was stillborn. Mother became very depressed. Since she did not have a son, my father had no interest in her. So they divorced. My father took another wife who gave him three sons. About ten years later my mother met another man who is the father of my two sisters. We have the same mother but different fathers.

Mortality and Infertility as Opportunity

Mortality and infertility sometimes opened marital opportunities for women who would otherwise have remained unmarried. As previously noted, daughters in a family typically married sequentially according to seniority. As a result, younger daughters were disproportionately affected by the marriage squeeze engendered by polyandry. Sometimes the untimely death or infertility of an elder, married sister necessitated that a younger sister be sent as a replacement bride. The following examples detail such cases.

Kyishöl #2

Dorje, the dingpön and head of household, age 36; Döndrup, the son, age 30; Dargyay, the son, age 20; Chödrön, the bride, age 29; Kunchok, the son, age 17; Jigme, the son, age 10; Rigzen, the son, age 6; Sherab, the son, age 3; Chogpa, the daughter, age 1.

The first wife of the brothers Dorje, Döndrup, and Dargyay had two surviving sons in this household, Kunchok and Jigme. She passed away sometime during the 1940s and was replaced in the household by her younger sister, Chödrön, who gave birth to Rigzen, Sherab and Chogpa.

Kyishöl #50

Lhakpa, the head of household, age 36; Tenzin, the wife, age 36; Peyzang, the wife, age 24; Dolkar, the daughter, age 11; Chökyi, the daughter, age 10; Chimi, the daughter, age 17; Buti, the daughter, age 1.

Lhakpa married Tenzin who bore two daughters, Dolkar and Chökyi. Afterwards, Tenzin failed to conceive another child. That prompted Lhakpa to bring her sister, Peyzang, into the household as his second wife. Peyzang's child is Buti. Chimi is the illegitimate child of Lhakpa's sister, a woman who later married and moved to her husband's household leaving her daughter behind.

Polyandry and Its Discontents: The Magpa Option

The fertility depressing effect of the polyandry-generated marriage squeeze would be even greater if not for the fact that brothers sometimes departed the household. Many parents clearly recognized that the more sons involved in a marriage, the more likely it was for friction to develop between them. Reducing the number of sons in a household could be accomplished through a couple of family management strategies. Celibate monasticism presented one such opportunity. According to Tibetan cultural norms, the middle of three sons (*spun gsum bar ba*) was the ideal candidate to be ordained as a monk, thereby reducing by one the number of married, reproductively active, and economically productive members of the household. However, in Kyirong there was only one celibate monastery, Tashi Samtenling, which was not very large.

Parents sometimes preempted future conflicts by sending one or more sons out of the household as matrilocally-resident magpa. A man who went to the house of another family as a magpa became the sole husband of one or more women. Although technically he was not the

head of the household, a magpa typically had considerable say in the management of family affairs and was secure in the knowledge that his children were the legal heirs. Kyirong also provides several examples of discontented brothers using the magpa option to opt out of their unhappy polyandrous unions. For example, in one household (Pangzhing #21) two brothers, separated by two years in age, took a common wife. In 1958 only one of the brothers is listed in his natal household; the younger is listed as a magpa in another household. According to the elder brother's son, "He discarded my mother and went as a magpa. He and my father did not get along." In another household we find the following residents:

Neynub #6

Lhakpa, the head of household, age 48; Tsering, the wife, age 37; Namgyal, the daughter, age 13; Tsewang, the son, age 8; Kelsang, the daughter, age 6; Kunzang, the daughter, age 2.

Lhakpa was a magpa who became head of his wife's household. According to his wife, Tsering, "I did not go as a bride. A magpa came to our house. There were three sons in Lhakpa's household who had a common wife. But Lhakpa did not get along with them so he came as a magpa."

In the following case a dispute arose between a magpa and his son over the inheritance of the family's assets after the household's legal heiresses passed away. This is the only instance of a taxpayer household consisting of one single resident.

Chang #10

Zangpo, the son and head of household, age 22.

My father came as a magpa and married two sisters, my mother and my aunt. My father had six children, three with each wife. All of them died except me. My mother was the younger of the two sisters; I was seven when she died. I am unfortunate, I experienced much suffering. I did not have a father to look after me because, after my mother and aunt died, he left home for another woman. He then wanted me to go as a magpa to another person's house, and to divide my mother's land between us. But I am not stupid. Why should I go to another's house as a magpa when I had inherited my mother's house?

Polyandry and Its Discontents: Dividing Household Assets

Theoretically, a younger brother could choose whether or not to join his elder sibling(s) in a polyandrous marriage. According to one person,

When three brothers are covered in *kata* (*kha btags*, ceremonial silk scarf) at the marriage ceremony, then they have taken the wife [i.e., are married to her]. Before this time, if one of the sons says, “I want to marry separately”, and if he does not accept *kata* [at the wedding ceremony], then they [the parents and the other brothers] must give him part of the estate. But if the son has accepted *kata* and then decides that he wants to move out and take his own wife, he does not receive inheritance. If the parents are good—he is after all their own child—and the wife is good, they will give him a little bit of land. If the wife is bad, if she is quarrelsome, then he will get nothing.

Because many men became betrothed when they were very young, it is doubtful whether they could exercise much free will by defying their parents and older brothers. For example, in one household (Magal #7) six brothers took a common bride who was four years junior to her eldest husband, but two years, nine years, 11 years, 14 years, and 18 years senior to her other husbands. The husband who was 14 years younger stated, “I received a *kata* at the wedding, but we were not compatible. We stayed together while in the village, but then when I came down here [to Nepal] I took my own wife”. His testimony reveals how some men were willing to marry monogamously as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

A disgruntled brother could attempt to bring a second wife into the household and initiate a division of the family’s assets, a practice that was discouraged on the grounds that everybody would become relatively impoverished. Nevertheless, some men did use such a strategy to form families independent of their brothers, as illustrated by the following case.

Dra #4

Gonpo, the *tümi* who lives in an adjunct house, age 61; Gyurme, the *tümi*, age 51; Tempa, a male, age 60; Kyidzom, the bride, age 65; Wangchuk, the son, age 27; Dawa, the bride, age 47; Migmar, the son, age 19; Nyima, the daughter, age 15; Penba, the son, age 13; Tamdin, the male, age 1.

The brothers Gonpo and Gyurme took Kyidzom as their common wife. Tempa was not a brother, but a household servant. Kyidzom bore only a single son, Wangchuk, who was mentally disabled (*lkugs pa*). Strife within the household prompted Gyurme to take his own wife, Dawa. Their children were Migmar, Nyima, and Penba. When the property was divided, Gyurme remained in the main house and Gonpo moved into the *zurkhang* with Kyidzom and Wangchuk. Tamdin was the

illegitimate son of Buti, the daughter of Gyurme and Dawa, who left her son behind when she married and moved into another household.

Most people stated that those who broke away from their households did so at their own economic peril because the wife in a polyandrous household was often a force to be reckoned with. She could try to prevent a husband from bringing in a separate wife, or attempt to prevent one of her husbands from separating and removing any assets from the family's property. Sometimes a man needed the assistance of relatives to succeed in gaining his independence. According to the son of a man from one of the wealthiest households in all of Kyirong,

There were five brothers in the household. The eldest was the holder of the lease, the second was my father. The five brothers married one woman, but then my father decided to take his own wife. He stayed in the zurkhang and took his own wife, but the household did not divide its fields. My father took his case to the dzongpön, but the wife of the household prevented him from getting any assets. She said, "I must control my husbands. If the five brothers take five wives, then they and their wives are not allowed to stay in the zurkhang. They must move far away, and should not even be permitted to remain in the land of Kyirong".

My father had a sister who married in Lende [the eastern valley of Kyirong District]. She felt that it was best if her five brothers stayed at home together, because those who left the household would become poor. But she felt sorry for her brother. The household into which she married was very wealthy; they had many cattle, horses, and a large amount of land. So when my father moved out, her household helped by giving him some cattle to look after. My father was able to keep all the butter produced by the cattle, as well as some of the calves that were born. This was a great blessing. But he still fought with his brothers' wife who said that he should leave the land altogether and move to Nepal. Their dispute went on for many years.

In the next example a man did not receive anything from his natal household, but was assisted by a relative of his new wife.

Gyeypug #17

Zangpo, the head of household, age 45; Tsewang, the son, age 20; Döndrup, age 16; Pelmo, the daughter, age 10; Dorje, the son, age 6; Gyurme, the son, age 4.

Yeshi, the wife of Zangpo and mother of all the household's children, died before 1958. According to Tsewang,

In the past my father [Zangpo] was together with his brother Tempa. They took a wife, but did not get along so he moved out and took his own wife. Tempa retained the household's fields. If one brother separated he did not get any fields, so at first my father did not have land. Sritar,

my mother's brother, was alone [i.e., he had no wife or children] so he gave some of his fields to Zangpo.

Informal Marriage

In taxpayer households women who were unable or unwilling to marry typically moved into zurkhang (adjunct houses) once their brothers brought home the household's new bride. A zurkhang was sometimes physically part of the main house, for example a room or two with a separate entrance. Sometimes it was a small structure adjacent to the main house. A woman inhabiting a zurkhang continued to make economic contributions to her natal household.

Living in zurkhang gave unmarried women a high degree of independence, especially after their parents passed away. These women provided disgruntled males from polyandrous households ample opportunities to find new partners. Many women living in zurkhang had either short-term affairs or formed long-term relationships with men, which helps explain why women who never formally married into taxpayer household experienced an unexpectedly high level of fertility. The following cases illustrate how these informal unions came about.

Pangshing #15

Sonam, the son and head of household, age 51; Dechen, the daughter, age 17; Zangpo, the son, age 50; Kunchok, age 44; Jampa, the son, age 24; Lhamo, the bride, age 20; Diki, her daughter, age 1; Namgyal, the daughter, age 26; Nyima, the daughter, age 8; Purbu, the daughter, age 5; Pasang, the next daughter, age 2; Pelmo, one more daughter, age 1.

Sonam, Zangpo, and Kunchok were brothers. Their wife, the mother of Jampa and Namgyal, died not long after giving birth to Namgyal. Sonam then commenced a long-term relationship with Chökyi, an ex-nun who resided in the zurkhang of her natal household where she held düchungba status. In fact, she is listed among Pangzhing's düchungba population as a 38-year-old daughter who had returned to the laity from her former status as a nun (*chos bitsun log*). One of Chökyi's four daughters, Dechen, lived with her father while the others lived with their mother (being listed below her in the document as düchungba.) As Dechen put it, "I stayed with my father; I was given to his household". Meanwhile, Namgyal (the unmarried daughter of Sonam, Zangpo, and Kunchok) co-resided in a zurkhang with Tashi, a man who was a junior brother in a polyandrous marriage. Despite the fact that Tashi lived with Namgyal at her family's zurkhang, he was still listed as being a member of his natal household. Nyima, Purbu, Pasang, and Pelmo are

their daughters. Because of the stable nature of this couple's relationship, the children are considered to be legitimate.

Men could also move into a zurkhang, as the following example illustrates.

Gyepug #21

Pasang, the mother, age 80; Sonam, the son, age 55; Samten, the village representative, age 45; Sritar, the son, age 42; Tsamchö, the bride, age 44; Pema, the daughter, age 19; Gyaltzen, the son, age 15; Gonpo, the son, age 18; Ngawang, the son, age 7; Lobzang, the son, age 13; Samdrup, the son, age 4.

The elderly woman Pasang was the mother of four sons: Sonam, the deceased Sherab, Samten, and Sritar. All four had originally been married polyandrously to Tsamchö. However, Sherab moved out to form his own family with a düchungba woman with whom he had fallen in love. After Sherab's departure, Samten wanted to bring his own wife into the household. Tsamchö objected, so Samten moved into a zurkhang. Although his wife continued to live primarily with her natal family, she sent the sons Gyaltzen and Lobzang to live with their father.

These examples demonstrate how men drifted from polyandrous marriages into unions with women who were unable to marry within taxpayer households. Although polyandrous marriages rarely dissolved altogether, the number of brothers engaged in such unions often diminished over time. Some men tried to divide the property so that they could form independent households; others simply resided periodically or permanently in a zurkhang with a woman of their choice. The children of these unions would be deemed legitimate or illegitimate depending on whether the relationship between a couple was long-term and stable, or merely a casual liaison.

Illegitimacy

Illegitimacy in Tibetan societies can be defined in one of three ways: children born to unmarried mothers, children resulting from an affair between a married woman and a man who is not her husband, and children of an incestuous union.¹⁰ The following discussion only concerns the first of these, children born out of wedlock.

¹⁰ Jäschke equates *nyal bu* (son resulting from copulation) and *nal 'phrug* (incest-child) with 'bastard' (1972, 187, 304). He also records the colloquial term *nal le* (1972, 304), which is rendered as *nya le* by Chopel (1996, 16). Another dictionary defines *nal bu* and

The colloquial term for an illegitimate child in Kyirong is *nyelu* (from *nyal bu*), except in the Lende Valley where the child is called *arken*.¹¹ Illegitimate children were usually relegated to *düchungba* status even though their mothers, and often their fathers, held taxpayer status. For example, one person stated,

There were many *düchungba* in our village. Many were *nyelu*. In our village many women were sent as brides to other households. Others just had children [out-of-wedlock] who became *düchungba*.

Another person explained,

Many women did not marry; they were spinsters (*mo hrang*). Most spinsters would give birth to one or two children, not many. Their children were considered *düchungba* because they were *nyelu*, without fathers, so they did not inherit.

The people of Kyirong distinguished ‘insider children’ (*nang gi phru gu*) from ‘outsider children’ (*phyi'i phru gu*). The former category refers to those born to parents in taxpayer households who have undergone a formal marriage ceremony. The latter refers to children who were born to unmarried women. Illegitimate children were considered ‘outsider children’ because they held no rights of inheritance; thus, they had no long-term entitlement to remain in the household. They became, in essence, appendages to taxpayer households, living in *zurkhang* and working for the main household, but they had no claim on assets other than those they could earn on their own. A close association therefore existed between illegitimacy and *düchungba* status.

The research uncovered numerous examples of children who were clearly illegitimate. For example,

Dra #8

Migmar, the head of household, age 62; Kyipa, the wife, age 63; Zangpo, the son, age 43; Rabten, the son, age 30; Norbu, the son, age 30; Pema,

its synonym *nal phrug* as “a child born as the result of a relationship between a man and a woman who do not conduct themselves in a proper manner”, which I presume refers to an unmarried couple, and “a child born from the union [of a couple] of the same bone”, which connotes an incestuous relationship (Tshig mdzod chen mo 1993, 1523). Goldstein defines *byis phrug* as ‘illegitimate child’ (1999, 146).

¹¹ The etymology of this term is unclear. Brigitte Huber, who has completed a linguistic study of the Lende dialect (Huber 2002), suggests that it could be spelled *ar mkhan* and may be related to the term *ar gon* (personal communication), identified by Jäschke as a Ladhaki term meaning “an offspring of parents not having the same rank, nor the same religion, and not belonging to the same nation” (1972, 606).

the daughter, age 19; Dawa, the bride, age 34; Tenzin, the daughter, age 13; Sumchog, the daughter, age 37; Kunzang, the son, age 5.

Migmar and Kyipa lived with their three sons and two daughters. The sons Zangpo, Rabten, and Norbu had a common wife, Dawa. Tenzin was their only surviving child. Sumchog, the sister of Zangpo, Rabten, and Norbu, had never married. Despite her relatively advanced age, she was still listed in the household register as 'daughter'. According to a close relative,

Sumchog was the mother of Kunzang. Sumchog did not have a husband. She did not go as a bride, but after giving birth to a nyelu she stayed together with her mother, Kyipa, in a zurkhang.

Not all children born to women who had never formally married into taxpayer households were considered illegitimate. The people of Kyirong distinguished between offspring resulting from casual, short-term affairs and those from stable, long-term relationships. I have noted that, in Kyirong, a brief ceremonial act conferred social recognition on a relationship and thereby legitimated the status of any resulting offspring. According to one former Kyirong resident, village leaders asked unmarried women who were discovered to be pregnant to name the father. Afterwards,

If the father admitted [to paternity], and if the couple had a wish to get married, then the village representative and the village elders would give *yarka* [*gyar kha*, ceremonial butter placed on one's forehead]. By receiving *yarka* in this brief ceremony, they became married.

Most women who underwent this truncated marriage ceremony were still listed in the household register as 'daughter', an unmistakable indicator that they had never formally married. Nevertheless, their children were considered legitimate. As such, the same woman could be the mother of both legitimate and illegitimate children, as the following case illustrates.

Norbu, age 71; Pelmo, the bride, age 74; Dawa, the son, age 25; Zangmo, the wife, age 25; Drolma, the daughter, age 44; Purbu, the daughter, age 24; Sonam, the daughter, age 20; Pelchor, the son, age 10; Migmar, one more daughter, age 5.

According to a former member of this household,

Dawa was Norbu's son, Zangmo was Dawa's wife. Drolma was Dawa's elder sister. She did not get married; she just had illegitimate children

[Purbu and Sonam]. Pelchor and Migmar were also Drolma's children, but they were not illegitimate. They had a father who was from Pangshing. He died. He and Drolma did not marry, but just stayed together after falling in love. He was a *düchungba*.

In this case, two of Drolma's children were considered *nyelu* (Purbu and Sonam), whereas the other two were not (Pelchor and Migmar). The key distinction seems to be that Drolma lived together with the father of the latter two, and hence their union was socially recognized.

Not all unmarried women had illegitimate children. In the following household one unmarried sister had a *nyelu*, the other did not.

Kogley #7

Sonam, the head of household, age 37; Lhawang, the son, age 34; Chökyi, the bride, age 46; Tsewang, the son, age 15; Pema, the daughter, age 10; Chogpa, the daughter, age 47; Diki, the daughter, age 25; Buchung, the son, age 26; Pasang, the daughter, age 7; Orgyan, the son, age 4; Dawa, the daughter, age 1.

Sonam was the second eldest of four brothers who married a common spouse. Sonam's elder brother is the father of Tsewang and Pema, while Sonam fathered Pasang and Orgyan after his brother died. Two of the brother's sisters, Chogpa and Diki, lived in the adjunct house. Chogpa was a spinster (*mo hrang*) who neither married nor bore children. Diki gave birth to the illegitimate child Dawa.

Furthermore, not all out-of-wedlock childbearing resulted from liaisons between consenting individuals, as illustrated by the following case.

Gyeypug #29

Tinley, the head of household, age 53; Dargyay, the brother, age 56; Buti, the daughter, age 35; Tsering, the daughter, age 1; Ngawang, her [Buti's] son, age 8; Kelsang, the daughter, age 5; Sumchog, the daughter, age 24; Orgyan, the son, age 1; Kunzang, the daughter, age 14.

The brothers Tinley and Dargyay, whose wife had died before 1958, had three daughters: Buti, the deceased Dolkar, and Sumchog. None of the daughters married, but all had children. Buti lived in a *zurkhang* with her three children, Tsering, Ngawang, and Kelsang. Kunzang was Dolkar's illegitimate daughter who remained in her maternal grandfather's home after her mother died. Orgyan, Sumchog's son, was an illegitimate child, the product of a rape. According to Sumchog,

I had one son [Orgyan]; he died at a young age. The child was a *nyelu*. There was so much forest around our village. We would go there to work

and would sometimes sleep in the forest. Sometimes men would come during the night and take us by force (*btsan dbang*). Then nyelu would be born.

Little social stigmatism seemed to be attached to the nyelu. Illegitimate children were neither shunned nor denigrated as unwanted consequences of moral indiscretions. Throughout the course of the research, I was continually surprised by informants who did not hesitate to identify illegitimate children within their households, even if they themselves were that nyelu. For example, one woman confided, “[After I was born] my mother brought a magpa into the home. He was not my father, so I called him uncle (*a khu*). I am a nyelu.” Another woman said,

My father was from Neynub, my mother from Neyshar. My father and mother did not stay together; I am a nyelu. I was born within my mother’s home. My father went elsewhere. He went as a magpa to another household.

Although nyelu status did not carry much social stigmatism, illegitimate children did suffer economic disadvantages. By virtue of unrecognized paternity they were ineligible to inherit the most critical assets, land and herds. One person explained,

We did not consider it too bad to have children without being married. Nyelu themselves could get married, but they did not receive inheritance (*pha gzhis*). They would become düchungba. There were many nyelu. The father would not have to give anything [to the mother or child].

Chronic labor shortages no doubt contributed to the acceptance of illegitimate children in Kyirong society. According to a member of a taxpayer household,

Nyelu would stay with us. When they got older they would not be sent away from our houses, but would remain and work with us. If they had children we would not throw them out, they stayed together with us as well.

The fact that nyelu were not stigmatized is probably related to the fact that taxpayers valued their labor contributions. Bear in mind, a nyelu was typically relegated to düchungba status and hence had no claim on a household’s heritable assets. As children and adults they could work for the household yet only needed to be compensated with food, clothing, and shelter. Despite such disadvantages, some nyelu rose above their humble circumstances. For example,

Gyepug #19

Gyalmo, the female head of household, age 32; Dorje, the magpa, age 34; Puntsok, the son, age 8; Changchub, the daughter, age 6; Wangmo, the daughter, age 2.

Gyalmo became the heiress of this household because her only brother died before having children. Gyalmo therefore brought home a magpa, Dorje, to be her husband. According to a former neighbor,

In the past there was a nun who gave birth to Dorje. He had no inheritance since his father was separate [from his mother; i.e., not married]. Gyalmo had a brother who died. Then Gyalmo brought home a magpa. He [Dorje] was the nyelu who went as a magpa and got land.

In summary, although polyandry limited marital opportunities for taxpayer females, unmarried women still had ample opportunities to reproduce, especially with men who were dissatisfied with their own plural marriages. People attached little overt stigmatism to the nyelu, which no doubt contributed to the fact that illegitimacy was rather common in Kyirong.

Religious Celibacy and Fertility

Although Buddhism has long been Tibet's preeminent religion, the demographic upsurge of monasticism only occurred during the latter part of the seventeenth century—more precisely, under the administration of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617–1682). As a major supporter of religious institutions, he reorganized the Tibetan administration under the guiding principle 'religion and political affairs joined together' (*chos srid gnyis 'brel*) (Goldstein 1989, 2). Not surprisingly, this initiative led to a dramatic increase in monks. Using historical documents, Dungkar Lobsang Tinley has estimated that between 1694 and 1733 the number of monks rose from 120,000 to 342,000 (Dungkar 1991, 73–76), an impressive 185 percent increase in a mere 40 years. By the time Europeans began visiting and describing Tibet during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, monasticism had become a highly visible part of the cultural landscape. Observing that many Tibetans resided in monasteries, the British diplomat Samuel Turner reflected on the population regulating function of male celibacy. Turner was struck by Tibet's dual system of governance whereby every notable position was occupied by a lay official and a monk counterpart. Because becoming a monk official was one route to upward social and economic mobility, Turner concluded,

It will be obvious from hence, since population is opposed by two such powerful factors as ambition and religion, how great a diminution in the number of inhabitants must inevitably be the result. (Turner 1991, 172)

Turner's account led Thomas Malthus to deduce that population regulation was a central concern of the Tibetan government. He wrote,

In almost every country of the globe individuals are impelled, by considerations of private interest, to habits which tend to repress the natural increase of population; but Tibet is perhaps the only country where these habits are universally encouraged by the government, and where to repress, rather than to encourage population, seems to be a public object. (1989, 119)

To this day scholars cite male celibacy as a population regulating factor in historical Tibet, in one case going so far as to claim that monasteries in post seventeenth century Tibet were 'voluntary mechanisms of population control' (Thurman 1990, 110). Some also declare monasticism to have been partially responsible for Tibet's alleged population decline from the 1700s to the 1950s (e.g., Ekvall 1972; Grunfeld 1996; Guo 1996). There is no doubt that the Tibetan government's strong support for organized religion had demographic consequences. Nevertheless, I do not subscribe to the supposition that monasteries were 'voluntary mechanisms of population control' (Thurman's position), nor to the notion that Tibetan society was intentionally organized to control population growth (Malthus' position). I would be more inclined to accept these positions if direct supporting evidence could be found, for example historical records showing that political or religious leaders intended to use monasticism as a means for regulating the size of the Tibetan population. Until such evidence comes to light, it is more plausible to consider how population regulation can be an unintended effect of institutions that developed to serve other, non-demographic purposes. The task at hand is to sort out the hypothetical ways that population regulation can be an inadvertant by-product of monasticism, rather than an intentional goal.

To begin, only certain members of a household in historical Tibet were likely to become monks. Tibetans have a common saying that the 'middle of three sons' (*spun gsum bar ba*) should become a monk. However, this ideology was not an infallible predictor of who became a monk. Obviously, the demographic forces of fertility and mortality did not always leave families with three sons. As previously noted, the

only female-headed households were those that lacked a male successor. We can infer then that taxpayers had a strong preference for passing succession to a son; as a result, households with only one son were not in a position to forfeit him to the clerisy. Furthermore, parents were no doubt conditioned to the realities of high infant and childhood mortality. Consequently, for a family with two sons to require one of them to take an irrevocable vow of celibacy—before the other had married and produced heirs—would be a risky proposition, not to mention a major economic sacrifice to the household's labor force. Based on this logic, I hypothesize that households with three or more sons were the most likely to send a child to a monastery.

The above hypothesis is supported by data from Sama (see Chapter 4). Although the people of Sama live under different political, social, and economic conditions than the people of historical Tibet, they no doubt share many of the same concerns when it comes to balancing the decisions of household succession with those of making a son a monk. Sama's 36 monks aged 5–24 came from families that had an average of 2.8 living male offspring. The majority (67 percent) had two or more surviving brothers, while 30 percent had one surviving brother. Only one monk was from a single-son family. Because his mother died shortly after he was born, and because he had a sister who was nine years older, the boy's widowed father decided to keep that girl at home and later bring in a magpa for her rather than waiting for his son to come of age.

Now consider findings from research on the instability of polyandrous marriages. Using data from a Tibetan community in Western Nepal, Levine and Silk found that the more husbands there are in a household, the more likely the household is to partition into separate units (1997, 381). The initiators of household partitions are usually junior brothers who are younger than the wife of the household. In other words, subordinate status within the household (the eldest brother is typically designated the head of household) and the age difference between junior husbands and their older wives are significant factors that can lead to the dissolution of polyandrous marriages (Levine and Silk 1997, 381–382; see also Haddix 2001, 56).

The above findings are based on data from Nepal where households own their land and can partition it as they see fit. Such was not the case in historical Tibet where agricultural fields were owned by the government, a monastery, or an aristocratic family, and where taxpayer households leased set amounts of land that they could neither expand

nor partition easily. Because the number of taxpayer households in a place like Kyirong remained more or less stable over time, the number of households that women could formally marry into also remained stable. The limiting factor for marriage was therefore the number of households, not the number of laymen. Ultimately, if monks from taxpayer households mainly came from families with three or more sons, then an increase in the number of monks reduced the average number of men per polyandrous union, not the number of taxpayer households into which women were eligible to marry. Based on Levine and Silk's arguments, we can hypothesize that decreasing the average number of brothers involved in polyandrous marriages reduced the potential for inter-sibling conflicts to arise. Consequently, fewer disgruntled sons would leave their households to form separate relationships with unmarried women. Therefore, monasticism would affect aggregate fertility by reducing non-marital fertility, not marital fertility. Because non-marital fertility is much lower than marital fertility (e.g., 2.2 versus 6.2 births per woman in Kyirong) the impact of monasticism would not be as great as others have presumed. For example, if Kyirong's non-marital fertility rate were reduced by one full birth per woman, the resulting TFR would be 4.0 rather than the actual rate of 4.4 births per woman.

Two factors could mitigate male celibacy's impact on non-marital fertility: how frequently men adhered to their vows of celibacy and how rigorously those vows were enforced within monasteries. According to one nineteenth-century observer,

The rule [in monasteries] which is most broken is celibacy. The established church alone adheres strictly to this rule; so that, on this account, many of its monks leave the order, as they are always free to do, though suffering social disgrace, as they are called *ban-lok* [*banlog*], or 'turncoats'. (Waddell 1991, 193)

Banlog (*ban log*) and its synonym *dralog* (*grwa log*) literally mean 'a monk who has returned'. These terms usually designate one who has renounced or broken his vow of celibacy and resumed life as a layman. Despite a general atmosphere of disapproval, some very prominent monks have had affairs with women throughout Tibetan history. The most famous is Tsangyang Gyatso, the Sixth Dalai Lama. He was only enthroned in 1697 at the relatively advanced age of fifteen, as Tibet's regent Sangye Gyatso concealed the death of the powerful Fifth Dalai Lama in order to avert political turmoil. Tsangyang Gyatso's prolific love poetry, which often includes descriptions of romantic interludes, is

generally accepted as evidence he was far from chaste (Sörensen 1990; Williams 2005). In any event, Tsangyang Gyatso did not break any vows because he refused to pledge celibacy in the first place despite considerable pressure from clerics and ministers of the state (Aris 1988, 155–156). Other notable monastic officials who are known to have had affairs with women include Lobsang Tutop, a regent under the Fifth Dalai Lama, who was forced from office in 1675 when it was revealed that he kept a mistress (Shakabpa 1984, 121; Richardson 1998, 452–453), and Reting Rinpoche who was regent during the time when the current Dalai Lama was young. Reting Rinpoche resigned his prestigious post under pressure, partly on the grounds that he carried on affairs with women (Goldstein 1989, 359–363). We know that some powerful clerics were sexually active. Less clear, however, is how frequently lower-ranking monks broke their vows of celibacy, or what proportion of monks was expelled once their indiscretions were exposed. In any case, the breaking of vows and defrocking of monks would certainly mitigate the fertility reducing effect of male monasticism.

Reproducing Monks and Nuns in Kyirong

Monasticism's effect on aggregate fertility would vary by region because not all Buddhist sects require celibacy among its clerics. The Gelugpa sect that dominated Central Tibet is rather stringent in their chastity requirement. In contrast, householder lamas (*sngags pa*) are more common than celibate monks in the Nyingma communities that predominate along Tibet's southern fringe (e.g., Aziz 1978; Clarke 1980). With these thoughts in mind, let us now examine the potential impacts of male celibacy on fertility in Kyirong.

Kyirong had a Gelugpa institution, Tashi Samtenling Monastery, but this was relatively small with only about 75 residents. Because Tashi Samtenling was the only celibate monastery in the district, only about two percent of Kyirong's male population consisted of monks who were prohibited from engaging in sexual activities. Nyingmapa institutions headed by married lamas were far more common. According to the present leader of such an institution, Tashi Chöling, the monastery possessed land which it leased to its own taxpaying subjects from whom it recruited monks. The incumbents of this lineage were expected to father their successors, and at the time of founding, resident monks were expected to take vows of celibacy in accordance with the monastery's charter (*bca' yig*). However, the celibacy requirement was abandoned

several generations ago in response to an epidemic that decimated both the monastic community and the surrounding lay population. Following this demographic catastrophe, the monastery had difficulty recruiting monks, leading the head lama to transform his institution into a *ser khyim* ('householder monk') monastery. Inside those confines, residents did not have to remain chaste. By the 1950s the monastery was populated by roughly 85 monks and 20 nuns—almost all of whom were permitted to reproduce. One former resident of this unique institution explained,

At our monastery there were only a few monks who maintained pure vows (*sdom gtsang pa*, i.e., celibate monks). Very few residents took the vows of the fully ordained monk (*bsnyen rdzogs sdom pa*). Most only took lesser vows. My father was a religious practitioner (*chod pa*), and my mother was a nun (*jo mo*). My mother's mother was also a nun. We say that there is a lineage of the lamas (*bla ma gdung rgyud*), and a lineage of the monastic community (*grwa tshang gdung rgyud*). We stayed in our own dwellings at the monastery. My mother and father met there, stayed together, and had children.

My mother would have to go to the village to give birth. It was not permitted to give birth at the monastery. A woman could not say to the lama, "I am pregnant". Instead, she would first burn juniper in order to inform the lama that she was pregnant. It was a sign to let the lama know. Then the lama would understand, "Oh, the woman there is pregnant". After giving birth [in the village] she would have to burn juniper as a purification offering (*lha bsangs*). Then the lama would know, "Oh, she will come to rejoin the assembly (*tshogs*)".

The current incumbent of Tashi Chöling further explained,

Our temple had statues of Orgyan Ngawang Yeshe and Miling Terdag Lingpa. These two statues were considered to be especially sacred. There were different types of pollution that could negatively affect our monastery, including birth pollution (*skyes grib*). If pollutions of that sort entered our monastery, then the hats of those two statues immediately dropped to the ground. For example, on the morning after a woman had conceived, the caretaker would go to offer the holy water and see that the hats had fallen to the ground. He immediately went to consult with the lama and the master of discipline (*dge skos*). "One of our nuns is with child", he would say. The master of discipline would then be sent to gather information on who was pregnant. When discovered, the nun would have to offer repentance (*bshags pa*). From the day she offered repentance and said, "I am pregnant", the nun was not permitted to remain at the monastery. She would go down to the village where she would give birth. After giving birth, she would do a ceremony to absolve the pollution (*grib bsangs*). A month or two after giving birth she would seek an audience with the

lama. The lama would present her with a ceremonial scarf (*mjal dar*). Henceforth the pollution would be cleansed. The indiscretion would be cleansed. She could then either stay at the monastery or with her own family. The infant needed to be cared for so she would often remain with her family for a period of time. In other cases, such as poor people who had no families to stay with, the nun would stay in her monastic abode with the infant.

Unfortunately, the requisite data does not exist to determine whether this small community of nuns bore as many children as their lay counterparts. Regardless, it is an interesting example of how a monastic institution responded to a demographic setback, in this case an epidemic that threatened its very existence. Removing the celibacy requirement apparently enticed new recruits and not only allowed the decimated population to recover, but to sustain itself from within its own ranks. The relaxing of the celibacy requirement counteracted the fertility depressing effect that monasticism would otherwise have exerted on Kyirong's population.

In the early twentieth-century Tibetan world Kyirong's relatively low number of celibate monks may be anomalous. Everything else being equal, those areas of Tibet with a higher percentage of celibate monks would theoretically have slightly lower fertility rates than Kyirong. As argued above, a rise in the number of monks does not necessarily increase the number of unmarried women. Rather, it decreases the average number of brothers in a polyandrous union; by extension, monasticism has a slightly negative impact on non-marital fertility by decreasing the number of men who could potentially stray from home and have children with unmarried women.

Conclusions

Tibet's land tenure and taxation system presented a matrix of structural factors that influenced family formation processes and fertility. Specifically, a taxpayer household was granted the right to till a set amount of government land and to keep a percentage of the produce providing they fulfilled their tax obligations. The tax basis held by a household was heritable, but the amount of arable land was fixed and could not be expanded or contracted in response to needs generated by a changing family size. These realities—in combination with a complex economy of farming, herding, and trading—provided incentives for households to enhance their long-term economic viability by

regulating the composition of their membership. A common solution was fraternal polyandry, a practice that effectively prevented the division of assets by keeping brothers together so they could function as a single productive unit under one roof.

Household-level adaptations to the conditions imposed by Tibet's land tenure and taxation system would logically result in low aggregate fertility because many women were excluded from marriage. In this regard, polyandry did indeed act as a preventive check on population growth. However, the polyandry effect was tempered by several factors, not the least of which was that formal marriage within a taxpayer household did not represent a woman's sole opportunity to reproduce. Polyandry's fertility reducing effect was counteracted by discontented junior husbands who went in search of their own partners, typically high parity female victims of the marriage squeeze. Relatively permissive social attitudes toward out-of-wedlock childbearing helped make these unions possible. In the case of Kyirong during the middle of the twentieth century, the childbearing contribution of women who never married into taxpayer households tipped the demographic balance in favor of population growth. This outcome would never have been possible if all brothers in polyandrous households had acted in accordance with the corporate family ideal. Clearly, the actions of individuals who contravened social norms and cultural expectations played a major role in shaping demographic outcomes in Kyirong.