

***EX ORIENTE LUMINA***  
***HISTORIAE VARIAE MULTIETHNICAE***

**Festskrift tillägnad Juha Janhunen  
på hans 61. födelsedag 12.2.2013**



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**Tiina Hyytiäinen, Lotta Jalava,  
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# NOTES ON THE MAINTENANCE OF DIVERSITY IN AMDO: LANGUAGE USE IN GNYAN THOG VILLAGE ANNUAL RITUALS

*Gerald Roche & Lcag mo tsho ring*

## INTRODUCTION

The Reb gong Vale is a densely populated high-altitude agricultural oasis that runs north-to-south for approximately twenty kilometers through the north-eastern Tibetan Plateau, surrounded by barren pastoral hills that rise to rocky snow-capped peaks.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the vale's residents self-identify as Tibetan, but this population contains considerable diversity along religious, sectarian, and linguistic lines. We explore how the linguistic diversity of the region might have been maintained despite communities sharing a common identity, being engaged in inter-communal ritual networks, sharing common trade and pilgrimage sites, and living in close proximity in the absence of geographical barriers. Given their contiguity and interconnectedness, what enabled certain communities to remain distinct from nearby populations? Under such circumstances, how did relatively small communities maintain distinct languages? What prevented them from being linguistically assimilated into the Tibetan population?

Social scientists have, since Durkheim (2008 [1912]), posited a link between ritual and communal coherence. Despite Geertz's (1957) attack on the overly-enthusiastic functionalism of the early twentieth century, the idea that ritual serves to create and integrate communities continues to surface, for example in Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) work on invented traditions, and Anderson's (2006 [1983]) work on the nation as imagined community. The idea of ritual functioning to constitute community has proved particularly resilient in Tibetological studies (e.g. Ramble 2008; Epstein & Peng 1998). Balikci (2008) noted the compulsory nature of

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1 We use the term vale as distinct from valley. Valley refers to the lowland region between two mountain ranges, along the course of a river while vale refers to a portion of a valley, typically limited at either end by canyons. See Yangdon Dhondup (2011) and Snying bo rgyal & Rino (2009) for more on Reb gong.

The authors thank the following people for their assistance: Rdo rje tsho brtan, Keith Dede, C.K. Stuart, and Elena McKinlay.



*Figure 1* Dor rdo communities in Reb gong. The outline shows the basin of the Dge chu and its tributaries.

communal rituals in the Tibetan context and Roche et al. (2010) suggested that the compulsory nature of this ritual participation may have been a driving mechanism behind the diversity on the Tibetan Plateau; ritual, rather than geographic mechanisms isolate communities from one another and drive diversity.

The suggestion we investigate here is that compulsory ritual participation may also have fostered linguistic diversity in Reb gong. We seek to investigate this question through an examination of the annual ritual cycle in Gnyan thog (Nianduhu) Village in Reb gong Vale, and the use of language within these rituals. We hypothesize that if annual rituals serve to socially constitute the community then this will also be reflected in language usage, and we therefore expect to see the annual ritual cycle simultaneously reify communal structure and foster positive attitudes towards communal language. Below we introduce the village context, the local language and its speakers' attitudes towards it, and then describe language use throughout the village annual ritual cycle.

## GNYAN THOG VILLAGE

Gnyan thog Village is in Gnyan thog Township, Reb gong (Tongren) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China. The approximately 1,300 residents live in c.230 households, are classified by the government as Tu,<sup>2</sup> are referred to by local Tibetans as either Hor or Dor rdo,<sup>3</sup> and self-identify as Tibetan, albeit a locally distinct community. Their

<sup>2</sup> The Tu are one of China's fifty-six officially recognized ethnicities. The group contains severally linguistically and culturally distinct populations. See Janhunen (2006) for a review of the issue.

<sup>3</sup> However, only educated Tibetans use the term "Hor". The term "Dor rdo" is understood to

shared identity comes from their common belief in Tibetan Buddhism, shared history, common ancestry, and distinct language. The village is situated on a terrace above the confluence of the Dgu chu River and one of its unnamed tributaries.

The origin of Gnyan thog residents is a complex and contested issue. Skal bzang nor bu, Zhu Yongzhong & Stuart (1999) and M.H. Fried (2010) both summarize Chinese sources on the issue, listing numerous potential origins for Gnyan thog residents including:

- descendants of Mangghuer (Tu) migrants from the Sanchuan region of Minhe Hui and Mangghuer County<sup>4</sup>
- descendants of Tuyuhun who married local Tibetans, Mongols, and Han Chinese<sup>5</sup>
- descendants of Han Chinese from Jiangnan and Hezhou (present-day Linxia) sent as troops during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)
- descendants of migrants from Huzhu Mongghul (Tu) Autonomous County<sup>6</sup>
- descendants of Mongolian and Uighur troops sent during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1378).

We contribute to this discussion by summarizing a Tibetan text on village history (Blo bzang snyan grags 2000) that states that present-day Gnyan thog residents are the descendants of Eastern Mongols sent as soldiers during the reign of Kublai Khan (r. 1260–1294) under the leadership of General Hor dor rta nag po. They first settled on the Yellow River, most likely where it forms the border between present-day Rma lho (Henan) Mongolian Autonomous County<sup>7</sup> and Rma chu (Maqu) County.<sup>8</sup> They then migrated to the grasslands of Rgan rgya<sup>9</sup> before settling in Gnyan thog in 1352, two generations after reaching the Yellow River. In 1321, Hor rta nago po's grandson, O chu go bu me thu me lun, attended the coronation of Suddhipala Gege'en, the fifth Yuan Emperor (r. 1321–1323) and received the title of chieftain.<sup>10</sup> After the fall of the Yuan, this title and concordant

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have a pejorative connotation when used by local Tibetans to address Gnyan thog villagers.

4 Tu in the south of Minhe County are referred to in the literature as Mangghuer (e.g. Slater 2003), a term they apply to Mongols.

5 The Tuyuhun were inhabitants of the Tuyuhun Kingdom situated primarily in the north of present-day Qinghai from the third until the seventh century. See Molè (1970) and Zhu Shikui & Cheng Qijun (2010).

6 Tu in southwest Huzhu County refer to themselves as Mongghul whereas those in the north-east refer to themselves as Karilang (Limusishiden and Jugui 2011).

7 In Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sgnon Province.

8 In Kan lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

9 In Bsang chu (Xiahe) County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

10 Tib. *to'u pa tsi*.

political authority were reinstated on his son, Go bu me tu hu sun khrin, by the Ming Hongwu Emperor (r. 1368–1398).

Present-day residents of Gnyan thog are divided into four territorial divisions: Srang gong, Srang zhol,<sup>11</sup> La kha, and Byi rwa. All of Srang gong and three or four households of Srang zhol are inside the original walled settlement of Gnyan thog, referred to as Sde ba nang ‘Inside the Village’. Membership in a territorial division is based purely on residence. Each territorial division venerates different territorial deities:

Division	Srang gong	Srang zhol	Byi rwa	Lha kha
Deity	Gnyan chen	Bya khyung A myes dar rgyas	Go'u mo ri lang	Rma chen Dgra 'dul

Each territorial division has a temple in which their deity is enshrined. In the past, each temple had a *lha pa* ‘trance medium’ who embodied the temple deity or deities and facilitated communication between the community and deities. At present, however, there are only three *lha pa* – in La kha, Srang gong, and Byi rwa. In addition to the *lha pa*, there is also an *awu* in the village – a lay religious practitioner whose main responsibility is to beat a drum and cut paper offerings to delight local deities.

The village also contains eight named descent groups, which we call lineages but that are locally referred to as *tshang*. Four of these contain a sub-lineage, and four are grouped together in a super-lineage.

Lineage	Sub-lineage	Super-lineage
Sog rgya	Lo brgya	Zhang blon bzhi
Tsong kha	Lha ba	
Ma gzhi dmag		
Bang rgya	Nye sring	
Cin ci dmag		
Yun ci dmag		
Hor rgya		
Shing bza'	Hor tshang	
Gyang bzhi		

11 Lit. ‘Upper Street’ and ‘Lower Street’, respectively.

*Tshang* members refer to each other as *sha nyi* ‘relatives’ and are obliged to help member households during funerals, when representatives from all village households must be fed while immediate family members mourn. Marriage within the *tshang* is permissible, as long as the couple is not closely related.

Villagers profess faith in Tibetan Buddhism, and though the village is home to Gnyan thog byams pa gling Monastery, a Dge lugs pa institution, villagers typically profess faith in Tibetan Buddhism in general, rather than a specific sect. This in part explains why the village is also home to a tantric practitioner’s hall.<sup>12</sup> There are two reincarnate lamas in Gnyan thog Monastery, Mkhan chen Rin po che, and A lags Kha so.

### LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN GNYAN THOG

The majority of Gnyan thog residents speak a Mongolic language identified as Bao'an or Bonan (R. Fried 2010, Wu Hujiltu 2003) but which they refer to as Dor skad ‘Dor [rdo] Language’ or more commonly simply as *mankhatsha* ‘our language’. This language is also spoken in the nearby villages of Rka gsar, Sgo dmar, and Tho skyA<sup>13</sup> bod skor. The total population of speakers is approximately 4,000 (R. Fried 2010). In addition to Rdo skad, the Reb gong Vale also contains a majority population of A mdo Tibetan speakers, a population of about 3,500 people speaking the Sinitic Wutun language (Janhunet et al. 2008), and a large but unknown number of Chinese speakers (both Modern Standard Chinese and the local Chinese dialect, similar to Hezhou Chinese; Dwyer 1992). In this linguistically complex environment, A mdo Tibetan is the language of institutional religion (Tibetan Buddhism) and pre-tertiary education, whereas Chinese is the language of tertiary education, commerce, and bureaucracy.

Respondents to an informal survey of forty Gnyan thog residents conducted in 2010 said that both Tibetan and Chinese were very important for all Gnyan thog residents (rating the importance at 4.75 out of five), for their current and future children (4.85), and for their current or future spouses (4.65).<sup>14</sup> This attitude was expressed regardless of age and gender, though young people appear to take this attitude most seriously in terms of acquired language proficiencies.

Gnyan thog people have essentially positive attitudes towards Tibetan, even though Tibetan is the language most likely to replace Dor skad in the future. Oral instruction in primary and higher education are conducted in Tibetan, and

<sup>12</sup> Tib. *sngags khang*. Similar sectarian plurality may be observed throughout A mdo.

<sup>13</sup> Also spelled Mtho rgya and Tho rgya.

<sup>14</sup> This survey was based on a modified version of Perlin’s (2009) survey.

hence Gnyan thog residents must acquire a command of the oral and written languages to succeed in education, which is now compulsory for the first nine years. Tibetan is also the local *lingua franca* in communication with non-Gnyan thog residents and is additionally the language of institutional religion – Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, all villagers are now functionally bi-lingual in Dor skad and Tibetan, though this situation has only emerged in the present generation; previous generations had only limited competency in Tibetan.

Gnyan thog residents feel that Chinese is important in doing business, communicating with non-Tibetans, and higher education. The majority of textbooks are written in Chinese in public school classes after graduating from primary school. Mastery of Chinese becomes increasingly important as the student approaches the university entrance examination, and is the primary language of tertiary education. Spoken Chinese is also important for the many villagers who engage in business selling religious images throughout China.<sup>15</sup>

Most villagers express concern about the language abilities of young Dor skad speakers. Moreover, Gnyan thog youths typically feel that they speak less fluently and authentically than their elders. Villagers express anxiety about their language's future because they recognize that Dor skad monolingualism would limit a person to a subsistence existence, whereas Tibetan is necessary for education, and Chinese for earning cash income.<sup>16</sup> Many villagers currently feel their language is useless outside the local environment, and consequently, will no longer be spoken in two or three generations, spelling an end to its seven centuries of history in Reb gong.

## LANGUAGE USE IN GNYAN THOG ANNUAL RITUALS

Following, we discuss language use in village annual rituals to determine if this cycle fostered Gnyan thog as a linguistic community. A brief description of each ritual is given below, focusing on communal participation and language use.

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15 Many villagers are engaged in producing *thang ka*, painted or embroidered Buddhist images on cloth. See Stevenson (1999). Such business is so profitable that villagers, unlike many other Amdo Tibetans, typically do not go to urban centers to undertake migrant labor, nor do they go to high altitude grasslands to dig caterpillar fungus (*Cordyceps sinensis*) to earn cash income.

16 There are currently no monolingual Dor skad speakers, though monolingualism was common in the early twentieth century.

### Lo sar ‘New Year’

All village males gather late in the twelfth lunar month in the temple of their respective territorial deities to chant Tibetan scriptures for three to five days in order to generate good fortune for the coming year.<sup>17</sup>

Monks in Gnyan thog Monastery burn incense<sup>18</sup> at midnight on New Year’s Eve. Next, the Gnyan thog chieftain burns incense in his home. When he blows a conch signifying the completion of his duties, all village households burn incense in this order: the compound roof, the adobe stove in the guestroom, the courtyard on an incense altar,<sup>19</sup> and finally on the compound wall above the door. Men recite improvised prayers to local deities to bring auspiciousness in the coming New Year while burning incense. Villagers then spend the night visiting friends and relatives. They greet one another in Tibetan by saying, “*Lo sar bzang* Happy New Year!”

Villagers gather in the monastery to burn incense at dawn and then hold a celebration at which they sing Tibetan traditional folk songs and play on a swing made from two eight-meter-tall poles planted in the earth with a rope tied between them. Villagers continue visiting each other for several days. Guests sing in Tibetan for their hosts if requested to.

On the third or fifth day of Lo sar, females between the ages of fifteen and nineteen celebrate a coming-of-age ritual by donning jewelry<sup>20</sup> and a new robe prepared specially for the occasion. The girl’s brother or father burns incense on the compound roof and then blows a conch. The man prays to local deities to bless the girl with good fortune while burning incense, and the girl then prostates three times in the family shrine. After this brief ceremony the girl visits relatives, beginning with a household chosen by a diviner. The ritual concludes when she returns home.

Weddings and tonsure ceremonies are held during Lo sar. Guests visit the groom’s family and offer gifts and good wishes during wedding parties. Speeches are given in Tibetan and songs are also sung in Tibetan. Tonsure ceremonies occur when a child turns three. The child’s head is shaved and relatives and villagers are invited to a celebration in the household. All guests are offered a meal of good food and celebratory songs are sung in Tibetan.

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17 We do not provide the name of scriptures chanted as villagers themselves generally do not know them. The efficacy of the chanting is not thought to depend on the semantic content of the texts.

18 Tib. *bsang*.

19 Tib. *bsang khri*.

20 This jewelry is worn first on this occasion and, later, only during Klu rol (see below). This jewelry was also worn at weddings in the past.

During Lo sar, all formal language is Tibetan: prayers are offered to deities in Tibetan, wedding speeches are made in Tibetan, celebratory songs are sung in Tibetan, and greetings are made in Tibetan. Dor skad is only used for informal conversation, except in the tonsure ceremony when villagers one-by-one express in Dor skad the wish that the baby's hair will grow.

### **Smon lam 'Great Prayer Festival'**

Smon lam takes place on the twelfth and thirteenth days of the first lunar month. A large image of the Buddha Ston pa sha kya painted on silk is displayed to villagers on the first day. The next day, a statue of the Buddha Rje btsun byams pa mgon po is drawn in a wheeled cart around the village monastery. A lags Kha so chants and gives teachings to the assembled crowds on both days, and all participants are fed two meals per day by a village household that volunteers to do so.<sup>21</sup>

As with Lo sar, all formal speech during Smon lam is in Tibetan. The speeches given by A lags Kha so are in Tibetan, as are scriptures chanted by villagers while venerating the Buddha images. Villagers also respond to the lama's teaching by saying, "*Lags so*", in affirmation of his instructions. Throughout the ritual, villagers converse in Dor skad. When meals are dispersed, ritual organizers also direct the thronging crowds in Dor skad.

### **Rim gro sgrub pa 'Following the Lama's Instructions'**

During Lo sar, the two lamas in Gnyan thog Monastery specify scriptures that households should chant to ensure the well-being of their family throughout the New Year. Households typically either chant themselves or invite monks to chant in the home. This is done during the second lunar month. The monastery holds a similar ritual to ensure the well-being of the whole community, also in the second lunar month. Following A lags Kha so's instructions, a scripture is chanted by monks (in the chanting hall) and a representative (male or female) of each village household (in a separate hall).

All formal speech in both rituals is in Tibetan whereas informal conversation takes place in Dor skad.

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<sup>21</sup> This family is thought to accumulate much merit from their voluntary donation to the villagers. They may spend 70,000 to 80,000 RMB. In addition to the food provided, the family also provides carpets and Buddha statues to the monastery, and sacks of grain, brick tea, and clothes to both of the monastery's lamas.

### Smyung gnas ‘Fasting’

Smyung gnas begins on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month and every adult female villager is required to participate. Women spend two days chanting on a hillside above the village. They limit food intake on the first day and do not eat on the second day. The ritual concludes on the morning of the third day.

Silence is prescribed during Smyung gnas. Nonetheless, language plays a role. Participants chant in Tibetan during the ritual and attempt to communicate with each other quietly in Dor skad while keeping their mouths closed.

### Lab rtse ‘Communal Deity Empowerment Ritual’

On the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, a male representative of each household goes to a hill above the village to renew the communal *lab rtse* – a cairn containing large poles resembling arrows that the deity Go'u mo ri lang is said to use to defend the community from evil beings and forces. During the festival, the arrows are replaced, tantric practitioners<sup>22</sup> chant Tibetan scriptures in a tent beside the *lab rtse*, offerings of incense and alcohol are made to Go'u mo ri lang, and men improvise prayers to the deity in Tibetan or Dor skad to increase their luck in the coming year.

### Chos skor ‘Circumambulating the Fields’

Chos skor is held on the first day of the sixth lunar month. Villagers gather at the monastery and form a single line with men at the front carrying scriptures on their shoulders, women behind them carrying scriptures on their backs, and children at the rear also carrying scriptures if they are able to. Each section of the line is organized from oldest to youngest. Participants first circumambulate the monastery and then the village fields while chanting *Om mani padme hum*. The ritual strives to ensure the village's prosperity by protecting crops from natural disaster. Again, formal speech in this ritual – chanting – is in Tibetan whereas informal conversation is in Dor skad.

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22 Tib. *sngags pa*.

### Klu rol / རྗེཤག་ ‘Water Deity Ritual’

The Klu rol festival is held from the twenty-first to the twenty-fourth days of the sixth lunar month.<sup>23</sup> Participation is mandatory for all adult village males, though any male old enough to walk may participate. Deity images are brought from the four village temples during the ritual to a threshing ground and enshrined in a tent. Performances are then given on the threshing ground to delight the deities and oblige them to reciprocate villagers’ offerings by protecting the community in the coming year. Throughout the ritual, deities possess the *lha pa* in order to direct the performances and to act as a medium of communication between the deities and the community.

Only brief performances take place on the twenty-first, -second, and -third. Full communal participation is not required. On the twenty-fourth, male villagers perform to delight deities, as do female villagers who have held their coming-of-age ritual.

This ritual is the most complex regarding language. While possessed, *lha pa* are said to speak Lha skad ‘Deity Language’, which is A mdo Tibetan spoken with more clarity than usual. All chanting and praying is done in Tibetan. Scriptures are chanted in Tibetan when offering incense to deities and at other times throughout the ritual. Only one performance during the ritual requires Dor skad. The *awu* mumbles a speech in a mixture of Tibetan, Chinese, and Dor skad that even he cannot understand, in an unnamed performance on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth lunar month. He does this while circling a group of four young men chosen for their physical attractiveness. As with other rituals, conversation takes place in Dor skad.

### Shing long ‘Summer Picnics’

Beginning on the twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh day of the sixth lunar month, villagers hold picnics in tents pitched beneath the village terrace in a stand of trees on the banks of the Dge chu and its tributary. Villagers sing, dance, eat good food, and enjoy themselves. The picnic lasts for five days. Songs are sung in Tibetan and certain elder males may improvise humorous performances using Dor skad.

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23 See Stuart, Banmadorji & Huangchojia (1995), Dpal ldan bkra shis & Stuart (1998), Xing Quancheng (1998), Nagano (2000), Buffetrille (2008), Mkharrtse rgyal (2009), and Snying bo rgyal & Rino (2009) for more on this ritual.

### **Lnga mchod 'Tsong kha pa's Nirvana'**

The day of Tsong kha pa's attainment of Nirvana is commemorated on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth lunar month. Each household sends a representative to chant in the monastery courtyard; others may circumambulate and make prostrations as they wish. A village household volunteers to provide breakfast and dinner to the entire village. Families also light oil lamps at home and abstain from eating meat. As with the other Tibetan Buddhist rituals described in this paper, Tibetan is the primary formal language during this ritual. Participants only employ Dor skad in informal conversation with one another.

### **Bang and Wutu 'Winter Cleansing Rituals'**

The final rituals of the year before Lo sar are Bang and Wutu, which take place on the sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth days of the eleventh lunar month. Bang aims to delight territorial deities with musical performances, whereas Wutu aims to purify the village of evils and ensure prosperity in the coming year. Wutu is unique to Gnyan thog Village whereas Bang is also performed in Tho skyA bod skor.

Each territorial section holds the Bang ceremony separately on different dates either in their temple or in a selected household in the eleventh lunar month. Village youths gather during the night and sing courtship songs in Tibetan or Chinese to each other. The *awu* joins the ritual and makes a speech in Tibetan to invite the deity, and also offers prayers in Tibetan to the deity.

Wutu is held on the twentieth day of the eleventh lunar month with the intention of expelling evil spirits from the village and inviting auspiciousness. The ritual, described by Skal bzang nor bu, Zhu Yongzhong & Stuart (1999), includes seven male performers dancing through the village collecting bread offerings from village households. These breads are discarded at a river below the village, symbolizing the expulsion of evil spirits in the coming year. The *awu* leads the seven performers through the village but remains silent throughout this process. The only speech he gives is in Tibetan, when he invites and prays to deities at the start of the ritual.

## **CONCLUSION**

The language used in Gnyan thog's annual ritual cycle is almost exclusively Tibetan and rather than helping maintain a unique identity, it has contributed to marginalization of Dor skad and reinforced attitudes attributing prestige to Tibetan. Rather than explaining how Gnyan thog residents retained a distinct linguistic identity, an examination of the annual ritual cycle only further begs

the question of how this language was maintained over such a long time period. Gnyan thog is a culturally Tibetanized community and thus it is of interest that they did not speak Tibetan while their surrounding neighbors did.<sup>24</sup>

Although the following conclusions are tentative, it seems that Dor skad's vitality was largely due to socio-historical, rather than cultural, factors. Broadly speaking, local Mongolic populations in A mdo were deliberately differentiated from surrounding populations by Chinese imperial authority following the demise of the Yuan. When local Mongol leaders and the garrisons they commanded deferred to the newly established Ming Dynasty (Schram 2006 [1954, 1957, 1961]), political and military authority was conferred upon these communities to oversee local populations as *tusi* 'local chieftains' (Herman 1997), typically with the privileges of leveraging conscription, corvée, and taxation. A second time local Mongolic populations were differentiated was after the 1723 uprisings swept A mdo. These uprisings were instigated by the Khoshuud Mongol Blo bzang bstan 'dzin and supported primarily by Tibetan Buddhist institutions (Schram 2006 [1954, 1957, 1961]; Yang Ho-chin 1969). Following this, the Qing employed a policy of reifying ethnic identities that differentiated and separated Mongolic and Tibetan populations (Crossley 1999). The Tibetan term for this policy, Bod kyor Sog gnod 'Helping Tibet, Harming Mongolia' (Lce nag tshang Hum chen 2007), is indicative of its divisiveness. It is unclear what impact this policy had on Dor skad speakers in Reb gong, but the current situation suggests that it set in place institutions, practices, or identities that delayed the complete Tibetanization of the population.

The population of Dor skad speakers of Reb gong has therefore been historically differentiated from surrounding populations on two significant occasions. They were first conferred significant privileges at the beginning of the Ming, and were then deliberately separated from Tibetan populations in the mid-Qing. The remnants of this past privileged political status can be seen in Reb gong, for example, by the fact that the Mongolic-speaking communities of Gnyan thog, Rka gsar, and Sgo dmar occupy some of the most productive farming land in the vale – on the relatively sunny western side of the vale, at the lower altitudes of its northern end, where level land is abundant. The unique women's dress worn only in Dor skad speaking communities (and in Wutun-speaking villages) is also suggestive of previous privilege (see Skal bzang nor bu, Zhu Yongzhong & Stuart 1999 for images). These communities' near monopoly of the lucrative *thang kha* trade is also suggestive of prior privilege. It is likely this political privilege and

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24 See Bkra shis bzang po (2012) and G.yu lha (2012) for examples of linguistically distinct populations whose members self-identify as Tibetan and whose cultural traditions are largely Tibetan.

enforced social differentiation, rather than a unique identity or cultural distinctiveness, which explains Dor skad's long maintenance. Now that the political status that maintained Dor skad's isolation has vanished, the linguistic privilege accorded to Tibetan (in the religious and educational realms) and Chinese (in commercial and bureaucratic realms) is likely to result in a language shift that sees Dor skad vanish in the near future.

Finally, it is worth noting the broader theoretical implications of this study. In his study of Zomia (the Southeast Asian highlands, see van Schendel 2002) Scott (2009) theorizes a link between ethnolinguistic diversity and an absence of the state's hegemonic presence. Samuel (1993; 2005) similarly explains the diversity of "Tibetan societies" as result of Tibet's "statelessness". In contrast to these authors, this study suggests that in certain cases the state's hegemonic presence, rather than its absence, resulted in the maintenance of local distinctions, and that the state was not necessarily an agent of homogenization (Scott 1998).

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