

みんなくりポジトリ

国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

SER no.057; Introduction

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Karmay, Samten G. メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00001626

Introduction

Gyalrong is situated to the southeast of Khams¹ and still remains to this day a very difficult place to get to. The region is now divided into two halves. The northern part is under the administrative unit of the rNga ba (Ch. Aba) 'Autonomous Prefecture'. Its administrative centre is in 'Bar khams. The southern part, which begins just after the Chu chen rdzong, comes under the dKar mdzes (Ch. Ganzi) 'Autonomous Prefecture'. Its seat of administration is Dar rtse mdo (Ch. Kangding). Both units come under the administration of Chengdu, Sichuan province, although both are completely cut off from the Sichaun basin by the watershed of the massive mountain ranges. Gyalrong therefore no longer exists in its traditional entity. However, in the pre-communist era, it was a Tibetan region with its own history and culture.

The name of this region in Tibetan is spelled as rGyal rong which is derived from its full name rGyal mo tsha ba rong.² It is related to the name of the river rGyal mo dngul chu which is the main river in the region.³ The toponym Gyalrong in Tibetan usually covers the whole region that had originally included eighteen principalities of varying sizes.⁴ The equivalent name of the region in Chinese is often given as Jinchuan, but in fact Jinchuan designates only two principalities in Gyalrong: bTsan la and Chu chen. The Chinese use the name Jiarong for the whole region of Gyalrong. The name Jiarong is obviously a transcription of the Tibetan name rGyal rong.

In Tibetan geographical vocabulary the region is described as *rong*, 'gorge'. [Pl. 1-3] It is one of the four great *rong* (*rong chen bzhi*). They are: Kong po rong, A stag rong,⁵ Tsha ba rong and rGyal mo rong. The first refers to Kong po where Mount Bon ri is situated;⁶ the exact location of the second *rong* remains unknown; the third is the region of Mount Tsha ba dkar po in south-east Tibet and the fourth refers to Gyalrong. Indeed, the main valley of the region is long and very narrow. It is cut deep by the huge river called rGyal mo dngul chu which flows through it.⁷ The river starts in the north of the valley from the confluence of rDo chu which runs from the area of 'Dzam thang and So mang chu that flows through the valley of Tsha kho. Downstream after about 200 kilometers from the confluence the river is called Dadu in Chinese and here the valley also gradually widens out at a place called lCags zam, 'Iron bridge'. From this point the landscape and its inhabitants become explicitly Chinese. The iron suspension bridge over the river is believed to have been originally constructed by the Tibetan engineer Thang stong rgyal po (b.1385). [Pl. 4] It marks the traditional Tibeto-Chinese border in the area.

Gyalrong, as a sacred land

Gyalrong is also considered as *sbas yul*, 'hidden land'. As is known, there are a number of places in Tibet that are often described as 'hidden land'. The term refers to

an inaccessible place. The notion of the 'hidden land' is also connected with the 'sacred geography'. From the thirteenth century onwards, there were sporadic Mongol hordes that used to rampage the country attacking anything they found on their way. Because of this threat, a body of prophetic literature came into existence. It is filled with warnings of the 'Hor', a term which refers to Mongol hordes. They would turn up without warning and cause havoc. Gyalrong is described as one of the places where the local people valiantly resisted the Mongol hordes, later the Manchus and still later the Chinese Red Army. In consequence the place was considered a veritable hidden land. It was also a hidden land in the sense that it was the place where the Bon masters claim to have excavated 'hidden texts' (*gter ma*), especially from places around Mount dMu rdo. Gyalrong was therefore a sacred land for the Tibetans extolled in prophetic texts.⁸

For the Bonpo, it was primarily a 'place where textual treasures were concealed' (*gter gnas*) and so a number of 'textual rediscoverers' (*gter ston*) made visits to Gyalrong. The notion of *gter gnas* in turn has roots in the legendary accounts of the Bonpo sage Dran pa nam mkha' and his Buddhist disciple Vairocana. They are believed to have dwelt at one time on Mount dMu rdo. Vairocana was one of the first seven Tibetan Buddhist monks of the eighth century A.D., but he was regarded by the Bonpo and rNying ma pa as one who practiced both Bon and Buddhism. He is, however, said to have been banished to Gyalrong from Central Tibet on an account of having had a liaison with one of the queens of Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan (r.742-c.797).⁹ These legendary accounts are important for an understanding of the workings of religious developments in later centuries, particularly in the eighteenth century in Gyalrong. There are caves in the vicinity of Mount dMu rdo reputed to have been dwelling places of Vairocana.

However, no Bonpo record on Gyalrong has so far been found that goes back beyond the fourteenth century. The founder of the sMan ri Monastery,¹⁰ mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1356-1415) was a native of Gyalrong. He was first a monk in the dBen sa kha Monastery in gTsang, Central Tibet. The monastery was founded in 1072 (*STNM*). This suggests that monks from Gyalrong studied in this monastery in the fourteenth century. When the latter was destroyed by a flood he founded the sMan ri Monastery in 1405. Many of the monks who succeeded him as abbots of the sMan ri Monastery were also from Gyalrong.¹¹ Both the main Bonpo monasteries sMan ri and Ra lag gYung drung gling¹² in Central Tibet had residential houses for the monk-students coming from Gyalrong (*rgyal rong khang tshan*) as for monks from other regions.

The natives of Gyalrong are referred to as Gyalrongwa (rGyal rong ba) in Tibetan.¹³ The Gyalrongwa always considered themselves as Tibetan and they still do to this day [Pl.5-6]. They do not claim any separate ethnic identity from the rest of Tibetans in spite of their native spoken language which is some way from being a

Tibetan dialect, but all the same belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese group.¹⁴ Classical Tibetan was the basis of their education and it was their principal means of written communication till around 1950. Even in the present Chinese administrative set up they are rightly treated as Tibetan.¹⁵ And yet it has been denied that the Gyalrongwa are Tibetan on the ground that in their language there is a term for Gyalrong itself.¹⁶

The Gyalrongwa were reputed to be good craftsmen. Their masonry work was especially appreciated among the Tibetans. This is evidenced by the solidly built houses with stone walls [Pl.7-8]. Another aspect of their architecture is seen in the formidable tall stone towers which are either square, hexagonal or octagonal. They were mainly built for defensive purposes, but also had cultural significance [Pl.9]. But above all, it was in their craftsmanship that the Gyalongwa displayed artistry of a particularly high order, as will be seen below, in the handling of the wood-engravings and paintings.

The penetration of the dGe lugs pa in Gyalrong

Around 1410 a disciple of Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419) named Tsha kho Ngag dbang grags pa, after completing his studies at the feet of the master in Central Tibet, returned to his native land, Tsha kho, a district in northern Gyalrong. There is scant information about him. The fact that his name is preceded by the word Tsha kho made me presume that he was born in Tsha kho. However, he is said to have been born in a place called Sum mdo in the principality of bTsan la.¹⁷ This is an interesting indication if it is correct. We will come back to the vicissitude of this principality below. He was no ordinary disciple of Tsong kha pa. In fact, the master praises him in several colophons of works which the master composed at his behest.¹⁸ Tradition has it that he had taken a vow in the presence of his master to found a hundred and eight monasteries in his native land. He certainly managed to convert a few people and founded some small monasteries in Tsha kho and even one in the area of bTsan la in the fifteenth century. It was not an easy job for him, for he faced strong resistance from the local people who followed the Bon religion. Subsequently, his establishments remained insignificant throughout the following three centuries. There are tales which tell that he performed magic rites against the Bonpo religious practitioners in order to overcome their opposition to his proselytising activities.¹⁹ In any case, it is certain that a dGe lugs pa foothold was established in Gyalrong already in the fifteenth century.

In order to overcome difficulties in converting people the dGe lugs pa always tried first to convert the chieftain of a locality. The chieftains of Cog tse, So mang and rDzong 'gag principalities in the Tsha kho area were converted to dGe lugs pa only in later centuries. Their most effective method in converting the local people was to recognize a young boy of a chieftain family. Once the boy becomes a reincarnation as such the prestige of the family increases and the family gets converted usually without any apparent opposition.

In the area of the Cog tse principality, there was a Bon monastery called 'Bar khams gYung drung gling. This is said to have been the place of the Bon master dMu gshen Nyi ma rgyal mtshan (b. *STNN* 1360). He was a member of the gShen family whose seat was situated in Dar lding, gTsang, Central Tibet.²⁰ The monastery therefore followed the religious tradition of the gShen family. The village 'Bar khams has now become a Chinese town serving as the administrative seat of the 'Autonomous Prefecture' of Aba (rNga ba). In spite of the intense proselytism of the dGe lugs pa in the area in the eighteenth century it managed to maintain its own tradition till late in the nineteenth century. A young boy of the Cog tse chieftain family was recognized as the reincarnation of Byang rtse Blo bzang lhun grub (1781-1847), the 74th throne-holder of Tsong kha pa in dGa' ldan Monastery in Central Tibet. Blo bzang lhun grub himself was a man from Cog tse. The boy was called mKhyen rab bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan and later he became an abbot of the monastery bsTan 'phel gling formerly gYung drung lha steng in Chu chen to which we shall refer below. In 1874 supported by his own family which was now dGe lugs pa and the Manchu court, he turned the 'Bar khams gYung drung gling Monastery into a dGe lugs pa one and named it dGa' ldan dar rgyas gling. The forcible conversion of this monastery caused a local war between those people of Tsha kho who followed the dGe lugs pa and the people of Shark khog (Ch. Songpan) who followed the Bon religion. The latter tried to save the monastery, but they were ultimately defeated. They could give protection only to the lama of the monastery whom they led to Shark khog²¹ where he settled down in the village Trime.

The dGe lugs pa had great difficulties in penetrating into southern Gyalrong where the principalities of Khro skyabs, Chu chen and dGe bshes tsa were situated. They were staunch up-holders of the Bon religion. However, the position of bTsan la principality also in the south was somewhat dubious. At one time, the family of the chieftain followed the Bon religion, at another Buddhism. One of the monasteries founded by Tsha kho Ngag dbang grags pa is said to be in Sum mdo, a place in bTsan la. The fact that from about the beginning of the fifteenth century bTsan la was already strongly subjected to proselytism by the dGe lugs pa is also told in a work ascribed to Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367-1449), a Sa skya pa writer born also in bTsan la and originally a Bon follower. The work purports to be contesting the activities of Buddhist proselytism aimed at the court of the king of bTsan la.²²

In 1731 the king of bTsan la was reluctant to co-operate with the Bon master Sangs rgyas gling pa (1705-1735) when the latter was trying to trace a footpath around the sacred Mount dMu rdo.²³ All this suggests that the royal house of bTsan la was no longer entirely a follower of the Bon religion in the eighteenth century. However, the family was related by blood to the Rab brtan royal house in Chu chen. bTsan la was the target of the first Manchu military campaign in 1746 and in 1771 it joined Chu chen in putting up resistance against the second Manchu campaign.

The strength of dGe lugs pa's expansion in Gyalrong, which was slow but solid, is shown by the fact that a number of its monk-students went to study in Central Tibet. All the large dGe lugs pa monasteries such as 'Bras spungs, Se ra and dGa' ldan had residential houses for the monk recruits from Gyalrong. At various periods, four of them succeeded in occupying the throne of Tsong kha pa in dGa' ldan Monastery, the highest position a monk could hold in the dGe lugs pa school. The work on the history of Buddhism in Amdo gives a long list of other monks from Gyalrong who occupied various important positions in the dGe lugs pa establishments in Central Tibet.²⁴

The Bon religion in the eighteenth century in Gyalrong

In 1731 Sangs rgyas gling pa (1705-1735), a Bon 'text treasure revealer', traveled from Khyung po to Gyalrong. His main intention was to turn Mount dMu rdo into a sacred site and eventually to reveal 'hidden texts'.²⁵ It was on this occasion that Kun grol grags pa (b.1700) joined him and at the same time became a disciple of the master and was initiated into what is known as Bon gsar ma, the New Bon Tradition. This was the beginning of Kun grol's interest in Gyalrong. A little later he flourished there by becoming a prelate at the courts of the dGe bshes tsa, Khro skyabs and Chu chen royal houses. His main interest was to revive the Bon religion which was under continual threat from the slow but inexorable expansion of the dGe lugs pa clergy in the northern and eastern areas of Gyalrong. Through this intent, he discovered, thanks to Sangs rgyas gling pa, his spiritual mentor, the religious ideology which took the form of the New Bon Tradition. With this new approach to Bon he was able to arouse enthusiasm for the religion among the people, especially the most powerful local kings at the time. He was therefore successful in persuading the kings of Khro skyabs and Chuchen to undertake major woodblock engraving projects for the printing of the first part of the Bon Canon as well as the engraving of a number of printing woodblocks of the life-stories of gShen rab Mi bo.

The Manchu campaigns against Gyalrong

In the eyes of the Manchus the inhabitants of such outlying places as Gyalrong beyond the territories of the Manchu imperial rule were barbarians and were not worthy of attention. However, after the conquest of the whole of China proper by the Manchus, it soon became a battle ground of religio-political struggle from 1746 onwards, on the one hand between the Bon religion and the dGe lugs pa school of Tibetan Buddhism and on the other between the Manchus and the principalities of bTsan la and Chu chen in Gyalrong. In 1776 the Manchus finally triumphed in their imperial ambition through military victory over the principalities of bTsen la called in Chinese Xiao Jinchuan ('Small Jinchuan') and Chu chen, Da Jinchuan ('Big Jinchuan').

In Chinese historiography, the Mongol imperial rule over China is called the Yuan

Dynasty and that of the Manchu rulers the Qing Dynasty making them sound as if the two were just simply Chinese dynasties. This Chinese ethnocentric presentation of history is often faithfully followed by Sinologists. The fact is that neither the Mongols nor the Manchus were Chinese. It was only when the Mongol and Manchu emperors ruled China that Tibet had formed a political association with them just as China herself was part of the Mongol and Manchu empires. In the same vein, the Manchu campaigns in Gyalrong are said to have been launched in order to settle local disputes between 'local barbarian chieftains' giving the impression that the region was already under the Manchu rule. The resistance put up by the people of bTsan la and Chu chen in Gyalrong is therefore described as 'rebellion'. The claim that it was already from the time of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) that the local chieftains received Chinese titles is arguable to say the least.²⁶ It would be uncritical of us to accept such claims without noting to what extent the control was exercised over these people by the various rulers in China.

From 1720 the imperial court of the Manchus in Beijing had been able to exert its political influence in Tibet and came to embrace at least in appearance the new school of Tibetan Buddhism, namely the dGe lugs pa, which was in power. The Manchu government ostensibly presented itself as the defender of the new school for reasons of political expediency. Even if the Manchu political influence in Central Tibet by 1746 was considerably strong, the Manchus had yet to penetrate into such far flung regions of Tibet as Gyalrong.

In Central Tibet, the dGe lugs pa had previous political experience, for in 1642 it was with the support of a Mongol force that it was able to vanquish its opponent, Karma bstan skyong dbang po, the king of Tibet, based in gTsang although the king was the legitimate ruler of the country. The new school, however, came to be overtaken by a movement of fundamentalists within itself which advocated a radical approach to questions of Buddhist theory and practice in Tibet. It was diametrically opposed to the Bon religion, being a non-Buddhist religion, despite the fact that it was recognized as one of Tibet's official religions by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1712-1782) in his edict of 1664. It was therefore no coincidence if the Manchu empire wanted to bring Gyalrong under its control in its policy of imperial expansion as an extension of its influence in Central Tibet. Moreover, Gyalrong was one of the last regions of Tibet where an appreciable section of the population was still following the Bon religion.

At the Manchu court, there was a very influential Buddhist master in the person of lCang skya Khutuktu Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717-1786) who was a most zealous devotee of the new school. He was certainly keen to lend his power to the expansion of the new school in the places where it had begun to establish itself, but had no great success. The Manchus themselves at the beginning were perhaps not conscious of the religious problems in Gyalrong. Their main interest was the imperial policy of expansion towards the south. As the imperial army became entrenched, the Manchus gradually became

aware of the strong resistance put up by the local militia whose faith was opposed to the dGe lugs pa movement within Gyalrong itself. The Bon leaders in Gyalrong were aware that the Manchus were staunch supporters of the dGe lugs pa clergy and its theocratic government in Central Tibet. They viewed with scepticism the fact that the dGe lugs pa clergy in Central Tibet considered the Manchu emperors as the manifestation of Bodhisattava Mañjuśrī.

As the war dragged on, the Manchus suspected that the followers of the Bon practitioners in Gyalrong were capable of performing Bon rites against them and the emperor Qianlong was alarmed by the thoughts that it might have had a bad effect on the morale of his fighting men in Gyalrong. On the other hand, the emperor appreciated the Buddhist rites performed by ICang skya at the court for the same purpose. ICang skya was shrewd enough to foresee that the dGe lugs pa movement in Gyalrong would benefit if the imperial government embarked on its expansion towards the south and controlled regions like Gyalrong. He therefore lost no opportunity to exert his influence at the court in encouraging the imperial army to destroy the Bon establishments once it was victorious. In 1776 the imperial army, after six years of fighting was at last able to vanquish the enemy, but it was only through the use of Western methods of armament. In the same year the imperial army destroyed gYung drung lha steng, the Bon monastery of the Rab brtan royal house. It was immediately rebuilt in the image of the dGe lugs pa monastery with a new name. It was invested with full authority over all other dGe lugs pa establishments in Gyalrong.

The view according to which the emperor Qianlong was anxious not to encourage too strongly the dGe lugs pa in their proselytism in Gyalrong lest the influence of Central Tibetan authority in the region might increase does not correspond to the historical reality.²⁷ This seems to derive from wanting to credit more political genius to the emperor than is likely to have been the case. The fact is that ICang skya was not content with just having the Rab brtan royal monastery rebuilt in accordance with the tradition of the dGe lugs pa school. He further made sure that the Bon religion in Gyalrong was buried in the ashes of the ground on which the new monastery of the dGe lugs pa stood. In this, he was very successful, convincing the emperor of the necessity of proscribing the Bon religion in the region, for the emperor went to the extent of issuing an edict plainly authorizing imperial support for the politico-religious domination by new dGe lugs pa clergy in Gyalrong.²⁸

dGe lugs pa sources state that the emperor issued another edict that particularly forbade the practice of the Bon religion in Gyalrong.²⁹ However, if that had been the case, the imperial proscription had little effect, because the Bon religion continued to be practised in large parts of the region in the later eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although in the eighteenth century Gyalrong was marred by wars, persecution and destruction, there were short periods of intense cultural developments

such as gave rise to the practice of wood-engraving, calligraphy, painting, printing, architecture, stone work and writing.

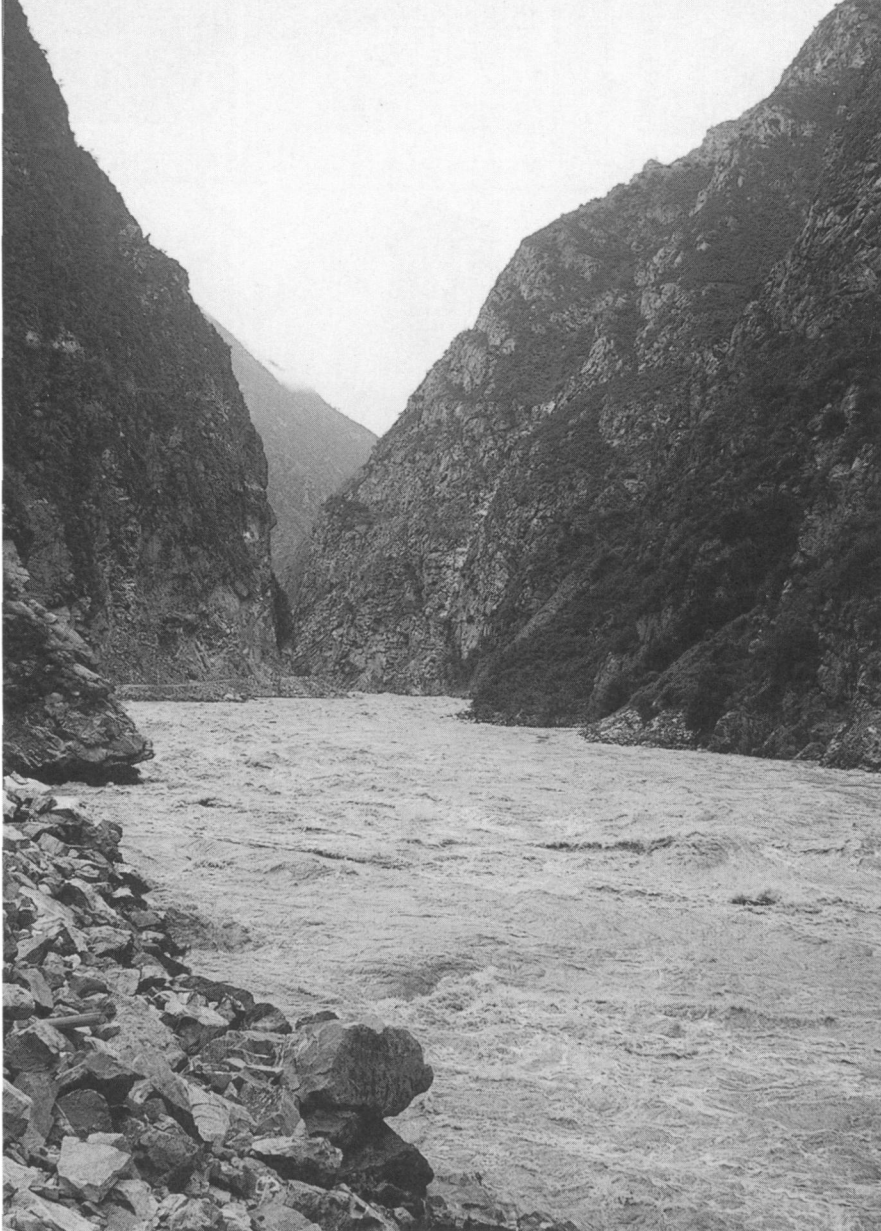
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- ¹ Whether Gyalrong is a part of Khams or Amdo, it is sometimes disputed. According to *DCh*, it is in mDo khams, hence Khams (p.771), but according to *KGML* (p.270) it is in mDo smad (p. 270).
- ² For the sake of simplification, I have used the transcription Gyalrong throughout this book. The name is sometimes written as rGya rong which is derived from the phrase *shar phyogs rgyal mo rgya yi rong*, but considered as incorrect. The phrase occurs in texts such as *SG* (f.531a). There is confusion about this name between Tsha ba rong and rGyal mo tsha ba rong in Buddhist sources, cf. Karmay 1988a: 26, n. 31. G. Van Drien translates the name rGyal mo rong as 'Queen ravine' and further indicates that "the 'Queen' is the native Bon goddess associated with mount dMu-rdo in the rGyal mo rong area" (2001: 44).
- ³ The name of this river is often mistakenly spelled as rGya mo rngul chu.
- ⁴ For references to the list of the eighteen principalities, see Chapter 5, n. 15.
- ⁵ This is normally known as A stag rong in the north (Byang A stag rong). It is therefore situated in the north, but its precise location remains unknown. In the Gesar epic literature, one of the 30 'knights' (*dpa' thul*) is called A stag lHa mo. She is considered to be based in the north, cf. Karmay 1998: 500.
- ⁶ Cf. Ramble 1997; Karmay 1998a: No. 14.
- ⁷ The river 'Bri chu (Salween) in Khams is also called by the same name.
- ⁸ Cf. *SM* p. 29.
- ⁹ Cf. Karmay 88a: 17-37.
- ¹⁰ Survey No. 1.
- ¹¹ According to *MSY* (pp.461-465) 19 out of 33 abbots of sMan ri were from Gyalrong.
- ¹² Survey No. 2.
- ¹³ The population of Gyalrong is about 80000 (Nagano 1984: 4).
- ¹⁴ Cf. Nagano 1984: 1.
- ¹⁵ Cf. Nagano 1984: 4.
- ¹⁶ Mansier 1990: 128.
- ¹⁷ *DCh*, p. 774; *ZMTs* p. 67.
- ¹⁸ *ZMTs* pp. 68, 69, 71.
- ¹⁹ *DCh*, p. 774.
- ²⁰ Cf. Karmay 1972: 3-6; Dondrup Lhagyal 2000: 437-445.
- ²¹ Cf. *BK* p. 149. On the people of Shar khog one may see Karmay and Sagant 1998.
- ²² *BT* p. 512.
- ²³ Cf. Karmay 1998: No. 25, p. 457. Also see Chapter 1.
- ²⁴ *DCh* pp. 778-779.
- ²⁵ Karmay 1998a, No. 25.
- ²⁶ Mansier 1990: 126-128.
- ²⁷ Mansier 1990: 126-27; Waley-Cohen 1996: 349.
- ²⁸ Kvaerne, Sperling 1993: 119.
- ²⁹ *BG* p. 389.



Pl. 1 River rGyal-mo dngul chu and a village with maize growing in fields, Samten G. Karmay (SGK) 1985



Pl. 2 River rGyal mo drngul chu and footpath on the eastern side of the river, SGK 1985



Pl. 3 Gorges in Gyalrong, SGK 1985



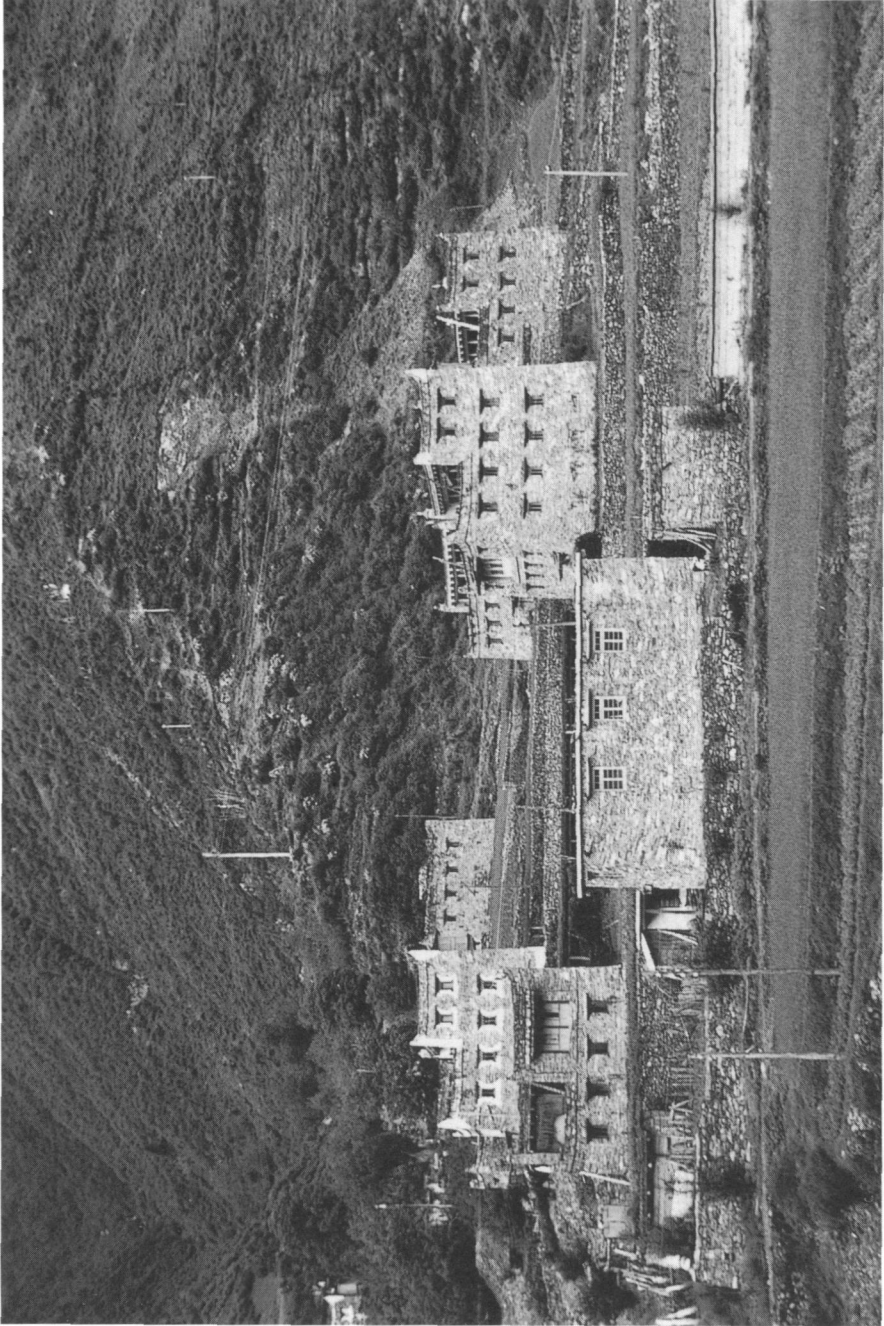
Pl. 4 Image of Thang stong rgyal po in dMu rdo lha khang, see Pl. 16



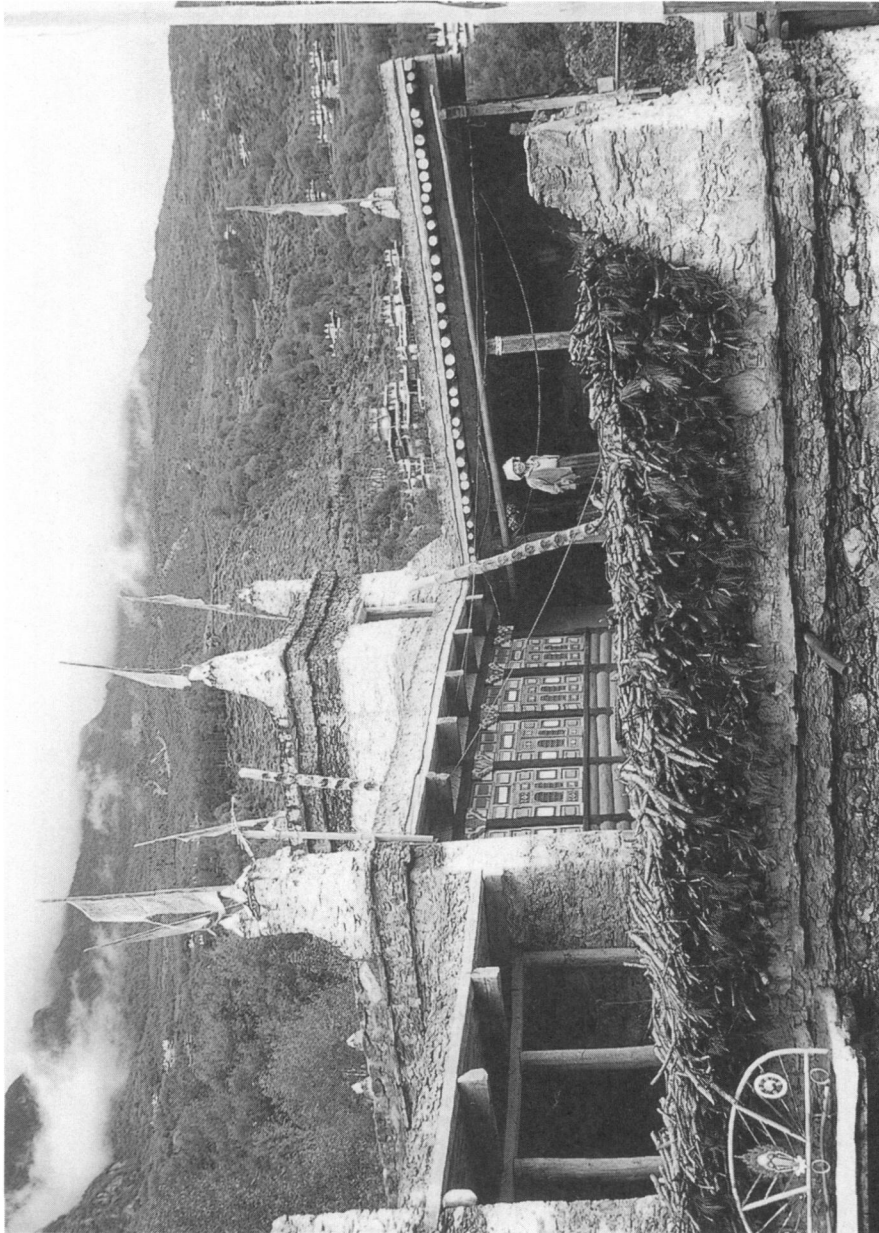
Pl. 5 Gyalrong men dancing, SGK 1997



Pl. 6 Gyalrong women singing, SGK 1997



PI. 7 Buildings with stone walls, SGK 1985



Pl. 8 Village house with a terrace stacked with wood for fuel, SGK 1997



Pl. 9 Tall towers built with stones, SGK 1985

