

THE HIGH-PASTURAGE ONES OF TIBET ALSO GROW OLD

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Environmental Background

The "high-pasturage ones" of Tibet who, by their mobile life-style are *nomadic*,¹ and by their subsistence economy—and its distinctive techniques—are *pastoralists*, are scattered across the "Roof of the World"—that high plateau north of the Himalayas and roughly bounded within the 28°–39° N and 75°–107° E parallels. Within these geographic boundaries the habitat available to the nomadic pastoralists has altitude boundaries extending from the highest limits of agriculture to the highest limits of vegetation. Factored by latitude these boundaries vary considerably from north to south. At 38° N the highest limit of agriculture is somewhat over 9,000 ft., and the highest limit of vegetation over 14,000 ft.; at 28° N those same limits are, respectively, somewhat over 15,000 ft. and over 17,000 ft.

Within these altitude zones only those areas, where vegetation in kind and quantity qualifies them as being authentically good "grasslands," constitute the normal range of the nomadic pastoralists. This range, a very large total of good grazing grounds in a variety of contours from steep slopes to level steppe, is known to all Tibetans as *aBrog*, a term best rendered descriptively in English as "high pasturage."

The concept for which this word stands is widely definitive, qualifying a range of such key concepts as: *aBrog Pa* (high pasturage ones), *aBrog sKad* (high pasturage speech), *aBrog TSHul* (high pasturage manner/custom), *aBrog Mo* (high pasturage woman), *aBrog lHam* (high pasturage boot), *aBrog Lug* (high pasturage sheep), *aBrog rTa* (high pasturage horse), and many more. Symbolically the term, "high pasturage," sets a subculture apart within the whole of Tibetan society and gives it identity.

Altitude, as the basic environmental factor, further distinguishes the Tibetan nomadic pastoralists as alti-

tude-zone pastoralists and fundamentally different from the arid-zone pastoralists, who constitute the great majority of the nomadic pastoralists throughout the world. They occupy the arid-zone belt, which extends from the west coast of Africa, through the Mid-East and Central Asia, to very near the east coast of Asia. Within this belt there are indeed mountain localities, such as Atlas, Caucasus, Karakoram, Pamir, T'ien, Altai, and Tanna Ola, where the factor of altitude has given rise to extensive and complex systems of transhumance that are yet practiced in the context of *arid-zone* conditions. Only on the Tibetan plateau, however, is the altitude zone, little affected by aridity, the basis for a unique system of nomadic pastoralism. These high-pasturage ones need not worry about water, except when extremely low temperatures cause lakes, streams, and even springs to freeze over.

Two distinct and separate results stem from the high altitude basis of pastoralism and point up important differences between Tibetan nomadic pastoralists and arid-zone nomadic pastoralists:

1) Whereas the arid-zone nomadic pastoralists live in the same climate as their nearby—or not too distant—agricultural neighbors, the Tibetan altitude-zone nomadic pastoralists live in a climate different from that of their agricultural neighbors. This results from a cause-and-effect differential between horizontal distance and vertical distance. One mile (or even five miles) on the level makes for little or no change in climate, but one vertical mile from whatever base, low or high, effects great changes: temperatures and their sequence of variation are different; air currents and their velocities are different; precipitation—in kind, volume, and timing—is different; entire ecosystems are different; and the totality of atmospheric conditions—relative percentages of oxygen and other gaseous variables in the air mix, and the assault of ultra-violet, cosmic, gamma, and other rays—is different.

2) In the arid zone the dividing line between the "sown" and the "unsown" (fields and pasturage) is a shifting one, either because of changing rainfall patterns or due to human manipulation of the environment. One mountain stream, dammed and deflected into an irrigation system, or one successful tapping and control of ground water can transform hundreds of acres of pasturage into potential fields and transfer exploitation rights from pastoralists to land-hungry agriculturalists.

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¹ The tense in which this ethnographic account of aging is being written is the historic present; but the actual time-frame is prior to 1959, the year when the Chinese finally achieved control of the whole of Tibet. Since that date, mandated or induced changes certainly have taken place; but for a variety of reasons (Ekvall 1968b: pp. 93-97) it is also quite certain that change among the nomadic pastoralists has been less drastic and at a slower rate, than among other sectors of the population. Appropriate comment concerning known, or arguable, change will be correlated with the text by a succession of footnotes.

Such occurrences and the fear of their repetition at an ever-increasing rate foster, on the part of the pastoralists, a massive sense of grievance which, when combined with mobility and a concomitant capability for raiding, may account for the classic tension between the herdsman and the farmer and the long record of periodic pillage, or at least enforced levies of commodities at harvest time by the nomads to the extreme detriment of nomadic-sedentary relations.

In the altitude zone, however, the dividing line between the "sown" and the "unsown" is relatively stable. There is virtually no competition for land resources between the agriculturalists and the pastoralists, because above the level of where crops will ripen there can be only pasturage. Such altitude-zone pasturages as are in the immediate vicinity of agricultural communities are exploited by those communities in varied and complex patterns of transhumance, in the course of which the farmers take on, in varying degrees, the techniques, routines, and habits of the herdsman.

Moreover, even in the instance of the *Sa Ma a Brog* (neither soil nor high pasturage), who by extended transhumance have come to so resemble the high-pasturage ones that passing travelers have confused them with the latter, and they may well be called "semi-nomads" although village based (Ekvall 1968b: pp. 21-23), there is no real threat to the high-pasturage ones or their range. Indeed, such extended forms of transhumance represent the historic Tibetan inclination to shift resources—economic and human—from sedentary agriculturalism to nomadic pastoralism in order to gain greater prestige and affluence. These varied stages of transhumance are not steps in the conquest of the high pasturage and its life-style, but tentatives of surrender to the allurements of that way of life.

Because there is little or no fear of expropriation of land or water by either the pastoralists or the farmers, and no tradition of the raiding of farming communities by nomadic pastoralists for pillage—or at least the commandeering of the harvests—there is relatively little tension between the communities of the two subcultures. The nomadic pastoralists do have a somewhat excessive degree of self appreciation and a corresponding contempt for the "soil grubbing farmers"; but the latter tacitly accept this as their lot and it does not interfere with a matter-of-fact symbiotic relationship focusing on the exchange of commodities, produced by the two subsistence techniques, to the benefit of both parties. By contrast, among the arid-zone nomadic pastoralists there is considerable raiding for livestock between communities and tribes.

The members of the high-pasturage subculture, thus set apart by the actuality and multifaceted consequences of altitude and by the basic and seminal concept of pasturage, and given a cultural identity of

which they are ever proud, live in an environment that is harsh, demanding, and a challenge to survival. The rigors of a continental climate are combined with what might be characterized as a heavily frosted monsoon system, and mountaintop and high-altitude winds of awesome violence. Riders have been known to have been blown from their horses; dust and grit, in clouds hundreds of feet high, are driven horizontally with such force that men and animals are swept along in the course of the storm unless they can find topographical wind breaks; and one traveler reported that the grit driven against his leather coat produced disconcertingly strong electric shocks. Blizzards of snow and hail overwhelm and threaten the lives of human beings and livestock.

On one occasion a Tibetan friend and I, riding furiously, barely escaped to the shelter of an overhanging cliff from hailstones the size of baseballs which, in just a few minutes, killed several score sheep on a nearby slope. Even rain can be a hazard, and when it falls in cloudburst volume for several days it can turn an entire landscape into an impassable sea of mud in which livestock simply disappear.

Of all these extremes the diurnal variations of temperature most affects the details of daily living. Throughout all seasons of the year, within each twenty-four hours the average fluctuation is between forty and fifty Fahrenheit degrees. I have experienced and recorded summertime changes from 25° F at dawn to 85° F in the early afternoon and a return to below freezing at night, and, in wintertime, variations of from -30° F at dawn to as high as 45° F in early afternoon sunshine—warm enough to melt frozen ground to the depth of half an inch which, in less than six hours, would be frozen solid. Much is known about the effect such rapid and extreme variations have on earth and rock formations; it is easy to see how such rapid oscillations of temperature influence clothes and how they are worn, and how such changes modulate the routines of daily living—as the climatic rhythms and temperature variations of an entire year are crammed within a day and a night—but we know little about the physio-psychological impact of such change on the human organism itself. We can only assume it represents one more hazard and long-term threat to health which the Tibetan nomadic pastoralists must survive long enough to grow old.

Demographic Considerations

Despite their lofty self-consciousness of identity—distinctive and praiseworthy—the high-pasturage ones, who live in this harsh environment of many extremes, are not a different ethnic group or enclave, as some travelers have taken them to be, but are Tibetans. As such they exhibit in all the anthropometric indices—cephalic, profile, size, build, hair, eyes, and so forth—a great variety of traits that can be attributed only to a

mixing of gene pools and even distinct races. Legend and history help in identification of those races—Persian, Turk, Mongol, Tartar, Ch'iang, Min, Burmese, Gurka, and Indo-Aryan are the recognizable ones, and others such as Zhang-Zhung, Yang-Tung, Dru-Gu are merely names without known ethnic identity—but all have long since been Tibetanized in language and culture. Whatever the ingredients, the result is a noticeable resemblance to northern Amerindians—particularly the Navaho and other Athabascan tribes—commented on by travelers and, most recently, by some Tibetans who have become acquainted with or have learned about Indians.

As Tibetans, the nomadic pastoralists have a minus-zero population growth; but as high-pasturage ones, living at extreme altitudes and with a life-style which requires much hard riding by both sexes, they have an even more accentuated minus-zero population growth. There are many indications that the population of Tibet has been declining for hundreds of years. The trend appears to have begun sometime after the eighth or ninth century, coinciding with the final domination of society by Buddhism as the national religion, and the consequent disappearance of ancestor worship. (See Ekvall 1972: pp. 277–285 for an elaboration of this theme with special reference to the nomadic pastoralists.) Indeed, if it were not for a continuous population leakage, due to cultural or economic incentives, from the sedentary agricultural communities to the nomadic pastoral communities, the population shrinkage of the latter would have caused nomadic pastoralism to have disappeared by simple attrition.²

There are no data figures available as to the exact or even approximate total number of the nomadic pastoralists; nor are there any exact figures as to the population ratio between the nomadic pastoralists and other Tibetan subcultures. One noted modern Tibetan scholar and historian (Shakabpa 1967: p. 6) states, however, that of the estimated six million Tibetans in ethnic Tibet, approximately 48 per cent are nomads, 32 per cent are traders and agriculturalists, and 20 per cent belong to the monastic subculture (18 per cent monks and 2 per cent nuns).³

² With the improved health-care services—and, as a result, the probable extension of life expectancy—which the Chinese have brought to Tibet since 1959, it is quite likely that the population decline has been arrested among the agriculturalists living at lower altitudes, but for the high-pasturage ones the adverse effects of high altitudes and much hard riding remain. The Chinese have noted the paucity of children among the nomadic pastoralists. No census reports are available, but the latest livestock enumeration reports a 2.7 times increase in livestock since 1959, which inferentially suggests a possible increase in the human population.

³ From all information available, it appears that because of the Chinese anti-monastic policy the monastic proportion of the population has been reduced to one tenth its former size.

There are no estimates whatsoever as to the proportion of the aged among the nomadic pastoralists, and I can draw only on my observations and impressions from eight years of living among them. Despite the myth of Shangri La and the very real existence of pockets of longevity among the fruit-growing, subsistence-farming, and goat-herding Muslim inhabitants of the Gilgit and Hunza valleys in Kashmir, only a small proportion of the nomadic pastoralists population are noticeably aged. I can recall maybe a half dozen men and women who had reached eighty, and not many more were in their seventies. For most, the process of really growing old physically and culturally begins in the forties. There are of course exceptions, and I remember a few—both men and women—in their late fifties and early sixties who apparently refused to grow old.

Before we go further into the details of the actual process of physical and cultural aging, there are additional considerations which claim attention.

Diet, Disease, and Health

The regular diet of the high-pasturage ones is an exceptionally high-protein one, based on animal husbandry products: meat—including skull skin, tongue, eyes (a delicacy), marrow fat, *all* the internal organs except the gall bladder, sinew, blood collected in the course of butchering, and “live blood” tapped from the veins of live bovines; and milk products—butter, cheese, yogurt, buttermilk, and whey. Cereals—barley, peas, rice, and wheat flour—are obtained through trade, and of the cereals, barley, when roasted, freshly ground and mixed with cheese, butter and tea, is the fall-back staff-of-life to accompany the eating of meat and the drinking of large quantities of tea. Vegetable intake is limited to the minute tubers of the edible *potintilla* and some frozen-dried turnips, and, in the summer, wild garlic, wild chives, and wild onion tops for flavoring. Although dandelion, plantain, caraway, and other edible greens are quite abundant, the pastoralists disdainfully call them “yak food.” Nor do they have much in the way of fruit—occasional handfuls of edible honeysuckle berries, buckthorn berries, raspberries, and a few strawberries gathered in passing. Dried jujubes and dried persimmons from China are prized items of trade.

Wounds—sword, spear, and gunshot—and dog bites are not exactly diseases, yet are sometimes fatal and do affect health by crippling and causing debilitating long-term infections. In the absence of any indigenous health records, any evaluation of public health conditions is a matter of observation and opinion, but in addition to my own experience I also had at one time a well qualified observer. At mid-term during our association with the high-pasturage ones, Vaughn Rees, an English missionary doctor, and his nurse-wife traveled with us for over three months, partly among

the sedentary agriculturalists but mostly among the nomadic pastoralists, and during that period he treated over 3,000 patients. All communication, both ways, passed through me as interpreter, and the experience was indeed a cram course in public health, diagnosis, prescription and treatment, and even surgery. The course was enhanced because the doctor, as any good professional would, enjoyed explaining the *what, why, and how* of each particular case and its relationship to public health, life-styles, and the environment. I learned much. Thereafter, my originally well-intentioned but amateurish first-aid efforts took on the expertise and assurance of paramedic care, and in the years which followed I acquired medicines and surgical instruments and treated thousands.

Although the pastoralists were much more exposed to the elements and lived a more strenuous and even dangerous existence than the farmers, they were, on the average, more healthy. The commonest complaints were: acute indigestion, stomach ulcers (known as "vomiting sickness" and frequently fatal within a relatively short time), rheumatism (more often muscular than arthritic), respiratory diseases, infections of many varieties, acute insomnia with resultant neural syndromes, male impotency, and that ubiquitous riders' affliction, hemorrhoids. The doctor found relatively little heart disease and virtually no traces of TB. There were some interesting variant analogies between pastoralists and agriculturalists: numerous cases of leprosy among the farmers and none among the herders; relatively little syphilis but much gonorrhoea among the herders; and less gonorrhoea but more syphilis among the farmers.

Although we encountered no epidemic diseases, three—smallpox, scarlet fever, and measles—are well known and feared. Not surprisingly, the agriculturalists are more victimized than the pastoralists whose life-style facilitates the imposition of quarantine. The pastoralists, however, know and fear pneumonic plague and are aware of the fact that marmots are the vectors. Anthrax, known as "soil poison," is also a particular threat to the pastoralists.

These are the principal health-signs and warnings on the road along which the high-pasturage ones grow old.

Sex Role Considerations

The general direction taken by men and women in the process of aging is basically the same, but the manner, stages, and even detours of the process are influenced, and to a certain degree determined, by the respective sex roles and norms men and women have in society. There are in fact three roles which condition the development of the process: 1) male role; 2) female role; 3) a joint role in which an assortment of activities are shared cooperatively, or even exchanged, as circumstances and need warrant.

The man's role in the joint venture of the tent is focused largely on what takes place outside the tent: the activities that give the tent its place in the community and maintain its status in the society at large. The male protects and cares for the livestock/wealth which constitutes the society's economic base and cultural distinction. To increase that wealth the man will venture far to tap other sources by trading, hunting, raiding, and furnishing (for hire) guide, guarding, and transport services for traders or other travelers.

As implements and symbols of his role, he wears at all times a case knife attached to his girdle and, when he leaves the tent, a sword tucked into that girdle. As tent-exterior manager he is primarily responsible for: herding the stock and seeing to it that all—yak, sheep, horses—graze well, survive the dangers and multiple mishaps of their high-pasturage living, and reproduce; negotiating the sale of animal husbandry products; butchering in the annual harvest of meat; shearing the sheep; depilating the yak and yak-cow hybrids; rendering veterinarian care, including castration; breaking in horses and oxen for riding and packing; preparing and tanning hides; and maintaining all saddlery and leather equipment.

Some of this activity, such as equipment crafting and maintenance, does take place in the tent, but the only tent-interior-male-role responsibilities are to set up the family altar, take care of the daily offerings, and intone mantras and prayers. This particular religious role also includes, on special days and for special reasons, the burning outside the tent of juniper twigs flavored with incense, butter, and grain, accompanied by similar intonations.

Aside from bearing, nurturing, and socializing the children (the *couvade* seems unknown), the woman's role in the joint venture is largely focused on what goes on inside the tent—the details of tent-keeping. At each move she is responsible for putting together a rock and clay stove and for keeping an ample store of fuel always ready for use. Keeping fuel on hand is no problem when people are in their winter quarters; mostly dried-out cattle and sheep dung is conveniently at hand in the cattle pens, but in summertime keeping a sufficient amount of fuel is a closely timed game with the weather. At daybreak, when the stock leave the encampment, the fresh dung must be gathered, spread thinly on the sward for a quick drying in the promised or hoped for sunshine, and the chips raked, turned, and gathered for storage in the tent before any afternoon rain arrives. As an important part of tent-keeping routine water must be carried from water holes, springs, and streams, barley must be roasted and ground by hand each day so that it is fresh, and tea must always be ready. The mistress of the tent also has an all-but-exclusive role in

caring for the animal young in the lambing, calving, and foaling season.

The most important exclusively female contribution to the economics of the tent is the gathering and processing of milk harvest. The processing results in butter, buttermilk, cheese, and yogurt. In addition to being indispensable as food, butter is also the symbol and substance of accrued wealth. It ranks next to silver as a universal form of currency (different amounts of butter are value-units used in trade, and it is the necessary element in a wide range of activities including religious ritual, the creation of art-forms, tanning, and cosmetology to the extent that the pervasive perfume of Tibetan culture is butter, somewhat rancid. In the later stages of the process in the harvest a male may lend a hand—to keep the dasher going in the churn or to spread the cheese in the sun to dry—but only a woman does the milking. Every high-pasturage milch cow, yak or hybrid knows that.

Once when we were traveling among the "black-tents people," one of our Tibetan servants, a young man from the land of farms named Jalo, suggested that we buy a milch cow and drive it with our pack oxen so that we could have plenty of milk without having to depend on our hosts' daily gifts. He promised to do the milking, for he came from a village where the cows came home to stables and were accustomed to heterosexual handling.

A tentative deal was made with our host for a good milch cow, a hybrid which would have no accompanying calf, and when she strolled near the tent for the customary noonday milking, Jalo emerged. He was well camouflaged with a woman's hat and long felt coat, and stooping over, cooing endearments in falsetto, he stalked the cow. At first she was puzzled and allowed him to get close, but when he squatted and shifted the milkpail into place, she tossed her head and opted for the proper fitness of things in relationships between the sexes by a leaping two-legged kick that sent Jalo sprawling and the milkpail rolling.

A common role shared between men and women in which an assortment of activities are handled cooperatively characterizes many of the tasks of daily work and living; for example, when moving camps. When breaking camp and moving to a new site, everyone (men, women, and children who are more than toddlers), according to strength and skills available, participates in packing, in taking down the tent, in loading the oxen and keeping them on the trail, and in setting up the tent at the fresh campsite. Women do share in the herding role, often taking care of the sheep which are pastured near the encampment and least likely to be the target of a raid. Men and women join in rolling fleece, wetted down with hot water, in the making of felt; and whenever anyone has nothing else to do, hand-and-spindle spinning of yak hair into thread, a task never completed, is always waiting

to be done. But roles change in the use of that thread. Though men and women spin, women do the weaving and then men do the hard and tight sewing needed in the making of a tent or in its renewal (Ekvall 1968 b: pp. 63-64).

In both preparation of food and general sewing and stitching, similar shifts in role take place: women do the ordinary cooking, but when special dishes, requiring the mincing of meat are to be prepared, men often take charge; in sewing, men and women, according to skills and preferences, sew up clothing and stitch patterns on the garments; only women, however, do the fine sewing with sinew required in crimping the leather role to the distinctive "high-pasturage boot," but it is the men who do the heavy sewing on leather bags and tack with leather thongs.

It is the continuous round of such activities as these in which men and women of the high pasturage play their roles, separate and shared, and grow old.

Economic Considerations

The right of primogeniture is not current among the Tibetans; among the nomadic pastoralists the wealth of the tent is allocated in shares long before the breakup by death or fragmentation of the family. Each member of that family knows, then, the size of the share to which he or she (there is no discrimination according to sex) is entitled. Sons, daughters-in-law, and even "called-in" sons-in-law have individual rights to shares of predetermined size. In some communities the custom is for each parent to have two shares.

For those who are growing old the economic outlook is encouraging rather than bleak.

Religion as Prime Consideration

Tibetan Buddhism attracts a variety of persons because of its multifaceted and esoteric aspects: abtruse philosophy, the discipline of the eight-fold way, proffered psychic experimentation, and the tantalizing, not altogether orthodox, perspectives of tantric thaumaturgy. For the Tibetan laity (in this instance the high-pasturage ones) there are five observances that make Buddhism a workable religion: 1) the attitude—the Tibetan term is literally "manner-change"—of faith/trust; 2) the verbalization, or concept release, of mantras, charms, and prayers; 3) the presentation of offerings; 4) the performance of salutations; and 5) the practice of circumambulation.

The first observance—the attitude of faith/trust—is seen by some buddhologists as being at variance with the grimly self-sufficient self-discipline and coldly intellectual agnosticism of theoretical Buddhism. The stance of faith/trust is, nevertheless, warmly embraced by the laity as basic assurance on which one can rely and thus accept all the tenets of religion, the foremost of which is worship of, and constant appeal

to, "Rare Perfect Three," generally known by western scholars as The Jewel Triad. The remaining four observances are categorized by the Tibetans as the "four *works* of religion"; they are also unquestionably the four *opportunities* of religion, and as such require intense labor and much time.

Offerings, which depend on the products of labor, are spent in the rituals of worship and in the bestowing of largesse to the religious establishment; butter lamps are filled, incense burned, and so forth. Verbalization, or "concept release," is not only intoned mantras, charms, and prayers by the thousands each day, but is also activation of written texts forced into repetition by hand-spun prayerwheels, by the great prayer cylinders of the monasteries pushed into motion, by prayer flags flying in the ceaseless wind, and by numerous other devices. Salutation is gesture amplified into genuflection, including all-out prostrations, which may total hundreds in a single day. Circumambulation is clockwise circling of whatever may be worshipped, and daily can accumulate many miles of movement. For a book-length elaboration and analysis of Tibetan religious observances see Ekvall 1964d: *passim*.

Because of the rigorous and stress-laden dichotomy of the religious and the secular in Tibetan society, making it more nearly a theocratic system than any society in the world,⁴ the lifetime posture and balance of a Tibetan man or woman is a straddle (ofttimes awkward) over a divide between secular pragmatism and the demands of religion. The progression of the aging high-pasturage ones is along that divide, with the balance tipping more and more strongly to the side of religion with the accumulation of years.

Before we explore the details of that imbalance and its ameliorating effect on the lives of those growing old, a digression is in order. There is no cult of the aged with routinized reverence and rituals in Tibetan society, such as existed in traditional China. Indeed, T'ang period Chinese historiographers who came in contact with Tibetan society were scandalized at what they considered the cavalier attitude towards the aged and the resulting negligent treatment of this group. In Tibetan history there is also a strangely ambiguous comment on royal succession in the mythic/legendary period, to the effect that when the son reached the age of thirteen and could ride a horse, he ascended to the throne and the father ascended to heaven by a magic rope.

Stages and Change

Out of much experience and extended observation it is clear that the aged of the high-pasturage ones are

⁴All available accounts following the carefully planned Chinese secularization of Tibetan society since 1959, indicate that the public practice of religious observance has probably fallen to one tenth of its former frequency. There is no way of knowing about the frequency of private observance.

not valued for being old *sui generis*, but are valued and honored for discretion, know-how, and wisdom acquired in lifetimes of often dangerous, always stressful living. When these qualities are self-evident in the aged man, his advice on many matters is publicly sought; and whenever there is community unease or strife, he intervenes as mediator.

The aged woman, too, from many years' experience in livestock midwifery and caring for the animal young, in keeping particular account of the herd growth, in exclusive management of the milk harvest and the real and symbolic wealth it produces, often comes to have a special voice in the councils of the tenthold, and she receives a hearing with increasing respect. Sometimes when she has become really aged (having outlived her peers) in the mumbling of mantras, charms, and prayers she may assert herself in the role of seer, eliciting awe in addition to respect.

The dual progression towards new levels of status and degrees of deterioration (loss of vigor and increasing decrepitude) by male and female of the high-pasturage ones exhibits, according to sex, both similarities and dissimilarities. Both move along the same divide between secular pragmatism and religious observance towards an ever increasing religious imbalance, and both share in the amplified performance of the observances previously cited; but factors of renunciation and radical change play a much larger part in the aging experience of the male than in the analogous experience of the female.

As aging signals its encroachment, at some point the male renounces the gains and intoxicating dangers of hunting and raiding. He also passes to others the function of killing in the harvesting of meat, though he continues to help in the butchering. These are the first steps of withdrawal from that arrogantly male world of weaponry, with its overt aggressions and flaunted challenges, although for a time he may continue to wear and carry weapons as an assertion of the right to defend himself if necessary. Eventually the man no longer carries a gun on his back nor wears a sword tucked in his girdle, but carries only a caseknife dangling from that girdle for cutting and trimming leather and carving meat.

During the entire process of social withdrawal an analogous withdrawal from sex occurs and is accepted, though timing and circumstances vary widely. Now living in a chaste manner and no longer killing, the Tibetan aged enter somewhat subconsciously into an implicit, imitative shadow state of monkhood and nunhood and apply themselves to a limited observance of the routines of monastic life.

Nevertheless, before reaching this stage of all-out concentration on religious observance, men and women have to go through the process of adjustment: coming to terms with their changed, or changing, roles in the life of the tent. This adjustment is, again, more

abrupt for the man than for the woman, posing more radical changes and discontinuities for him than for her. The male's chores by their very nature allow little respite as he ages; the sudden and prolonged physical effort in hard riding on errands of every kind and the contest-like exertion in much of the handling of livestock keep him active. These chores must be carried through completely or not attempted at all, unlike the woman's chores which gradually diminish her participation: she milks fewer cows, or the more docile ones, taking a shorter spell at the dasher of the churn, or foregoes any stint at weaving—a taxing task in which a woman straddles the warp stretched fifty feet or more and bending over, works her way along, threading the woof by hand and pounding the threads tight. Then, too, the female can always turn to the quasi-leisurely task of spinning, thereby maintaining a hold on her part in the daily routine.

Though the attitude of faith may be equally strong in man and woman, because of the greater disruption of male roles and routines brought on by the process of aging, it is more frequently the man who first begins to intensify effort and to devote more and more time to the "works" of religion, which transform effort in this life into benefits in the hereafter. In the sun-warmed lee of the tent or seated in comfort by the fire inside, he may still spin thread for the tent's renewal, but a more pressing and remunerative task is to multiply verbalization—"concept release"—of religion in all its power. With one hand he keeps a prayer wheel spinning in countless repetitions in order to activate the religious words of power finely printed on the roll inside, while his other hand moves the beads of his rosary to keep count of the mantras, charms, and prayers that flow from his lips in a steady stream.

In the strictly vocal verbalization no Tibetan woman is tongue-tied, and her mutterings as she goes about the less demanding tenthold chores may activate quite as many of the holy words, but her manipulation of the prayer wheel will be less frequent, for she continues to have things to do with her hands. She also never ceases wearing the decorated anchor-like, double-pronged hook which, as implement, holds the milk pail steady but as symbol, signals her complete control of the milk harvest. The man, however, quite early in his withdrawal no longer wears a sword—implement and symbol of his role.

~~In the presentation of offerings~~ aging men and women are more on a common standing and each one can initiate additional or special changes, as both have identical shares in the wealth of the tent. The woman may insist on extra lamps on the tent's altar into which she can feed more butter, taking care that all burn night and day; and she is progressively on the alert to hail and meet monks who are making the rounds

for the acceptance of offerings, so she can fill their bags with an abundance of butter, fresh out of the churn. On his part the man becomes profligate in incense-burning at the altar and multiplies the occasions when juniper-bough burnings, with accompanying ingredients are offered in front of the tent.

Though they have their place, such changes in routine are more symbolic than real. It is the offerings of appreciable value—silver, lambskin, loads of wool, bales of tea, and livestock of every kind to be presented to emanation-body lamas—or bestowed upon monastic institutions—that are the real religious offerings. In putting together gifts there is much consultation until a consensus is reached by the aged and all expenses are carefully shared. The aged ones make a point of taking part in the transportation of the gifts to the monastery of their choice and the driving of the livestock there, where they claim recognition as the donors and are appropriately greeted and honored. Such visits become occasions for truly gratifying performances of all the works of religion.

Of all those, only verbalization of religion can be adequately performed in the encampment. Outlets for those other works, particularly "salutations" with prostrations and circumambulation, are makeshift and meager. In some encampments a chief, or a very wealthy tentholder, may set up a beehive-shaped felt tent—the mongolian *yourt*—as his private chapel. It is furnished with an elaborate altar, images, image scrolls, and sacred books, and effectively creates a proper and consecrated shrine before which he can prostrate himself and around which he can circumambulate. In theory the privilege of that worship belongs to all members of the encampment, but in practice the "territorial imperative" Tibetan dogs have around the home tent make such worship a matter of considerable hazard.

Every Tibetan possesses and wears the makings of a shrine: a personal amulet—from the smallest leather packet containing something holy, to an elaborately chased silver or gold box containing an assortment of precious religious objects—which, when set on a rock or hummock, becomes a focus of worship towards which prostrations and around which circumambulations effectively contribute to accumulation of virtue/merit.

Visits to a monastery (a form of short-term pilgrimage) in search of ideal conditions for the works of religion are the special privilege of the growing-old ones, and on such visits the aged experience a variety of satisfactions and benefits.

On those visits it is the oldsters who present the offerings and receive in return tokens of appreciation: words of blessing from an emanation-body lama himself; scarves of blessing looped around their necks; even something like a caress when stroked by the

lama's blessing wand; and often elaborate hospitality with its overtones of conferred prestige.

Verbalization maintains in uttered prayers or mantras a fairly common average; that average is raised to a much higher number by the use of a hand prayer wheel, but when the pilgrims spin the giant prayer cylinders that fringe sections of the circumambulation path, those numbers take a quantum jump beyond computation to augment the virtue/merit credit balance in the nearing hereafter.

It is, however, in the "body works" of genuflection/prostration, and circumambulation, that the monastery offers the most in expected and unexpected opportunities and rewards, and it is towards these that the pilgrim visitor consecrates time and strength.

For the worshiper, man or woman, who would genuflect/prostrate there is a variety of shrines, structures, and objects from which to choose. Whatever the choice, in the worn hollows for his knees and grooves for his arms and hands in wood or stone, he can sense the presence of those who have been there before him, and behind him there are others waiting to follow in common purpose and fellowship. In this fellowship, as in the doing of the other religious works, there are more of the aging than the young, for it is the growing-old ones who progressively are relieved of tenthold chores and have the acknowledged privilege of spending days at a time at the monasteries.

During such visits the major portion of time and effort is devoted to circumambulation, the clockwise walk on the path that rings the monastery. Within that circuit are collected all the symbols and religious resources of the faith: the humanity of monks as they chant; the somewhat-more-than-human emanation-body lamas (bodhisattvas and their ilk) exuding blessing and saviorhood; the myriad printings of the Word of the Buddhahood; images and image-scrolls giving form to the esoterically formless; and the structures that house the religious total. One circuit completed is worship completed towards all, and blessing received from all.

Many circuits can be made in a day, even when rheumatic joints are hurting and muscles are tiring; and on the rounds there is the company and socializing of peers. There are meetings with friends, strangers, and even enemies. With the latter, enmity and fear are replaced by the assurance of a quasi truce and curiosity, for no one wears weapons on that path. Gossip and news are exchanged and day by day the glow of fellowship and of a common purpose and goal works its magic. At the end of a day, among other reasons for praising The Rare Perfect Three, there are twinges of increased physical well-being; even appetites are sharpened. Stiff and creaky bodies have been stretched and limbered up, and bow-legged nomads, who ride rather than walk, have discovered the unexpected benefits of religiously motivated daily constitutional walks—

against challenging wind and in soothing sunshine. The growing-old ones generally feel much better as they return to the tent and its routines.

Thus far, discussion of the growing-old process among the Tibetan nomadic pastoralists has, by implication, touched on male and female as a pair. There are many such pairs clinging to life together, but in the later stages of the process pairs do break up and there are more widows than widowers. Unless loss of spouse takes place quite early in the aging process, when one of a variety of remarriage arrangements may take place, the singled man or woman continues single to the end, but in most cases there is an added benefit of right to the wealth-share of the deceased.

As survival lengthens, increasing decrepitude brings changes and problems.⁵ In the seasonal encampment displacements, the aged one is given an equally aged horse, sure to follow the trail quietly, and a framework is attached to the front of the saddle on which one can lean and steady oneself. Even then the aged one may still help in the move, for sometimes a child is seated behind, bound to both framework and the aged one and needing reassurance and care. In rare instances the virtually bedridden stage is reached; the pastoralists improvise horse or ox-borne litters to provide solicitous comfort, though crude. At such a stage the end, however, is very near and comes quickly, for there are no life-supportive devices and drugs.

When death comes, there is much real sorrow in the tenthold and a shared mourning in the encampment, in a sense of loss within a culture which is people-hungry rather than land-hungry. With the simplest of ritual the corpse is taken to the top of the nearest sacred mountain and dismembered by the nearest of kin, so vultures may bring down "the burial of the heavens."

In the tent, much or all of the deceased's share of wealth (sometimes with appreciable contributions made by members of the tenthold) will be spent feeding the emanation-body lamas and monks who carry out the proper, and often lengthy, rites to aid and guide the soul in passage through the intermediate stage of Bardo, and on to the afterlife segments of the Wheel of Life that takes one through the eighteen hells and their various pains, and on to ultimate rebirth—but as what no one knows.

⁵ These conditions and problems may have changed greatly if a plan suggested (but not mandated at that time) by the Chinese in the late sixties has been carried through. The plan, accompanied by the slogan, "Fixed abodes—nomadic herding," provided for a permanent base at the site of the winter quarters for each pastoral unit. There would be houses, barns, expanded hayfields, public health and veterinarian services, and schooling for the children. Only picked work brigades would nomadize to herd the livestock, returning in winter to the base. Eventually processing plants and forms of cottage industry were to be developed. (Union Research Institute, 1968: pp. 294-298).

The void in the family and community will be long felt; but there can be no worship, or even formal reverence, for an ancestor who has passed into the unknowable permutations of karma.

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