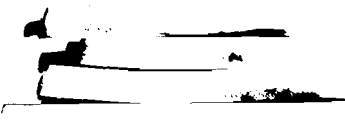


Grant Proposal to the Venture Grant Committee

Submitted by _____
1 May 2007



June 1, 2007

Venture Grant Proposal

Community Power in Transition
Exploring the Effects of Monetary Wealth on Local Governance in Ladakh, India

Ladakh sits in the austere and mountainous high deserts of the Tibetan Plateau, India. Subject to an extreme climate and limited resources, Ladakhis have employed traditions of frugality and cooperation to survive. Ladakh's social and political institutions respond to the severe constraints of geographical isolation and the region's resource scarcity. Their ancient rules embody an ethic of mutual cooperation and reciprocity that encourages social cohesion and allows for strict resource allocation, both imperative actions for the communities' continuation. In recent decades, improved infrastructure in the area has allowed for increased movement of goods, services, capital, people, and exposure to other cultures; globalization-induced influences that were previously unable to access the region. These forces have facilitated significant changes in traditional practices, from agriculture to governance, and ostensibly threaten the self-sufficiency of Ladakhi communities.

I will spend two months in Ladakh exploring local governance and how leadership and decision-making processes are changing under the influences of recently introduced modern forces. Obviously, the study of community power is expansive and, in its entirety, exceeds the capacity of this research project (or any other.) Consequently, I have chosen to focus my study on one issue area that is important to the life of the community and one critical variable that may affect it. My hope is that by examining leadership in a specific and concrete situation, I will be more able to determine the extent to which an identified modern force affects the existing power structure. I will focus on irrigation management due to its significant importance to Ladakh communities and measure the correlation between capital and political influence in the water-allocation system.

The Issue: Irrigation

Ladakh is one of the world's highest cold deserts and receives less than 12 cm of rainfall annually, with a subsistent agrarian economy that depends on shallow glacial streams. Small channels divert water into individual fields and each village has a set of detailed rules, codified into records called the *riwaz-i-abpashi*, which delineate how water will be divided. Land inheritance by primogeniture has historically controlled land ownership rights and the rules that govern the distribution of water are based upon this traditional practice. The *riwaz-i-abpashi* describe the principles of water allocation that are followed in the village, sharing arrangements with other villages, the rights of individual landowners (that, due to primogeniture, remain constant), as well as a history of disputes. Based on a principle of impartiality, the practices governing irrigation have emphasized equity and collective choice. Historically there has been little social stratification in Ladakhi society and relatively comparable landholdings between villagers. According to Ferry Erdmann, this economic and social homogeneity within society minimized opportunistic misappropriation of water rights. Additionally, a lottery system determines when each household will receive its portion of water, a process that furthers impartial treatment of community members¹.

The *chud-pon*, an appointed official, is responsible for overseeing the entire system of water allocation and making sure the guidelines are followed. This agent is nominated at the beginning of each agricultural season and his appointment depends upon a collective decision among villagers. It is mandatory that at least one member from each household be present and participatory at the time of appointment. Traditionally, the *chud-pon* is well versed in the rules governing the irrigation system and is a respected man in the community. This position rotates among families and thus no permanent authority emerges. Similarly, the rotational character of the position helps prevent a *chud-pon* from favoring his own family. The *chud-pon*'s responsibilities include overseeing maintenance of the irrigation system, a task that is traditionally shared by all villagers, and resolving any minor disputes

¹ Gupta, Radhika. At the Crossroads: Continuity and Change in the Traditional Irrigation Practices of Ladakh. Winrock International. New Delhi: IASCP, 2002. 1-28.

over water between villagers². Because the village members first developed the rules detailed in the *riwaz-i-abpashi* and societal pressure to conform to them persists, the need for external enforcement is relatively non-existent. This system, devised and enforced by the community, is in many ways self-governing and points towards a possible solution for overcoming the ‘tragedy of the commons’. Rather than a pure privatization model or a strictly state controlled approach, the *chud-pon* institution shares qualities from both³.

Change and Increasing Capital Flows

Ladakh’s age-old agricultural system has experienced significant changes in recent years. These changes are extensive and complex, so for the sake of brevity, in this proposal I will focus on changes to the *chud-pon* institution. First, payments to the *chud-pon*, traditionally offerings of goods or services, are now made in money. Second, whereas the position of *chud-pon* was once highly sought after, higher earnings in the cash economy have attracted villagers away from the community and decreased interest in the position. Consequently, the position that was once a result of collective nomination is now a mandatory, rotational agent and every family is required to provide a *chud-pon* when it is their turn. However, knowledge of the irrigation system is deteriorating and many households lack a qualified person for the job. To overcome this problem, monetary exchange has become a venue for avoiding the *chud-pon* position. Families can pool together to pay a more qualified villager to be the *chud-pon* for that agricultural season. Although the *chud-pon* is still kept alive, forces of modernization in the region are changing the institution’s character⁴.

Increasingly, monetary wealth plays an influential role in the irrigation system, specifically with regards to the *chud-pon* institution. The extent of capital’s influence and the ways that community members use monetary wealth to exert power is unclear and has yet to be explored in detail. In Who Governs?, a record of Robert Dahl’s famous study of community power in New Haven, Dahl writes:

² However, according to Radhika Gupta, “...the impartiality and equity built into the system as well as the ethic of mutual cooperation and reciprocity reduce opportunities for conflicts. In addition, the power of social sanction and disrepute is enough to prevent people from stealing water or creating disruptions in the system”. Whether or not the power of social sanction continues to prevent conflict might be an interesting area of further study.

³ Ibid, 8.

⁴ Gupta, 19.

“Now it has always been held that if equality of power among citizens is possible at all—a point on which political philosophers have had grave doubts—then surely considerable equality of social conditions is a necessary prerequisite. But if...there are great inequalities in the conditions of different citizens, must there not also be great inequalities in the capacities of different citizens to influence the decisions of their various governments? And if, because they are unequal in other conditions, citizens of a democracy are unequal in power to control their government, then who in fact does govern? How does a “democratic” system work amid inequality of resources?”⁵

As with New Haven, whether or not Ladakh’s irrigation system is “truly democratic” is debatable (as Dahl points out, this term is always debatable.) The traditional institution of water allocation undoubtedly has democratic qualities, such as the ethic of mutual cooperation and equal participation that underlies the entire system. In any case, I am not attempting to prove or disprove the democratic nature of Ladakhi governance. Rather, I will measure the degree to which political power correlates with monetary wealth, considering whether or not the traditional “ethic of equality and mutual cooperation” is changing to favor the emerging upper strata of society. Specifically, if (and if so, how) increasing economic disparities within the communities are changing the *chud-pon* institution. In an increasingly stratified society, to what extent have mutual cooperation and equal allocation among villagers remained?

The Variable: Capital

While there are various indices of social standing, (income, occupation, housing, social participation, consumption patterns, etc.) income and subsequent monetary wealth, including material/land ownership, are tangible variables that, taking into account the limited timeframe of the study, I can more effectively measure. Ladakhi communities did use money in the past, but their subsistent agrarian economy limited disparities between households and most services were paid in kind. Now, as the cash economy continues to grow, monetary exchange has intensified. In Who Governs?, Robert Dahl highlights three main ways that money can be used to obtain political influence: financial pressure, corruption and political contribution⁶. Additionally, Nelson Polsby, a colleague of Dahl’s, explains three kinds of data that can be used to analyze the process of decision-

⁵ Dahl, Robert. Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City. New Haven: Yale UP, 1961. Pg. 3.

³ Dahl, 241.

making and that might point to power distribution and influence. First, who participates in decision-making, second, who gains and who loses from alternative possible outcomes and, third, who prevails in decision-making⁷. Both Dahl and Polsby expand on these approaches in their various works, and I look forward to taking advantage of their extensive familiarity with the subject. I will measure the correlation between capital and influence in the *chud-pon* institution with these approaches in mind.

Methodology

My methodological approach will include interviews, surveys, examination of historical records and current documents, and participatory observation. Rather than concentrate on a possible power *base* (a wealthy elite, etc.) I will focus on power exercise and actual decisions, who they benefit, etc. These are more tangible areas of study and might eventually point to a power base. I will employ both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data. I am currently reading various critiques of research methods that highlight common limitations, for example categorical assumptions, self-fulfilling prophecies and interview questions that encourage certain answers. As I learn more about these issues, I will try and develop research methods that avoid these shortcomings as much as possible, though I am quite aware that my inexperience as a researcher and the inherent imperfections of research in general will prohibit a flawless study. I will try to be as eclectic as possible in my approach so as to compensate for the imperfect and inadequate nature of research.

For the interviews, I have arranged for an interpreter that will facilitate this process. I will speak with local members of the communities, the *chod-pun*, central governmental officials that run development programs in the area⁸, and members of ISEC (International Society for Ecology and Culture.)⁹ These interviews will explore the issues described above and illuminate various actors' perceptions of who makes decisions, who benefits from them and, ultimately, who governs. I will disaggregate variables such as gender, age and, in particular, income and material wealth among the

⁷ Polsby, Nelson. Community Power and Political Theory. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963. pg. 4.

⁸ Public Works Department (PWD), the Department of Rural Development (DRD), and the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA.)

⁹ Amanda Udis-Kessler has already approved My IRB status.

pool of interviewees. In order to accommodate cultural sensitivities, I will determine income levels and landholding, age, etc., through a written survey that precedes the interview. In order to test the validity of interviews and any judgments I make from them, I will study historical records and documents that detail the *chud-pon* institution and its decisions.

Among the records and documents I will examine are the following:

-*Land Settlement Records- "Bandobasti"*—stored in the Gompas¹⁰ and maintained by a Revenue officer, appointed for each village.

-*Riwaz-i-abpashi*—records of the *chod-pun* institution, stored in the Chemrey Gompa.

-*Water Development Program Records*—located in Leh, documenting New Delhi's development programs in the region.

Again, there are numerous self-evident limitations of this project (and probably others that will become apparent in the future) and I am not pursuing it under any pretense that I will discover verifiable, empirical truths. Still, both in preparation and in execution, this independent project is an incredible opportunity for me to explore research methods, theory, and an interactive, heuristic approach to learning that is not available in a classroom. I will share my research with the Colorado College community in spring, 2008, in the form of a presentation. The Colorado College community has shown significant interest in the issues I will study, and I hope that I can extend the educational benefits of the project to the larger community. I am extremely excited to embark on this venture and appreciate your consideration for funding. If there is any additional information that would help you in your decision, please contact me. Furthermore, I would appreciate any feedback or additional guidance about the project.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Ella Street

¹⁰ Buddhist Monasteries.

Budget
July 25th- September 31st

2007

Travel

Airfare:

-Los Angeles, CA to Delhi, India \$1,300.00
American Airlines
Departing: July 25th

-Delhi, India to Leh, India \$179.00
Indian Air
Departing: July 27th

-Leh, India to Delhi, India \$179.00
Indian Air
Departing: September 31st

Taxi/Bus costs in Delhi: \$15.00
July 26th- July 27th
September 31st \$10.00

Taxi/Bus costs in Leh, India \$80.00
(To-and-from neighboring villages
during research/interview process)
July 28th- September 31st

Total Travel Costs: **\$1,763.00**

Accommodation

-Delhi, India *Anoop Hotel \$8.00
July 26th

-Leh, India *Lakrook Garden Guest House \$48.00
July 27th- August 1st

-Home-stay in Hemis Shukpachan \$250.00
August 1st- September 31st

-Leh, India *Lakrook Garden Guest House \$9.00
September 31th

Total Accommodation Costs: **\$315.00**

Food

-August 1st- September 1st FREE
(Work exchange for room and board)

-\$8 per day for remaining 30 days \$240.00

Total Food Costs: **\$240.00**

Other Expenses

-ISEC Conference Fee	\$600.00
-Interpreter services*	\$500.00
-Indian Visa	\$85.00
-Passport	\$97.00
-Incidentals	\$200.00
Total Other Expenses:	\$1,482.00

Total Cost:	\$3,800.00
Total Received From the Political Science Dept.:	\$2,300.00
Total Received From The President's Fund:	\$500.00
Remaining Cost:	\$1,000.00

*I am unable to determine the exact cost for an interpreter as of now. I have contacted ISEC and they assured me that such services are available in Leh. However, I must arrange them upon arrival. The cost, then, is only an estimate based on similar services available elsewhere.

In addition to the Political Science department grant, I have received funding from the President's Fund. I realize that funds are limited but I believe that this project will be a great contribution to the Colorado College community and an essential step towards my own educational goals. I am requesting funding from the department for as much as possible to help cover the remaining costs.

I appreciate your consideration.

Major: Political Science
Minor: Philosophy
GPA: 3.95

Schedule

July 25th: Fly to Delhi, India. Stay in the Anoop Hotel and make travel arrangements for travel to Leh.

July 26th- August 1st: Fly from Delhi, India, to Leh, India. Stay at the Lakrook Garden Guesthouse. As recommended by ISEC, these five days are necessary for acclimatization. I will spend these days resting, preparing for research, arranging for an interpreter, adjusting to Indian food and climate, and learning basic language skills.

August 1st-September 31st: Meet representative from ISEC in Leh. Travel to Hemis Shukpachan and begin home-stay. Work in village and conduct research. Attend five workshops organized through ISEC.

Workshop dates:	August 1 st
	August 2 nd
	August 12 th
	August 19 th
	September 1 st

September 31st: Travel back to Leh. Arrange travel back to Delhi. Stay at the Lakrook Garden Guesthouse.