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PURITY AND FORTUNE IN PHUG SDE TIBETAN VILLAGE RITUALS

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ABSTRACT
Tibetan concepts of gtsang ma (purity) in Phug sde Village (Bla brang Township, Xiahe 夏河 County, Gannan 甘南 Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu 甘肃 Province) are described. The role of purity in manipulating rten 'brel (fortune) during village rituals is explored, showing the centrality of purity in Phug sde village life.

KEY WORDS
gtang ma, rten 'brel, Phug sde, Bla brang, Gansu, Tibetan
INTRODUCTION

The nature and importance of concepts related to purity in Phug sde Village, a Tibetan agro-pastoral community located on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, are examined. The connection between purity and fortune, as demonstrated by village rituals and daily practices, and an introduction to the village are given, followed by detailed explanations and numerous examples highlighting the cultural specificity of these concepts. Daily, annual, and life-cycle rituals are described and the connections between such rituals, fortune, and purity are explored. Purity is an essential condition for successfully avoiding bad fortune and creating good fortune and is a key concern for Phug sde villagers.

THE VILLAGE CONTEXT

Location

Phug sde Village is situated in Bla brang\textsuperscript{1} Township, Xiahe County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, PR China.\textsuperscript{2} In the recent past, Bla brang was a political, economic, cultural, and religious center in the region (Nietupski 1999, Gongbao Nanjie 2005). Xiahe County lies in the southeast of Gansu Province, in the northwest of Gannan Prefecture. The county town, Bla brang, is located at longitude 102 degrees and latitude thirty-five degrees; the total area of the county is 6,273.88 square kilometers (Huarui Dongzhi 2005, Gongbao Nanjie 2005).

Xiahe County's multi-ethnic population includes

\textsuperscript{1} Labrang, Larang, Ladrang, Labcheng.
\textsuperscript{2} See Appendix One for a map showing the location of Xiahe County.
Tibetans (seventy percent), Hui 回 (Muslim Chinese, twenty percent), and Han 汉 Chinese.\(^3\) Adjacent to Bla brang Town is the monastery of Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil, one of the six largest monasteries of the Dge lugs pa Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Xiahe County is divided into three towns (zhēn 镇) and eleven townships (xiāng 乡): Bla brang, Bang sgar thang, and A mchog towns; and Bsang khog, Rgan rgya, Mda' smad, Dmar thang, Chu sngon, Thang dkar nang, Tsa yas, 'Bor ra, Sgyus tshang, Yar ru rgyud, and Kho tshe townships.\(^4\)

Phug sde Village is three kilometers from Xiahe County Town. Villagers say people have lived there as long as humans have inhabited the earth. Phug sde Village is part of the lha sde gshog ka bzhi, a traditionally, though not administratively, recognized collection of seventeen villages\(^5\) divided into upper and lower groups. The villages are near Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil Monastery and, as explained later, villagers have certain ritual responsibilities and privileges there.

There were approximately forty households (~300 people) in Phug sde Village in 2008. All residents were Tibetan. The village is at an elevation of approximately 2,900 meters and is situated in a valley. Villagers are agro-pastoralists and consider themselves to be hard-working. Half of the members of a typical family tend sheep and yaks

\(^4\) See Appendix Two for a map of towns and townships in Xiahe County.
\(^5\) The seventeen lha sde gshog ka bzhi are Phug sde, Dgar sde, Lang kar thang, Glu rgyags, Za yus, Lam zhur, Mun nag, Sman dkar, Rka grong, Rig sgra, Mtha ba zhol ma, Mtha ba gong ma, Glu thang, Sa dkar, Thang nag, Glas sgrigs, and Mgon mchog.
on the grassland, where they live in tents during summer and adobe houses in winter. The other half of the family lives in houses near the fields. Consequently, families are only united during such village festivities as Lo sar 'New Year' and summer picnics. The villagers are mostly engaged in farming from May to September. From October to April, village men tend sheep and yaks, whereas females travel daily between the pasture and the village from May to September. They sleep at the pastures, milk in the early morning, and after bringing the milk to the village and working in the fields, return to the pasture in late afternoon.

The Village Economy

Villagers cultivate barley, potatoes, rape, and beans. Other crops and vegetables are not grown because of the high elevation. Eggplant, spinach, onions, tomatoes, wheat flour, and green peppers are purchased outside the village. Fields are located on hills and are not irrigated. The average family annually produces approximately 450 kilograms of barley grain from five \( \text{mu} \) of land. This is insufficient for self-consumption, forcing the purchase of additional barley for human and livestock. There is never enough barley harvested to sell.

The staple diet includes black tea, wheat bread, \textit{rtsam pa} (roasted highland barley flour), and flat noodles. Special guests are served milk tea; steamed buns containing mutton, beef, or pork and onions; and/ or boiled mutton.

The average family in Phug sde has 150 sheep, three cows, three yaks, one donkey, and one mule. There are four seasonal pastures, the furthest of which is eight kilometers from the village. The main income from herding comes from

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\(^6\) One \text{mu} = 0.0667 hectares.
women selling milk, cheese, yogurt, and yak dung. Yak dung is sold for fuel during winter to people living in the county town. Women sell milk and yogurt to regular customers, earning about thirty RMB per week. In addition, Phug sde Village women are hired by other villages to help harvest. A woman earns twenty RMB from a day's labor.

In addition to women's income, men earn money by transporting sand and stones in mini-trucks from the village to the county town, where they earn approximately 150 RMB per truckload, selling the sand and stone for construction. This is considered good payment, but this work is undependable because sand and stone are not always in demand. Village men also sell two or three sheep when a family is desperate for money, such as when a family member is seriously ill and needs medicine or requires hospitalization. In 2008, one sheep sold for around 300 RMB. However, the animal trade is only done for two autumn months; the animals are too thin to sell during other seasons.

Phug sde villagers did not engage in such migrant labor as construction work in 2008 because their agro-pastoral lifestyle results in year-round work, making absences from the village difficult. Moreover, villagers consider construction work humiliating. Villagers also did not collect caterpillar fungus (Cordyceps sinensis), an important source of cash income for many Amdo Tibetans, because they believe digging to be detrimental to the grassland, and insulting to local deities.

Families in Phug sde earn an average of 5,000 RMB a year. Money from the sale of milk, yogurt, and dung is kept by the women while the money from the sale of livestock is

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7 Amdo/ A mdo refers to northeastern Tibetan areas in China. It is one of three traditionally recognized Tibetan cultural and linguistic areas: A mdo, Khams, and Dbus gtsang.

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kept by men. The money earned by men is usually spent on such expenses as children's school's expenses, emergency medical care, barley and wheat for both human and livestock consumption, women's gold ornaments, men's knives worn as decoration, and motorcycles. The money earned by women is usually spent on salt, matches, vegetables (onions and garlic), fruit (apples, oranges, grapes, strawberries, and pears), and such household items as curtains, wallpaper, plates, bowls, cups, and bedding.

Before 2005, each Phug sde villager had to pay 100 RMB plus ten RMB per head of livestock to the local government annually. The average family paid 2,000 RMB per year. Villagers did not pay taxes after the government revoked taxes in 2005.

Education, Change, Modernity, and Globalization

Most adults were illiterate in Tibetan and Chinese (which most adults could not speak) in 2008. Out of 300 villagers, fifty had a primary school education, fifteen had a middle school education, and seven had a college education. Inability to communicate in Chinese limited trade opportunities and employment opportunities. Out of fifty-six school-aged children, only thirty-seven attended school in 2008. Twenty pupils attended primary school, thirteen students attended middle school, and four attended college in 2008.

A family’s oldest son usually remained at home and inherited the property. Boys and girls received education in equal numbers with girls generally attending Chinese language schools and boys enrolling in Tibetan language schools. Girls usually finished schooling after attending zhongzhuo 中专 (technical schools) in Hezuo 合作 (the capital of Gannan Prefecture), while boys more commonly
finished university in the provincial capital, Lanzhou 兰州 City.

The first gravel road to Phug sde Village, a narrow, one-lane road, was built in 1958 by locals. The local government widened this road and resurfaced it with compressed earth in 1980. The road was improved again, being widened and resurfaced with asphalt from 2005 to 2008.

The first motorcycle appeared in Phug sde Village in 1998. Later, nearly every family had at least one motorcycle; some had two. The first small trucks and tractors appeared in the village in 2000. Earlier, people rode bicycles to the county town, and rode a mule or horse to mountain pastures.

Since 1960, when local villager 'Brug thar rgyal (male, b. 1947) and other villagers travelled four days to transport materials necessary to bring electricity to the village, Phug sde has had electricity used for lighting and powering radios. One watt of electricity cost 0.80 RMB in 2008. The power supply was lost at least once a month, creating inconvenience for one or two days. Apart from media technology (below) people used electricity to power refrigerators, irons, and sewing machines.

The first battery-powered radio came to Phug sde Village in 1980. Tshe dar skyid (female, b. ~1950) took part in a singing competition in Hezuo City and won it as a prize. The first tape-players came to the village in 1989, brought from Linxia 临夏 City by a local businessman. Telephones arrived in 2000.

In the 1990s, one village family had a black and white television, which all villagers watched. In 2000, satellite television arrived and, in 2005, the first VCD players arrived. In 2008, villagers did not watch DVDs. People usually watched Tibetan programs on television and on VCDs. Television's popularity made radio obsolete. All village households had televisions and VCD/ DVD players,
which they used daily. Some televisions were connected to satellite dishes that received foreign broadcasts and a wide range of Chinese television stations.

RTEN 'BREL (FORTUNE) AND GTSANG MA (PURITY)

Rten 'brel (Fortune)

'Rten 'brel' appears to have entered the Tibetan language as a translation of the Sanskrit term \textit{pratītyasamutpāda} (Samuel 1993). The Tibetan Translation Tool\footnote{http://www.thdl.org/tibetan/servlet/org.thdl.tib.scanner.OnLineScannerFilter?thdlBanner=on, accessed 11 August 2008.} includes the following translations for \textit{rten 'brel}: dependent-arising, interdependence, supporting links, interrelation, relativity, connection, occurring in/ coming into being through interdependent connection, and interplay of circumstances.

In addition to these complex philosophical definitions, Samuel (1993:447-448) notes that:

The point is the range of additional meanings that \textit{tendrel} [\textit{rten 'brel}] has acquired in Tibetan usage. These center around the idea of 'omen,' especially in the sense of an indication that circumstances are auspicious for a particular action or development. The underlying concept is something like 'connections that are not visible on the surface'.

Definitions of the term employed by Phug sde villagers accord with Samuel's second definition of the term, and with the definitions that include 'omen', 'coincidence', etc. When asked for definitions of \textit{rten 'brel}, locals provided the following responses:
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- This word was originally a religious\(^9\) word, and has two categories: good and bad (male, b. 1977).

- Our life is steeped in *rten 'brel*, regardless of whether we are doing important or unimportant things. *Rten 'brel* are important when we hold rituals, give birth, and make plans. For example, a rainbow crosses the sky, rain falls, we meet people carrying full buckets of water, birds sing… (male, b. ~1963).

- *Rten 'brel* is an auspice or a pre-decision based on natural signs that indicate if something we are planning will succeed. For example, it is bad if a crow or fox cries before you do something (male, b. ~1973).

- *Rten 'brel* determines whether an event will be successful (female, b. ~1932).

- For me, *rten 'brel* are the decision-making tools I consult before doing something. For example, if I meet a person carrying a full bucket of water, this encourages me and I believe that my work will be completed successfully, but if I meet an empty bucket, it discourages me or gives me a belief that the work will be unsuccessful (female, b. 1963).

  *Rten 'brel* exists within a matrix composed of a number of closely associated concepts Phug sde villagers use to explain why things are the way they are. When trying to explain the reason some people are wealthy, others poor; some people are ugly while others are good-looking; some

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\(^9\) The Tibetan word used was *chos*, usually translated as 'religion' or 'dharma'. Clarke (1990) points out, however, that the word also implies 'customary order' or 'order'.
people are successful while others are not; why some families have many educated children and others few; and why disaster befalls this person or family, but not the other, Phug sde villagers employ any of the following concepts: g.yang, rt...en 'brel, bsod nams, bkra shis, rlung rta, las, and dge ba. To illustrate the difficulties involved with distinguishing and translating these terms, one might ask non-specialist English speakers to differentiate between chance, fate, luck, fortune, karma, destiny, happenstance, providence, and coincidence, and to theorize on how these are related to effort, merit, work, and value, and then translate this into another language. Complex and discrete definitions could be created by recourse to etymology, discourse analysis, and so on, but most English speakers employ these words without recourse to such measures. When Phug sde villagers use g.yang, rt...en 'brel, bsod nams, bkra shis, rlung rta, las, and dge ba they do so employing mostly fuzzy,\(^{10}\) intuited, affective definitions, making precise translation difficult.

We gloss rt...en 'brel as 'fortune'; da Col (2007) translates it as 'happenstance', and Clarke (1990) gives 'material prosperity'. Our gloss should be understood only within the context of the following explanation of related concepts, and of the many examples given below. We do not suggest that rt...en 'brel and 'fortune' map precisely onto one another.

Within one's current life, a person may improve their circumstances by performing dge ba 'acts of virtue'. These might include offering butter lamps in a monastery or shrine, not eating meat, abstaining from killing, and offering food to funeral participants. Performing dge ba creates bsod nams,

\(^{10}\)'Fuzzy' is not used in a pejorative sense suggesting something unclear, unknown, vague, or misunderstood, but to suggest ideas that overlap and interconnect.
which Clarke (1990) translates as 'merit', and da Col (2007) as 'karmic storage'. *Bsod nams* gives positive results in one's current lifetime, such as wealth and health. For this reason, one might expect that a person such as a butcher, constantly involved in non-virtuous action, would find it difficult to experience wealth and health; however, this clearly happens. This can be seen as the result of *las*. *Las* is usually translated as 'karma', but is more often employed in the mundane sense of luck. It refers to outcomes resulting from actions outside this lifetime. If a butcher becomes rich, this is because of his good *las*. A person who has good *las* will, as a result, also have *rlung rta* 'reputation'. *Rlung rta* is both the good talk, and a positive force, surrounding those who are successful.

Also related to *bsod nams*, *las*, *dge ba*, and *rlung rta* is *g.yang*. We define *g.yang* as 'potency', following Tooker's (1996) translation of the Akha term *gylàn*. Potency exclusively applies to property and the ability to acquire or create more of it. Having much *g.yang* means that one will have a good harvest, healthy livestock, a stable family, success in business, and so on. When a woman marries into a new home, her natal family will hold a *g.yang 'bod* 'potency calling' ritual to prevent her from diminishing her natal family's *g.yang* by taking *g.yang* to her new home.

Finally, the idea of *bkra shis* must be discussed; the fortuitous coming together of all or most of the above mentioned forces. If one performs many *dge ba*; has a big *bsod nams*; the appropriate *las*, *rlung rta*, and *g.yang*; and if all the necessary *rten 'brel* are present, then this is *bkra shis*. All success and good results will surely be manifested.

As stated above, within the context of this matrix of concepts, and their fuzzy, overlapping nature, we have glossed *rten 'brel* as 'fortune', an important concept for Phug sde villagers. Creating *rten 'brel bzang po* 'fortuitous circumstances' and avoiding *rten 'brel ngan pa* 'misfortune'
(or 'unfortuitous\textsuperscript{11} circumstances'), are persistent concerns, and are the main motivations for performing the numerous rituals briefly outlined above. The following example shows the difference between good and bad fortune: a businessman, going to do business after Lo sar, will carefully watch for signs. If he meets a woman carrying a full bucket of clean water, this is fortuitous for him. On the other hand, if he meets a woman carrying an empty container, this is considered ominous.

Apart from good and bad fortune, Phug sde villagers also distinguish between naturally occurring fortune and created fortune.\textsuperscript{12} Snow or rain before a long journey is an example of naturally occurring fortune. An example of created fortune is parents asking monks to chant before their children take important tests, such as college entrance exams.\textsuperscript{13}

The following examples of good fortune were collected from consultants in Phug sde and further illustrate the concept. It is considered fortuitous when:

- a rainbow appears when a lama visits.

- guests are offered food and drink from a bowl decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols.

- a layman, on his way to become a monk, meets a person carrying a full container of milk.

\textsuperscript{11}We use this neologism since 'unfortunate' carries the implication of unlucky/ pitiful, and misfortune/ misfortunate implies accident (al) or unlucky.

\textsuperscript{12}There are no specific Tibetan terms we are aware of for these types of fortune.

\textsuperscript{13}This is also considered dge ba.
- a monk's string of beads breaks when he is debating; the weight of his knowledge is thought to break the string.

- livestock in the village give birth, or if a villager gives birth, before someone undertakes a journey to see a doctor; these indicate that the patient will recover. Birth is also considered fortuitous when people begin such new endeavors as building a house, marrying, or starting a new business venture.

- it rains, snows, or thunders when people go to religious sites\textsuperscript{14} to offer gter kha.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, it is considered fortuitous if herds of yaks or sheep are seen in the pastures, and if snakes are seen. These signs all mean that the klukha 'water spirits' are welcoming the people.

- New endeavors are begun on the first, eighth, fifteenth (the full moon), and thirtieth of each lunar month. During the first lunar month, the first, third, and fifth are also considered fortuitous. It is considered especially fortuitous to see a person carrying meat or bread with white sheep wool on it on these days.

- encountering a freshet running downhill while walking uphill after heavy rain symbolizes a new

\textsuperscript{14} This is often the lab rtse (locally, a mountain altar consisting of a stone base into which large wood arrows are inserted) of the village's natal deity, but may also be Rta rdo zong Lake, which is near Bla brang Town and considered sacred by local people.

\textsuperscript{15} Gter kha are small white cloth bags of wheat or barley buried in the earth or thrown into water to create wealth and well-being for a family or individual.
start, or the advent of good occurrences. People meeting the head of a freshet splash water upwards three times. A local saying describes this: "Chu sna rgya mo yar la mchod Offer up the water's head."

- the surface is full of yellow butter when yogurt is made.

- livestock give birth to females and women give birth to males.

A sickle, knife, or a dab of milk or yogurt is placed on top of the pile of grain-bags. Each bag is tied with white wool to create good fortune after a harvest. This ensures that the harvested grain will last until next harvest and the harvest will not be stolen by the'u rang malicious spirits (explained later), eaten by pests, or otherwise lost. The following are examples of unfortuitous things:

- meeting a corpse at any point on a journey;

- meeting people carrying gtor ma (dough effigies generally employed to exorcise evil) on a journey;

- hearing a fox or crow cry, especially when undertaking a new endeavor;¹⁶

- meeting people coming out of a house with ash from the stove;

- being offered tea or food from a chipped or cracked bowl;

¹⁶ See Lauffer (1914) for a translation of a manuscript on 'bird divination' and Norbu Chapel (1983) for a description of the 'language of ravens'.

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- seeing a whirlwind turning in a counterclockwise direction;
- meeting a woman combing her hair is unfortuitous for monks;
- milk boiling over or spilling; and
- hearing wolves howl near the village.

Not all signs of fortune are unambiguously good or bad. Encountering an empty water container is usually considered unfortuitous, but the saying, "Stong ba thams cad gang ba zer Empty containers will soon be full," demonstrates that the symbolism of such containers is open to interpretation. Likewise, a broken bowl is normally considered unfortuitous, but the saying "Kha dbur chag na kha mgo bde, If the rim is broken, the body will be healthy," indicates that this may also be interpreted as fortuitous.

_Gtsang ma_ (Purity)

Definitions of _gtsang ma_ provided by the Tibetan Translation Tool\(^{17}\) include clean, hygienic, sanitary, pure, sanctified, celestial, immaculate, clear, neat, sterile, without faults of stains or violations, full, and complete.

Phug sde villagers' understandings of the term mostly accord with these definitions, and include:

- Water is the cleanest thing. For example, anything that is considered dirty is again clean after being washed in water. When we offer _bsang_ or other things we always wash our hands with water beforehand (male, b. ~1965).

\(^{17}\) Accessed 11 August 2008.
My understanding of gtsang ma has two parts: one is genetically clean, the other is purification; making dirty things clean. For example, when people free animals, they mix water and milk and pour it on the animal, purifying the body. After people fast they take a mouthful of water, rinse, and spit it out, which purifies speech. When people talk about the cleanness of a family like 'clean blood' or 'clean bone' they mean genetically clean. This is inherited from the ancestors. A woman's menstrual cycle is a form of bodily purification. When monks offer holy water to people, they usually drink a little and then pour it on people's heads. This purifies the body, and is spiritually purifying too (male, b. ~1979).

A young widow is considered unclean. Generally gtsang ma is considered as an absence of bse dri\textsuperscript{18} and the'u rang. If a family has neither of these and the children die after birth, this family is also considered unclean (female, b. ~1966).

We have chosen to translate gtsang ma as pure/purity, though it is more commonly employed in the mundane sense of 'clean'. Gtsang ma suggests a sense of not covered by dirt, bse dri, or other pollution, such as from touching the corpse of any animal that is not usually eaten. A word with similar meaning to purity is gral dag 'neat', 'tidy'.

\textsuperscript{18} Bad odor. Phug sde villagers recognize two types of bad odor. One refers to unpleasant odors that are not considered polluting: the smell of roasting meat, and of burning hair or fingernails. The other type of bad smell, bse dri, refers to what villagers consider a biological condition causing the armpits to emit an odor suggesting a blend of garlic and flatulence. This condition is thought to be patrilineally inherited.
However, a home might be tidy, but the location may not be pure. A related term is *yag pa* 'beautiful'. A woman might be beautiful, but may not necessarily be pure (see Makley 2007 for a discussion of local gendered concepts of purity). Generally, 'beautiful' means 'pure', but not in the context of marriage and religious rituals.

The opposite of *gtsang ma* is *mi gtsang pa* 'unclean'. Related negative terms are *sbags* and *grib* both of which mean 'defiled' or 'polluted'; *sbags* applies to things whereas *grib* applies to people's bodies.\(^\text{19}\) Here are two examples of defilement. If a child drops a piece of bread into pure water, then the water is called *sbags*; it now cannot be offered to *gzhi bdag* or *srung ma* deities. In school, when students sleep in bunk beds in their dorms, sometimes the student on the lower bunk becomes sick or gets pimples. Parents usually say that this person is *grib* because they were sleeping beneath people.

Purity is defined according to circumstances and may be categorized as bodily, socially (in behavior, speech, and mind), and in terms of location. Pure in body means that people are not physically disabled, and do not have *bse dri*. If someone is socially pure, it means that their mind, speech, and behavior are properly oriented towards others. A location is pure if nobody has been killed and no corpse has

\(^{19}\) *Grib* may apply to animals in certain cases, such as a lama's horse. Huber and Pederson (1997:587) refer to *grib* as "embodied moral contamination" whereas Mills (2005:354) explains *grib* as: "[it] is seen as being localized to a single lifetime, curable through direct ritual and medical means, and unrelated to the *intention* of the polluted person." Schicklgruber (1992) chooses to translate the term 'chaos' (as opposed to social order), while Diemberger (1993:117) gives "... the name for the unnamable, the undefined, the 'shadow'."
been buried there. Also, a place may be unclean if *tshwa tshwa*,\textsuperscript{20} *rde'u 'bum*,\textsuperscript{21} or scriptures have been buried there, which is sometimes done to ensure success in such endeavors as business and education.

As described above, bodily purity relates to an absence of bad odor. Related to the body, but to the bloodline of families rather than to individuals, is the presence or absence of *the'u rang*, detailed later.

Closely related to bodily purity is behavioral or social purity. The socially pure body is used respectfully, such as prostrating to lamas and elders. Butchering is also unclean behavior.

Social purity is exemplified by pure speech, which should be gentle, clear, and polite. Unclean speech concerns the use of foul language related to male and female genitals, women's menstruation, and to cursing people by saying such things as *A pha shi* 'dead father'. In Phug sde Village, it is more acceptable for women to curse than men, because women are considered to be more talkative than men. Men who curse a great deal are considered feminine. It is acceptable for uneducated people to curse more; educated people and monks should never curse if they want to be respected.

Social purity is also shown by purity of mind. Those devoid of pride, jealousy, and ambition are considered to have a pure mind. However, a certain amount of pride is acceptable for educated people, some jealousy is acceptable for women, and ambition is tolerated more in men than in women.

The purity of a location depends on its history rather than its appearance. If disasters befall an area, it is inhabited by malicious spirits and is polluted; for example, a house

\textsuperscript{20} Stamped clay Buddhist images.
\textsuperscript{21} White stones.
where someone has committed suicide is considered impure. Great care is given to the purity of the place where a corpse is disposed of. A family is also very concerned about the cleanliness of the new house and invites a local lama to chant and burn pine needles to purify the new location.

Purity generally has a vertical dimension. Pollution flows downwards, but rarely upwards, and therefore the higher up something is placed, the less likely it is to become polluted. For example, deity images are placed up high, and holy and respected persons are seated higher than normal people. Further illustration of this is that stepping over things and people is polluting, and that the lower part of clothes, such as trousers, underwear, socks, and shoes should not be put near people's heads, regardless of how well or recently they have been washed.

Yellow is considered noble and holy, and white is considered pure.

Finally, it is important to note that purity is the primary condition for creating good fortune. Gang 'fullness' (of containers, the moon, etc.), is the other main condition. The following section examines how the connection between purity and fortune is manipulated in Phug sde Village rituals.

FORTUNE AND PURITY IN VILLAGE RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

Phug sde villagers perform daily, annual, and life cycle rituals to create fortuitous circumstances and avoid unfortuitous ones; such rituals must ensure purity is created and maintained to be efficacious. Here, daily, annual, and life-cycle rituals are examined in terms of how purity is used to create good fortune.
The Daily Cycle

Phug sde villagers perform various rituals throughout the day. Typically, village women get up at six a.m. to milk and do other chores. Men get up an hour later. Anyone habitually asleep after eight o'clock is considered abnormal. Men get up, wash their face and hands, brush their teeth, and then offer bsang\textsuperscript{22} on a bsang khri 'bsang altar', which is usually on the courtyard wall above the gate. The bsang khri should be in a high place: the higher the better. While offering bsang, men chant the local bsang yig 'bsang scripture'. Bsang is offered to the local gzhi bdag 'mountain deities'. Phug sde Village has three gzhi bdag, the most important of which is the skyes lha 'natal deity', A myes drag dmar. He is considered more important than the other village gzhi bdag, A myes stag ri and A myes bya khyung. Gzhi bdag are dri bzal, meaning they can only eat odors, not the solid foods eaten by humans; hence fragrant offerings are burnt for them. Villages believe that if they make regular offerings, gzhi bdag will help them when needed. It is unacceptable if people only make offerings when they need help, or if gzhi bdag do not aid those who make regular offerings.

The next daily ritual takes place immediately after offering bsang. Seven small bowls of clean water (mtshod pa bshams individually, bdun tshar when in a group of seven) are cleaned by rubbing them with a clean cloth. The cloth may have dirt or butter on it, but must not be contaminated by any trace of meat, garlic, or onion. The bowls are then placed in front of images in the shrine room, together with

\textsuperscript{22} The Tibetan Translation Tool (accessed 11 August 2008) defines bsang as "smoke offering; purify with incense; consecrate, bless, cleanse, purify, sanctify, clear away; (incense); purification and payment offering. Smoke-puja." It usually consists of conifer needles and rtsam pa.
incense. The images these are offered to are *thang ka* (religious images on cloth, silk, or canvas) of such deities as Shakyamuni Buddha, Green Tara, White Tara, and Manjushri, and photographs of important local lamas. *Gzhi bdag* are not enshrined in Phug sde Village. The men then prostrate three times in front of the images, while chanting the *bsang yig*.

A final ritual (*bsur*) is performed before eating breakfast. Smoldering coals are taken from the stove on a *me skyogs* (a ladle used to add fuel to the fire) and then the man performing the *bsur* goes just outside the room. The coals are placed on the *bsur phud sa* (a one meter high post used only to offer *bsur*) and a little *rtsam pa* and *chab*²³ are sprinkled onto the coals. This ritual is performed for souls wandering in *bar do*,²⁴ for ancestors, and for the *srung ma* 'household protector deity'.

If the man has time, *shug bduug* is performed by placing coals on the *me skyogs* again, sprinkling juniper leaves on top, and fumigating the room. This ritual purifies the room, household objects, and people's bodies. Afterward, he eats breakfast. All of these rituals may be performed by a woman if no man is available.

Most people are busy with work during the remainder of the day. Elders who no longer do much manual work, chant, spin a hand-held prayer wheel, prostrate before the shrine, circumambulate the prayer hall, and gather inside the *ma Ni khang* 'prayer hall' in the afternoons to chant, turn the large prayer wheel, and chat. Sick people prostrate before the shrine and circumambulate the prayer hall. These activities are considered to positively affect the next life or, in the case of an ill person, the present life.

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²³ A small amount of water used as an offering. *Chab* is the honorific form of the regular word for water, *chu*.
²⁴ The intermediate stage between death and rebirth.
The water offerings in the home shrine are removed late in the afternoon before dinner. The water is emptied (usually onto a plant), the bowls are stacked side-by-side to dry, and a butter lamp is lit and placed in front of the shrine. This is usually done around dinner, when darkness has fallen, but is done earlier if an animal is being slaughtered that day.

The family chants Sgrol ma and Skyabs 'gro25 after a meal at nine or ten p.m., led by the male family head. There are a certain number of times to chant the different texts. For example, Sgrol ma should be chanted twenty-one times. Chanting is done to benefit the family, to protect against illness, and to increase the family's wealth. After chanting, people go to bed. The daily cycle is repeated the next morning.

Locals believe that if they regularly perform daily rituals, the deities and other beings to which they sacrifice will protect them. Performing these rituals creates good fortune for individuals and for the household. Fortuitous signs associated with daily offerings indicate that the offerings please the deities. Deities are very pleased with the offering if the flame burns brightly when bsang is offered. It is fortuitous if smoke from bsang offerings hovers above the village like fog. It is also fortuitous if flower-shaped ice crystals form in water offering bowls in winter and it is fortuitous if butter lamp wicks split in two at night—the appearance of two things from one indicates prosperity.

A family is worried and uncomfortable all day if they lack time to do a daily ritual. Householders watch anxiously for signs of their success or lack thereof when performing daily rituals, as Tshe sgron (female, b. ~1945) describes:

One winter morning, I went to the shrine room to do

25 Skyabs 'gro may be translated as 'taking refuge' and may refer to any one of several different texts.
morning rituals. At that time, I saw that one of the bowls was full of lotus-shaped ice crystals, and over night the wick in a butter lamp had split. I felt overjoyed and knew that something good was about to happen to the family.

For all daily rituals, both the implements and the people performing the rituals must be pure; impurity displeases the deities. Hands must be washed, and should not have touched meat, garlic, or onion and bowls must be washed, and butter and water must be clean. Bowls cannot be washed in detergent, because anything related to commercial chemicals is considered impure. Measures are taken to ensure the purity of butter used in offerings. Before milking female yaks, the woman doing the milking (never a man26) must wash her hands in water. Soap is not used because it is perfumed and this odor displeases the deities. This ensures that the milk, which will later be used to make butter that may be used as an offering, will be clean.27 Bsang to be offered to deities must not be stepped over, cannot have blood on it, and must not have been lain on by animals. Finally, the vertical dimension of purity necessitates that the bsang khri be placed as high as possible to ensure the purity of the offering. The following account demonstrates the importance of not offering unclean things to deities:

26 "Pha bsang pas bzhon ma mi bzo/ Ma bsang mas mtshon cha mi 'dzin A good man never milks and a good woman never touches a weapon," epitomizes local notions about the gendered division of labor, Mixing gender roles is thought to bring bad luck.

27 The oldest butter is given when offering butter. Rancid butter (after about a year) is not considered unclean for the deities. Commercial butter is considered unclean and not used in offerings.
In 2007, Mgon po (male, b. ~1956) went to Bla brang Monastery to offer bsang. When he entered the temple, a monk was shouting angrily to the visitors not to offer commercially produced barley flour. The reason was that many birds that usually ate the barley near the bsang khri had died because the commercially produced barley contained insecticide. Such pollution would, in addition to killing birds, certainly displease the deities.

The Annual Cycle

Whereas the purpose of daily rituals is to create good fortune for the family or for individuals, the purpose of annual rituals is to create good fortune for the entire lha sde gshog ka bzhi or the Phug sde Village community. However, the focus is on the family in the case of Lo sar (New Year). Although villagers hold numerous rituals in the village and attend rituals in Bla brang Monastery, we focus on Lo sar, Smön lam, and Drug pa'i ma Ni, because of their local importance in creating good fortune.28

Lo sar

Preparations for Lo sar begin in the twelfth lunar month. On the fifteenth day, the bsang khri is restored and on the eighteenth and nineteenth days, the house is thoroughly cleaned (locally called du ba 'phyag pa 'sweeping smoke'). On the twenty-fifth day, the stove inside the house is renewed,29 and on the twenty-ninth day, trash from cleaning

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28 For brief descriptions of annual rituals not included here, see Appendix Three.

29 If the stove is adobe, fresh adobe is applied to make the surface smooth. Fresh concrete is applied in a similar way if
the house is discarded in the lower part of the village, fresh water is fetched, and the family eats a special meal known as *dgu thug* 'nine noodles'.

Lo sar is held from the first to the sixteenth day of the first lunar month, though preparations begin several weeks earlier (see below). On the first day, people rise at midnight, set off firecrackers, offer *bsang*, eat a family meal, and then children go from house to house in the village visiting relatives. Meanwhile, other family members visit relatives and villagers, especially the homes in which a family member has died. Everyone except those in mourning wear new clothes. They continue visiting one another for the remainder of Lo sar, except on the *nyin nag* 'black day', which falls on the seventh day of the first lunar month and is considered inauspicious. Skra phab (see the section on lifecycle rituals) is held on the third day and weddings are held on the fifth day of this month. On the eighth day, people visit Bla brang Monastery for the first time in the new year. *Tshe thar* rituals are held to consecrate animals and plants. Plants are uprooted, brought to the monastery, and planted in a special enclosure known as the *tshe thar ra ba*. There they are protected and may not be cut or damaged. Animals are consecrated to the village's *skyes lha* and may not be slaughtered or sold.

Lo sar creates good fortune for the coming year. In certain nearby agricultural communities, though not in Phug...
sde Village, chunks of ice are placed on the walls surrounding houses. These translucent decorations are considered clean, and hence fortuitous. Cleaning the house, restoring the adobe stove inside the house, restoring the *bsang khri*, discarding refuse in the lower part of the village, and fetching water before the beginning of New Year all purify the house and ensure good fortune for the family in the coming year. Wearing new clothes, especially for children, and offering clear liquor to guests, also create good fortune.

People visiting each other, especially when children visit elders, exchange words considered to be pure, such as "Lo sar *bsang* Happy New Year" or "Tshe ring lo *rgya* May you have a life of one hundred years" and prostrate, exemplifying socially pure behavior. The good fortune created by this is for the individuals exchanging the words and performing the actions. Similarly, offering *kha btags*, white symbols of purity, creates good fortune for people in the coming year.

The *tshe thar* ritual performed during Lo sar also exemplifies the connection between purity and fortune. If a family holds this ritual to free one animal each year, then locals believe they will have good luck and all inauspiciousness in the family will gradually diminish. Sometimes, to create good fortune and treat illness, a family holds *tshe thar* at times other than Lo sar. The following account attests to local beliefs regarding the efficacy of offering *tshe thar* to create good fortune and thus cure illness.

One of Klu mo skyid’s (female, b. ~1982) teeth became infected in 2006. A doctor advised her to pull it out, but she refused. Her father went to a local lama for advice. The lama chanted scripture for a while, gave a consecrated string to Klu mo skyid, and asked the father to free a sheep that he considered faithful to the family. To consecrate the animal, the father washed his hands, making sure there was no trace of meat or blood. He then poured a bowl of
milk mixed in water on the animal and tied several strips of cloth to the animals' ear with white wool. Soon afterwards, Klu mo skyid recovered.

During Lo sar, people are particularly careful about encountering bad fortune, in fear it will pursue them the entire year. Villagers beginning new endeavors during Lo sar will be particularly upset if they encounter signs of bad fortune. For example:

Don grub (male, b. ~1975) was waiting by the road for the public bus when Mtsho mo passed by carrying an empty water container. Don grub and his family felt really angry that their enemy Mtsho mo had cursed Don grub's journey.

Unrelated to purity, but connected with the creation of good fortune, is the fact that during Lo sar, hosts will give their guests something to carry after leaving a house, such as a piece of fruit. This ensures that no-one will encounter people going about the village empty-handed, which would be bad fortune for the coming year.32

Smon lam

Smon lam33 is an important series of rituals held in Bla brang Monastery. They begin on the thirteenth day of the first month and finish on the sixteenth day.34 Gos sku is held on

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32 For a village-level description of Lo sar elsewhere in Amdo, see Tsering Bum et al. (2008).
33 Translated as 'Praying festival' by the Tibetan Translation Tool (accessed 11 August 2008).
34 Smon lam also refers to a specific form of chanting that monks begin performing on the afternoon of the third day of
the thirteenth day. *Gos sku* literally means 'silk image', but here refers to the displaying of a large *thang ka* on a mountain slope north of the monastery. On the fourteenth day, *'cham* 'masked religious dance' is held and *gtor ma* prepared by monks are discarded outside the monastery, accompanied by people known as *bo'u rgyag* firing guns. The *bo'u rgyag* all come from the *lha sde phyogs ba bzhi*, and wear their best clothes for the occasion, which must include a silk robe, *zhwa dmar* (a saucer-shaped hat fringed with red tassels), and *lham* 'traditional cloth shoes'. On the evening of the fifteenth, *me tog mchod mjal* is held. Butter sculptures depicting flowers, religious images, deities, and scenes of daily life are blessed by the *tshogs chen khri ba* 'abbot of the monastery' and are then worshipped by lay people. On the final day of Smon lam, a statue of Maitreya (Rje btsun byams pa mgon po) is taken from within the monastery and carried around the monastery, accompanied by performers dressed as a tiger, wild yak, and snow lion, as well as an *a tsa ra* (an acrobatic 'clown' who carries a baton). Smon lam attracts visitors from throughout Amdo and is a good chance to *shom ston pa* or display one's self in one's best clothes and ornaments.

Smon lam connotes good wishes for the future. For example, when local people visit the monastery or meet monks, they usually say "*Smon lam 'debs!*" to offer good wishes to the monks. The purpose of Smon lam is to create good fortune for the coming year for all sentient beings, and for individuals who make offerings during the festival. People not attending Smon lam feel uncomfortable about the coming year.

the New Year, and continues every afternoon until the sixteenth day, but especially on the fourteenth, when Smon lam is chanted the entire day.
Drug pa'i ma Ni

Phug sde villagers gather in a large tent to chant *om ma Ni pad+me hUM* from the third until the ninth days of the sixth lunar month. During the seven days\(^{35}\) of the ritual, participants do not eat meat, garlic, and onions; they also abstain from such foods on the thirteenth and fifteenth days of the month. Pieces of wood resembling arrows are placed in the *lab rtse* during the time villagers hold *shing gling* 'picnic'.

The Drug pa'i ma Ni festival brings good fortune since it is thought to bring abundant harvest and ensure the health of livestock. Similarly, not holding the ritual brings bad fortune. Five families manage the ritual, cooking such pure white foods as butter, grain, and milk porridge, and offering them to participants. By not participating, any one of the families can create bad fortune as exemplified in the following account:

One village family refused to participate in this ritual in 2003 because the husband had left the wife and married another woman. All the villagers said that this was really bad for the village, but it was especially bad luck for that family. The five days of Drug pa'i ma Ni are just like the five fingers of a person's hand. If one family does not join, the Drug pa'i ma Ni is just like a person missing a finger. Soon after that family refused to participate in the festival, one of their sons was hit by a car and lost a leg (male, b. ~1950).

During the Drug pa'i ma Ni, good fortune is mostly brought about through the chanting (pure speech) done by the villagers. However, in order to assure this, the purity of all

\(^{35}\) As with the water offerings in the family shrine, seven here is thought to be an auspicious number.
participants is important; villagers are not allowed to eat meat, garlic, and onion, which are considered unclean and all villagers stay in a large tent where they eat and chant together. Any misbehavior during Drug pa'i ma Ni may create immediate negative consequences for the village and for specific families, as demonstrated in the following accounts:

Grog pa (male, b. ~1979) and Ja phrug (male, b. ~1976) quarreled about their field boundaries in 2000 during Drug pa'i ma Ni. Afterwards, the rows of butter lamps on the altar fell to the ground and a storm came, destroying Phug sde Village's crops. Their impure behavior brought misfortune.

Two children destroyed Phug sde Village's ser tho\textsuperscript{36} during Drug pa'i ma Ni in 2007. A huge storm struck the village and a flash flood washed away livestock and fields. Villagers thought that this misfortune was created by the impure behavior of the two children.

The Life Cycle

Several life-cycle rituals are held by Phug sde villagers. The first is a set of birth rituals; then at the age of three, children have a hair cutting ritual; at the age of around seventeen, young women have Skra phab (hair taming); next is marriage (though not everyone marries: some people become monks or nuns, others remain lay and single); people who reach the age of eighty have a ritual known as Brgyad cu'i gya ston; and funeral rituals are held for all villagers.

\textsuperscript{36} The \textit{ser tho} is an effigy protecting village crops from destruction by hail. For a photograph from a Tibetan village in Qinghai, see Snying bo rgyal and Rino (2008:22).
In association with births, fires are lit outside the family gate. The time when this fire is lit varies. If a woman is ill before giving birth, she is confined and does not meet guests who may bring harmful influences; fires are lit from the beginning of her confinement to purify any pollution arising from guests. If she is not confined, fires are lit starting immediately after the birth, explained by the local saying "Mi gtsang na lam mi gtsang The person is pure but the road is not pure." This expresses the belief that even pure people may be accidentally contaminated by impure things, therefore unwittingly creating bad consequences. The fire is made from sheep and yak dung and kindling. It needs to smolder enough to produce smoke, which purifies guests when they step over it. The greater the distance travelled, the greater the chance of encountering pollution, and therefore the greater the need for purification. This is expressed by the saying, "Mi rngul rta rngul can A person's sweat; a horse's sweat"; these are the outward signs of having made a long journey, and indicate that there is a greater chance of having encountered pollution. Special care must be taken in such instances.

Prior to a ceremony held for Phug sde Village children at the age of three, they are considered weak and vulnerable, and at risk of being affected by negative influences. This ceremony marks the transition to a more mature stage, when the child is less vulnerable. Nonetheless, the child still needs protection, such as this ritual provides. Firstly, the child's hair is cut. Males have all their hair shaved except for a forelock, while females have the lower back of their head shaved; the hair on the crown is braided into two braids. Two small cowry shells are placed at the end of the braids. If the sons are healthier than the daughters in a family

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37 This can sometimes be done at two years of age, or one hundred days after birth.
then both boys and girls have their heads shaved like boys. If the daughters are healthier (though this is less common), the boys have their hair prepared like a girl's. The discarded hair is rolled into a ball, a small bell is attached to it, and this is sewed to the back of a new shirt. The child wears this for a month or so afterward as protection from evil.

At around the age of seventeen (although this can also happen at the ages of thirteen and fifteen) girls hold the Skra phab ritual, usually on the third day of the New Year. Skra phab literally means 'hair taming'; the verb phab 'to tame' is also used in other circumstances such as rta phab pa 'taming a horse'. The Skra phab ritual 'tames' the woman and changes her from an uncontrolled girl into an obedient, mature woman. After holding Skra phab, a girl is permanently considered an adult, and villagers gossip if she acts immatures. However, the change in status is not marked by significant change in her immediate work and responsibilities; she is still under her family's control. Although she is told that she is now adult and can make her own decisions, in actuality it will be many years before she has that choice. The ritual involves preparing new clothes and ornaments for the girl (especially a ra ba 'hair ornament') and braiding the girl's hair. She then tours the village, holds parties, and shom ston pa 'promenades' in Bla brang 'Town. Hair taming rituals were held for males in the past, but are no longer held.38

After taming the hair, the next significant life-cycle ritual is the gnyen ston 'wedding'. It is important to choose an auspicious time for the wedding, which is usually on the fifth day of the New Year. The family marrying off the child holds a farewell party, and the family accepting a new member holds a welcoming party. However, in Phug sde Village, these parties are not always held. Some families

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38 For a detailed description of such rituals elsewhere in Amdo, see Tshe dpal rdo rje et al. (2010).
consider it bad luck to hold one or the other party, or they simply cannot afford a party, particularly if a family has many children marrying out. A family holding either party invites all villagers and relatives, no matter how far away they live. The bride's representatives (brothers and uncles, but not her father) go to the bride's future home with her, and give speeches encouraging the groom and his parents to care for her. The groom's female relatives sing to comfort the bride and encourage the bride's family to not worry about her new family. After singing, the bride's representatives give some money to the village women in gratitude for their promise to care for their niece or sister. Then the representatives return to their original homes, leaving the bride with the groom's family. Village youths then sing folksongs and drink all night.

After the wedding ritual, the remainder of villagers' lives are devoid of life-cycle rituals, until they reach the age of eighty when Brgyad cu'i gya ston is held in celebration of the person's longevity. Villagers bring gifts for the elder, who gives them candies or fruits in return, symbolizing the elders' bestowing good health and longevity on their guests. The guests sing, dance, eat, and drink. The family holding the ritual offers a tea brick to each village household. 39

The final life-cycle ritual is the 'das mchod' 'funeral'. If a person dies within the village territory, the corpse remains in the home for three, five, or seven days. If a person dies in a hospital or elsewhere outside the village territory, the corpse is not returned to the village, for this is considered bad luck. 40 The family invites monks from Bla brang

39 For monograph-length, village-level descriptions of weddings elsewhere in A mdo, see Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart (2008) and Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. (2010).
40 If a person dies in fields near the village, the corpse is kept in the home, but the corpse of a person who dies further
Monastery to chant over the corpse during this time. When the body is taken from the village for cremation, it cannot be taken above the village, it must be taken below.\textsuperscript{41} The corpse is bound in a sitting position with white cloth and \textit{phrug} 'felt', and carried out late at night or in the early hours of the morning (e.g., two a.m.) on six to eight poles, arranged like a wheel's spoke; the corpse sits in the center. One or two men hold each pole as women stand in lines, sing \textit{ma Ni}, and hold smoldering incense sticks. If a family is worried about negative influence from the deceased, they covertly place an upside-down basket above their gate as protection. Immediate family members and other close relatives do not wash their hair or clothes and do not wear any jewelry for at least forty-nine days after a person's death; washing and wearing fine clothes and ornaments are taken as signs of leisure and pleasure, and indicate that the relatives are not in mourning. This may even be prolonged for up to one year.

Among life-cycle rituals, the hair-cutting rituals, Skra phab, marriage, and Brgyad cu'i gya ston create good fortune.

The hair-cutting ritual creates good fortune thought to protect the person throughout their entire life, but especially during childhood. The scissors used in this ritual should be owned by the family; people never use scissors from a hairdresser. Shears used for shearing livestock are also acceptable. The scissors and clothes are purified with \textit{shug b thugs}.

away from the village, but within village territory in the pastures, is kept in a tent within the village territory but not near village homes.

\textsuperscript{41} The village is built on a slope extending upwards on two sides of a valley and is divided into upper, middle, and lower sections depending on the position relative to the village's \textit{ma Ni khang}, which defines the village center.
Asian Highlands Perspectives. 10 (2011), 231-284.

The primary aim of the Skra phab is to create good fortune that will accompany a woman throughout her life. Moreover, not holding this ritual creates misfortunes for a family, as described below:

Some bad thing, often a death, happens in a family that does not hold skra phab. For example, a village girl (b. 1986) did not hold this ritual in 2002. Her family had four daughters, so her parents decided to not hold this ritual again. Her father soon passed away. All the villagers believed that his death was caused by the bad fortune created by not holding the ritual. In another case, a village girl (b. 1990) turned seventeen but decided to not hold this ritual because she thought that it would be arrogant to do so. Shortly after, her grandfather passed away. The villagers also said that this was caused by the bad fortune from not holding the ritual.

The condition for purity in this ritual is met in several ways to ensure good fortune. First, all ornaments and clothes prepared for the girl to wear in the ritual are new. No black clothing is worn. Moreover, the woman who braids the girl's hair, or who begins the braiding, should be pure: she must not be a widow or divorced, she must have successful children, she and her family should have a good reputation, and she must have good relations with other villagers. This woman also helps the girl to put on her shirt (right arm first), belt, and hat.\(^{42}\) When visiting other village homes, the girl first visits a family home located above her own, where she is offered pale milk tea to drink in a bowl with white wool

\(^{42}\) Generally, the right hand is considered purer than the left, which is referred to as dgra lag 'enemy hand'. Left-handed children's parents try to train the child so the right hand is dominant.
tied around the rim. Visiting those considered socially higher, eating white food, and using white wool all create purity ensuring good fortune. Snow on this day is also good fortune for the girl and her family. Borrowing ornaments and expensive clothes is bad fortune, because these borrowed things are considered unclean.

Concerns with purity are displayed in the arrangement of marriages, with the aim of ensuring good fortune for the future couple. Phug sde villagers pay close attention to the prospective partners' rus pa 'bones' and bse dri, epitomized in the local saying, "Pha lo'i rus pa gser/ Ma lo'i rus pa dung" meaning that the father's bone is gold, and the mother's is conch shell. Bad body odor inherited from the father is difficult to remove because it is fixed in bone and blood. If the bad smell is inherited from the mother, it is in the skin and easier to remove.

A second important factor concerning purity and weddings is the the'u rang. Most villagers cannot see the'u rang, but believe they exist. There are two kinds: yod the'u (which make a family rich) and med the'u (which make a family poor). Families do not marry into families who have the'u rang, because they are considered unclean. A village man (b. ~1950) provided the following account:

In the past, if a family bought a nice horse and a person from a the'u rang family thought it was a good horse, the horse immediately died. In this way, people knew if someone's family possessed the'u rang. If a visitor comes, and milk or yogurt suddenly explode from their containers, this further indicates that the visitor is from a family possessing the'u rang. Some people can actually see the'u rang, but most cannot. Those who see the'u rang are very special, though people disagree if such people are good or bad. The'u rang are supposed to look like cats and are always busy at harvest time. People who can see the'u
rang say that the'u rang steal peoples' harvest and take it to their master's home. The'u rang justify this by saying that they take away things from lazy people, but cannot take anything from hardworking people. I met a the'u rang when I was a child when I slept at my friend's house. When everyone was asleep, in the middle of the night, a cat bit me on the foot. I tried to kick it away, but it was so hard and heavy that I couldn't move it. I called to my friend, and suddenly the cat vanished.

Brgyad cu'i gya ston creates good fortune for the family in general, rather than for a specific person. In particular, this ritual creates good fortune for younger family members, imbuing them with good health and longevity. Purity is not of primary concern during Brgyad cu'i gya ston, but the following may be noted: the person being celebrated should wear new, white clothes; attendants should be careful to use pure speech; and finally, milk tea and yogurt, being white foods, are considered appropriate pure foods to offer on such occasions.

Rituals associated with birth and death are concerned with avoiding bad fortune. The many proscriptions associated with death prevent the deceased person from causing bad fortune for the family. Similarly, the proscriptions associated with birth prevent malicious forces from harming the new-born. Additionally, a rainbow, rain, and snow at the time of birth are considered fortuitous signs, indicating that the newborn will have a bright future.

Those who assist a woman give birth must be considered clean; they should have children and a husband, and not have experienced misfortune. For at least seven days and at most one month after a woman gives birth, family members cannot go outside at night or in the evening, as this increases the chance of meeting polluting forces that threaten the household's purity. If a person needs to go to the toilet,
the family puts a fire of pine needles in front of the door, which is also done when distant relatives or strangers visit. These guests are purified by stepping over this fire. New clothes worn by the child are also thought to be pure and to protect the child. If an entirely new outfit cannot be obtained, then at least the shirt should be new.

Unfamiliar relatives from far away are not welcomed when a baby is born in a family, as shown in the following account:

Within two weeks of my (female, b. 1985) niece's birth in 1996, all the villagers were having a picnic. My mother brought the new-born infant to the grassland in the morning. My niece was very happy and comfortable. A relative, who lives a hundred kilometers away, came to visit my family at lunchtime. She rode a black horse that was very tired and dripped sweat. As soon as that relative visited my family tent, my niece suddenly cried as if somebody was beating her. Villagers believed that even though our relative was clean, the long path she took must have been unclean and, as a consequence, bad fortune was created. The relative immediately returned home. Because the baby continued to cry and act lethargic, my father took her to a famous local lama and asked for advice. The lama said that the relative had come along an unclean path. Many monks came to my home, chanted, and did religious rituals. My niece once again became very energetic and stopped crying within three days.

Death involves considerable grib and precautions are made to maintain purity. In particular, the village community stands to be negatively affected by impurity, as does the deceased in bar do. The first precaution to maintain purity

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43 Skorupski and Cech (1984:5) state that, from a 'Buddhist' perspective, 'Tibetan' funerals are entirely concerned with
for the community is not to bring back the corpses of those who have died outside the village. Secondly, the corpse may not be carried above the village because this would pollute all village households. To ensure purity for the deceased, the body is tied with a white cloth in a sitting position before being taken for cremation. Lamas are also consulted for the purest method of dealing with the corpse because mistakes bring misfortune to the family or the village. Prior to this, monks chant over the corpse. This is considered especially helpful if there are visible wounds. Chanting 'closes the wounds' on the deceased's 'body' traveling in bar do. Finally, family members refrain from washing, which demonstrates to other villagers their purity of mind; cleaning the physical body shows little concern for the deceased and suggests an impure mind.

CONCLUSION

Phug sde Village Tibetans are concerned for their own personal well-being and prosperity, as well as that of their family and community. Such concerns motivate them to perform daily, life-cycle, and annual rituals that manipulate the future by engaging and creating such forces are g.yang 'potency', bsod nams 'merit', bkra shis 'auspiciousness', rlung rta 'reputation', las 'luck', dge ba 'virtue', and rten 'brel 'fortune'.

We have examined certain ways villagers perform rituals to create good rten 'brel and avoid bad rten 'brel.

"purification, elimination of sins and guiding the dead person through the state of bar do and helping him to regain a better rebirth, or even, if possible, Buddhahood."

44 Sky burial (cutting up the corpse and feeding it to vultures) and cremation are common.
Daily rituals create good *rten 'brel* for individuals and their families. Annual rituals create good *rten 'brel* for the village, the wider *lha sde gshog ka bzhi* community, and for the family during Lo sar. The hair-cutting ritual, Skra phab, marriage, and Brgya cu'i cha ston all create good fortune, whereas rituals associated with birth and death are concerned with avoiding bad fortune. Hair-cutting, Skra phab, marriage, Brgya cu'i cha ston, and birth rituals focus on individuals. Funerals focus on the village community.

Ensuring *gtsang ma* (purity or cleanliness) is of vital importance in the rituals and failure to ensure purity results in failed ritual, the most extreme consequence of which is death.
APPENDIX ONE: XIAHE COUNTY\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{45} TAP = Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.
APPENDIX TWO: PHUG SDE VILLAGE, ADMINISTRATIVE TOWNS, AND TOWNSHIPS IN XIAHE COUNTY
APPENDIX THREE: OTHER ANNUAL RITUALS IN PHUG SDE

Tshogs mchod is held on the eighth day of the second lunar month, at Bla brang Monastery. Villagers (mostly from the lha sde gshog ka bzhi) visit the monastery, where such treasures as elephant tusks, 'horse horns', and 'dragon teeth' are displayed. Lay people hope beholding these treasures will bring good fortune to their livestock and crops in the coming year. Three weeks later, on the twenty-ninth day of the second lunar month, sngags pa (tantrins) from Bla brang Monastery's tantric college hold 'gu drag. During 'gu drag, sngags pa chant and consecrate water, which they spray on the faces of lay people. This is believed to relieve headaches, hearing ailments, and other minor problems associated with the face and head.

Crop sowing in Phug sde Village begins in the middle of the third lunar month by a locally respected family. Afterwards, all the families begin sowing their fields individually.

Starting on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month, villagers perform a three-day fast–Smyung gnas. On the first day, all participants eat a meal together in the village ma Ni khang, provided by a sbyin bdag 'donor'. Afterwards, participants cannot eat; they may only drink milk tea at dinner. Participants cannot eat, drink, or speak on the second day. On the third day, participants eat wheat porridge in the morning and then the ritual ends. The ritual's purpose is to generate compassion for animals, and for all beings who suffer hunger.

On the ninth day of the fifth lunar month, Phug sde Village males go to the lab rtse of the village's skyes lha to renew it by adding new arrows.

Rig sgra is held on the eighth day of the seventh lunar month. During Rig sgra, a 'cham is held at Bla brang

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Monastery, commemorating Milarepa's conversion of a hunter, dog, and deer to Buddhism.

On the twenty-second day of the eighth lunar month, villagers fast as they did in the fourth lunar month. One week later, on the twenty-ninth day, Dgun 'cham (winter 'cham) is held at the monastery.

Phug sde villagers visit Bla brang Monastery to commemorate the death of Tsong kha pa on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth lunar month. They light butter lamps in the temples and burn bsang. Local people consider this a lucky day to die, for the deceased will be reborn into Lha yul (realm of the gods) and there is no chance of them being reborn into Dmyal ba (Hell).

Nyi ldog 'winter solstice' is celebrated during the eleventh lunar month, though the exact date changes yearly. Parents bring their children to circumambulate the monastery on this day in the hope that as the days are becoming longer, so will their children's lifespan increase.
REFERENCES


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NON-ENGLISH WORD LIST

'Bor ra འབོར་, *place
'cham འཆམ་, masked monastic dances
'das mchod ཤགས་མཐོང་, funeral
'gu drag སྒྲ་རྩོམ་, water consecration ritual

A
A mchog རྒྱུ་མཆོག་, *place
A pha shi གཞག་སྟི, dead father – an insult/curse
a tsa ra ཡུན་རབ་, clown, acrobat

B
Bang sgar thang གཞང་སྒར་ཐང་, *place
bar do བར་དོ་, the realm between life and death
bdun tshar བདུན་ཚར, offering of seven bowls of water
bkra shis བཀྲ་ཤིས་, auspicious
Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil བླ་བླང་བཀྲ་ཤིས་'ཁྱིི, *monastery
bo'u rgyag བོའུ་རྒྱ་, gun firing
Brgyad cu'i gya ston བྲི་གྱ་སྟོན་, *ritual
Bsang khog བསོང་ཁོག་, *place
bsang khri བསོང་ཁི་, incense altar
bsang yig བསོང་ཡིག་, incense scripture
bsang སློང་, incense, fragrant offering
bse dri སྦྱིད་, bad body odor
bsod nams བསྡོད་ནམས་, merit, karmic storage
bsur བསུར་, offering for souls wandering in Bar do
bsur phud sa ཁྱིན་ཕུད་ས་, a one meter high post used only to offer bsur
C

chab ཨི་, honorific form for water (chu), used when water is being used as an offering
chu sna rgya mo yar la mchod སྟེ་འབྲུ་བཟོད་ཀྱིས་བཟོད་, offering up the water's head
Chu sngon ཞུན་ོན་, *place
chu རྩོ་, water

D
Dgar sde གྲ་ཟེ, *place
dge ba དགེ་བ, virtue
dgra lag ཀྲ་ལག, 'enemy hand', left hand
dgu thug ཟུག་ཏུ, nine noodles, the meal eaten on New Year's Eve
Dmar thang དམར་ཐང, *place
Dmyal ba དམར་བོ, Hell, purgatory
Don grub དུན་གྲུབ, *personal name
dri bzal དྲི་བསལ, 'smell eater', beings that subsist on smells rather than food
du ba 'phyag pa རྒྱན་པ་, 'sweeping smoke', the cleaning done prior to the New Year

G

g.yang 'bod རྒྱན་འབྲིང་, potency calling
g.yang རྒྱན་, potency
gang རྣང་, full
Gannan ལྟོག, *place
Gansu ལྟོགས་, *place
Glas sgrigs སྟོན་གྲིགས་, *place
Glu rgyags རྒྱ་སྟོན་, *place
Glu thang རྒྱ་སྟོན་, *place

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gnyen ston [བཞི་ནུས་, wedding celebration
Gos sku [བུམ་པ་, *ritual
gral dag [གཉིས་, neat, tidy
Grib [པོ་, pollution, defilement
Grog pa [བོག་པ་,*personal name
gter kha [བོད་ཁ།, 'treasure bag' thrown into holy lakes to bring fortune
gtor ma [བོད་མ་, dough effigy, discarded to avoid misfortune
gtsang ma [བོད་མ་, pure, clean
gzhi bdag [བོད་དག, a 'smell eater', territorial deity

H
Han 汉 China's majority ethnic group
Hezuo 合作*place
Hui 回 Chinese Muslims; one of China's fifty-six officially recognized Chinese ethnic groups

J
Ja phrug [བོད་ཕྲུག, *place

K
kha btags [བོད་ཚོགས, ceremonial silk scarf
kha dbur chag na kha mgo bde [བོད་དབུར་ཆག་ལ་བོད་མོ་བེད], if the rim is broken, the body will be healthy
Kho tshe [ཆོས་, *place
Klu mo skyid [མོ་སྒྲིད, *personal name
klu [མོ་water deities

L
lab rtse [ལོ་རྩེ, mountain deity worship site
Lam zhur [ལམ་ཞུར, *place
Lang kar thang [ལང་ཀར་ཐང, *place
Lanzhou 兰州, *place

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las ལམ, luck, karma

*lha sde gshog ka bzhi* བཟློས་སོགས་བཞི་ monastic villages of the four direction', the lay community associated with Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil

*lham* སྒྲབ་, traditional Tibetan boots

Linxia 临夏 *place

Lo sar ཞེས་རབ, *ritual

*Lo sar bzang* ཞེས་རབ་བཞི་, Happy New Year

*M

ma Ni khang མ་སྤྱད་, village chanting hall

*mchod pa bshams* མཆོད་པ་བཤམས་, single water offering

Mda' smad མདའ་གནོད་, *place

*me skyogs* མེ་སློངས་, ladle used to add fuel (e.g., dried dung) to a fire

*me tog mchod mjal* མེ་ཞིག་མཆོད་མོ་ཇིལ།, offering of butter sculptures

*med the'u* བདེ་འུ་, a familial spirit that engenders poverty

Mgon po བོད་པོ་, *personal name

*mi gtsang na lam mi gtsang* མི་གཙང་བྱུང་མི་གཙང་, the person is pure but the road is not pure

*mi gtsang pa* མི་གཙང་པ་, unclean, impure

*mi rngul rta rngul can* མི་རང་འགྲུབ་རྒན་, a person's sweat, a horse's sweat

Mngon mchog མོང་འཆོག་, *place

Mtha ba gong ma མཐའ་བ་དོན་, *place

Mtha ba zhol ma མཐའ་བ་ཞིལ་, *place

Mtsho mo མཐོ་མོ་, *personal name

*mu* མུ་ unit of area measurement

Mun nag རྒྱུན་དང་, *place
N
Nyi ldog ཞི་ཐོ་, *ritual
nyin nag སྨིན་ཐང་, 'black day', an inauspicious, unlucky day

O
om ma Ni pad+me hUM སོམ་མ་ཐེ་མེ་ཧུམ་, Buddhist mantra

P
pha bzang pas bzhon ma mi bzhok/ ma bzang mas mtshon cha
mi 'dzin སྦིན་འིཚོ་བེཤུལ་མ་མི་བེཤུལ་ལམ་ཅིང་མཚོན་ལམ་, a good man never milks and a good woman
never fires a rifle
pha lo'i rus pa gser/ Ma lo'i rus pa dung གསེར་ལེེའི་བུན་, father's bone is gold, and the mother's
is conch shell
phab རབ་, to tame
phrug རུང་, felt
Phug sde རུང་ི་, *place

Q
Qinghai 青海
Qinghai Normal University 青海师范大学

R
ra ba རབ་, hair ornament
rde'u 'bum རྐྱ་འབུམ་, pile of protective, auspicious stones
Rgan rgya རྒན་རྒྱ་, *place
Rig sgra རིག་སྡེ་, *ritual
Rka grong རྒྱ་གྲོང་, *place
rlung rta རླུང་རྟ་, reputation, luck
rta phab pa རྟ་པོ་བོ་, tame a horse
rten 'brel bzang po རེ tùy་བོད་པོ་, good fortune
rten 'brel ngan pa རེ་ཏྲེབ་ཉན་པ་, misfortune

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rtten 'brel རྩེན་བུར།, fortune
rus pa ཉུས་པ, bones, lineage

S
Sa dkar བཀའ, *place
Sa mtsho skyid ས་མཚོ་སྐྱིད།, *personal name
shags ཤངས།, defiled, dirtied
sbyin bdag སྔིན་བདག, donor
ser tho སེར་ཐོ།, hail prevention effigy
Sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།, *personal name
Sgyus tshang སྒྱུས་ཐོང་།, *place
shing gling ལིང་གིང་།, picnic
shom ston pa སྒོམ་སྟོན་པ།, to promenade
shug bdag སུག་བདག, household purification ritual
Skra phab གྲོ་ཕབ།, *ritual
Skyabs 'gro སྤྱེབས་འགྲོ།, *scripture
skyes lha ཤེས་ལ།, natal deity
Sman dkar སྨན་དཀར།, *place
Smon lam སྒོམ་ལམ།, *ritual
smon lam 'debs སྒོམ་ལམ་བེད།, best wishes
sngags pa སྔངགས་པ།, tantrin
srung ma སྒྲུང་བ།, household protective deity
stong ba thams cad gang ba zer ན་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་དག་བ་ཞེས་, empty containers will soon be full

T
Thang dkar nang ཤང་དཀར་ནང།, *place
thang ka རང་ཁ།, cloth religious icon
Thang nag རང་ནག།, *place
the'u rang རུང་རང་།, familial spirit
Tsa yas འབྲས་ཡེ་ས།, *place

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*tsam pa* ཡང་བ, roasted barely flour, roasted barley flour dough
*tshe ring lo brgya* ཕི་ཞེར་གྱེ་, one hundred years of long life
*Tshe sgron* བཞེས་སྒྲོན, *personal name
*tshe thar* བཞེས་ཐར, consecrated animal
*tshe thar ra ba* བཞེས་ཐར་བ་, courtyard for consecrating animals
*tshogs chen khrig ba* མཆོག་ཆེན་ཁྲིད་, abbot of the monastery
*tshwa tshwa* བྲུས་, stamped clay Buddhist images
*Tsang kha pa* སྲོང་ཁ་པ་, *personal name

X

Xiahe 夏河, *place
*xiang* 乡 township

Y

*yag pa* ཡག་པ་, beautiful
*Yar rurgyud* ཡར་རུ་རྒྱུད་, *place
*yod the'u* ཡོད་ཐེའུ, familial spirit that bestows wealth

Z

*Za yus* ཡག་ཉུས་, *place
*Zhen* 鎮 town
*Zhongzhuang* 中专 technical school
*zhwa dmar* རྣམ་པར, red hat