

## The Locational Environment of A Sheep-Grazing Village and the Lives of Villagers in the Taklimakan Desert

— A Case Study of Tongsbusti, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China —

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### I Introduction

Recently, the desertification has attracted public attention as an important geo-environmental problem. On the desertification in the Taklimakan desert, Chinese and Japanese researchers have studied its actual circumstances (Hidehiro SOMA 1996, Zhenda ZHU and Tao WANG 1996, Kiyoshi TSUCHIYA and Yoshinari OGURO 1996, Yoshinari OGURO and Kiyoshi TSUCHIYA 1996, etc.).

On causes of desertification, Tao WANG (1996) insisted that unreasonable land-use owing to economic development was central. Masatoshi YOSHINO and his group (1996) discussed influences on the environment by expansion of farm lands and increased demand for firewood caused by population increase.

As a main cause of desertification created by human activities, degradation in covering plants owing to overgrazing has been pointed out (Satoshi MATSUMOTO 1991, e.g.). There has been no study, however, on grazing in the Taklimakan desert. Intensive studies on the actual circumstances of livestock farming are needed to understand relationships between grazing and desertification in the desert.

The object of this paper is to describe the locational environment of a sheep-grazing village in the Taklimakan desert and the circumstances of

villagers' lives. The author will discuss the aspect of grazing in the village in a second paper. The research was carried out late in October and early in November 1998.

### II An outline of the study area

The Tarim basin, occupying the southern half of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, is surrounded by the Pamirs to the west, the Tien Shan to the north, and the Kunlun Shan to the south. Most parts of the basin receive little precipitation and make up the desert called Taklimakan (Fig.1). Lots of rivers flow out from the Tien Shan and Kunlun Shan into the basin, and many oases are found at the foot of both ranges.

Most of the rivers flowing out from the surrounding ranges drain into the desert. The Keriya river is one of these large rivers. This river originates in the Kunlun Shan near the northern border of Tibet, flows into the basin and disappears at the center of the Taklimakan desert. The length and volume of water flow in the river differs from season to season, depending on the depth of snow at the origination point.<sup>1)</sup>

The Keriya river feeds the large Yutian (Keria) oasis at the foot of the Kunlun Shan. The volume of water flow in the river at Yutian begins to increase in June, when snow in the Kunlun Shan begins to melt. The largest increase in water flow

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Fig. 1 The Taklimakan

at Yutian comes in July, and reaches  $72.15 \text{ m}^3/\text{sec}$ . (Fig.2). The volume of water flow begins to decrease after August, and becomes smallest ( $6.88 \text{ m}^3/\text{sec}$ ) in January. The abundant water flow of the Keriya river in summer makes it possible to grow crops such as wheat, cotton, rice, and many kinds of fruit in the Yutian oasis. Yutian has developed as a trading center for these crops.

The Keriya river north of Yutian flows in a shallow river bed of several hundred meters wide. One side or both sides of the river bank form a comparatively flat sand plain. On these flat surfaces spread sparse mixed groves comprised of *Populus Pruinosa* and *Tamalix* among grasslands of *Phragmites Commnis*. Beyond the flat sand plain spreads the vast rolling sand dune region.

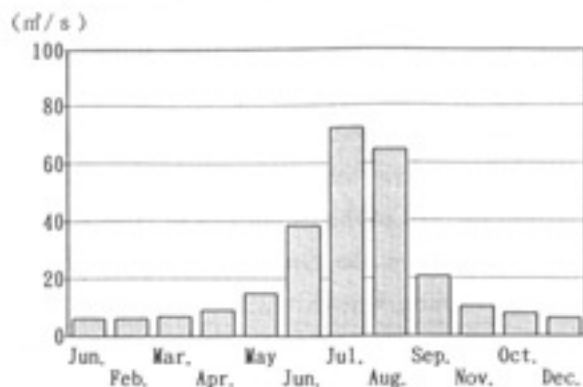


Fig. 2 Monthly Mean Flows in Keriya River at Yutian (Yutian Prefecture)

Tongsbusti, which is selected as a research area, is one of the small hamlets belonging to Daryaboyi province, Yutian prefecture. The territory of Daryaboyi province spreads along both sides of the Keliya river, and covers an area of 1,099 square kilometers. Since most of the territory consists of desert, the province's population is only 1,296 and its number of households 241 (in October, 1998). People live scattered on the flat sand plain along the Keriya River. Most of them engage in sheep-grazing; the households engaging in other occupations number only twelve (ten food or grocery retailers, two sheep-brokers). Large numbers of houses cluster in several small hamlets, but some sheep-grazing families live in isolation. There are five hamlets having over 150 residents in Daryaboyi.<sup>2)</sup> Those hamlets are separated by distances of several tens of kilometers. Tongsbusti is the second largest hamlet with a population of 218, and is the administrative center of the province. The provincial government and its office is found there. Tongsbusti is situated on the right bank of the lower Keriya river about 230km away from the Yutian oasis.

### III Locational Environment of Tongsbusti

The Tongsbusti hamlet is situated on a point about 1 km away from the right bank of the Keriya river. It occupies the border area between the flat sand plain along the river, on which spreads a grassland of *Phragmites Communis* with sparse scrub consisting of *Tamarisk* and *Populus Pruinosa*, and the rugged sand dune region spreading eastward from the sand plain. The grassland with scrub is used for sheep-grazing. *Phragmites Communis* is used as roof thatch, and woody plants such as *Tamarisk* and *Populus Pruinosa* are used for building materials and firewood.

About thirty houses or buildings dot an area of 600m from east to west and 400m from north to south in the hamlet. Six of them are school buildings such as classrooms, dormitories and a dining room.<sup>1)</sup> As for public buildings, there is a provincial government office and meeting house, a mosque, a storehouse, a powerhouse, two buildings of a clinic<sup>2)</sup> and two guest houses. In addition to these public buildings, there are fourteen private houses and a shop. The center portion of the hamlet in which are located four retail stores, the provincial government office, the clinic and the school, is surrounded by fences made of *Phragmites Communis* or railings in order to keep out grazing animals. Many scattered private houses are surrounded by fences, but some have none. There's no clear road within the hamlet except for a road in front of the provincial government office. Sandy spaces between buildings or houses are used as passages by villagers.

Although the altitude of Tongsbusti reaches 1,200m, the temperature in summer often rises as high as 40°C, and decreases to under -10°C in winter. *Phragmites Communis* as a main feed stuff for sheep withers from late in November to early in March. Sheep are thus raised during the winter

season in an enclosure set up next to the raiser's house, or in a nearby patch by dried *Phragmites Communis*. Enclosures for sheep are made of fences of braided twigs of *Tamarisk* and *Populus Pruinosa*.

There's no data on precipitation at Tongsbusti. According to the data from Yutian, the nearest point for which there is data, the average annual precipitation is merely 45.2mm (Table 1). Since Yutian is located closer to the Kunlun Shan than Tongsbusti, the precipitation at Tongsbusti in the middle of the desert is supposed to be less than that of Yutian. They have two or three periods of drizzling rainfall a year at Tongsbusti, in the summer season. As the precipitation is very small, the roofs and side walls of private houses in Tongsbusti are constructed with frames made with logs of *Populus Pruinosa*. The spaces between frame timbers are usually plugged with *Phragmites Communis*. Others are plugged with mud mixed with small pieces of *Phragmites Communis*. Roofs are plastered with mud. The roof form of the private house is flat-topped. On the other hand, most of the public buildings are constructed of bricks or adobe. All are one-story structures.

The road connecting Tongsbusti and Yutian is about 230km in distance. Running along the Keriya river, it is just a roughly converted livestock-trail. In addition to being unpaved, the road is very rugged because it passes through numerous sand dunes and wadis. Passage takes about ten to twelve hours by small 4 WD cars, and a whole day by the big trucks coming from Tongsbusti to

Table 1 Monthly Mean Temperature and Precipitation at Yutian

month	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	total
Temp. (°C)	-5.6	-2.7	2.6	16.1	20.0	23.4	25.0	22.6	18.9	11.4	2.9	-3.2	
Prec. (mm)	2.5	1.9	0.5	2.5	8.9	9.7	9.2	4.8	3.2	0.1	0.4	0.5	45.2

(Yutian Prefecture)

Yutian. It takes ten days for sheep-raisers in Tongsbusti, who drive their livestock to the bazaar, to get to Yutian. Because of poor transportation infrastructure, contact with other regions by villagers in Tongsbusti had been restricted until late 1980s, when cars and trucks became popular.

In Daryaboyi province there are now twenty-nine privately owned trucks, along with four automobiles owned by the provincial government (two trucks, one small bus and a small passenger car). Due to the introduction of these vehicles, the province is less isolated. It is unusual for residents in Tongsbusti, however, to have contact with outside societies, and most of them never even been to Yutian, the nearest urban settlement. Official postal service doesn't work in Daryaboyi province. Someone who happens to go to Yutian is asked to bring mail to the post office there, and he or she brings back mail for the residents from the prefectural office in Yutian.

There's no electrical supply system in Daryaboyi province. Even though the provincial government owns an oil generator (bought in 1989), the government generates electricity only on public holidays, festival days and governmental meeting days. Even in these cases, electric supply reaches only the government office, the school and the clinic, all in Tongsbusti. Candles, therefore, are the only light source common among the various families, but candles are seldom used because of their expense. Since there is no constant supply of electricity, there's no telephone, even in the government office.

#### IV Acquisition of Water

In Tongsbusti water needed for daily life, including drinking water, has been obtained from several community wells drilled in sand dunes and sandy plains. The provincial government was given two

tractors by the Autonomous Region government and the prefectural government in 1989, and it dug a canal about two kilometers long from the Keriya river to the hamlet. After that the villagers were able to obtain water from both the wells and the canal.

The water level of the Keriya river begins to rise in early May under normal conditions, and peaks in July. The remarkable development of irrigated farming at Yutian oasis in the late 1950s, however, lead to a marked increase in the demand for water from the upper Keriya. So the water level of the Keriya around Tongsbusti begins to rise after October, when the amount of irrigation water drained off at the upstream regions of the Keriya shows a sharp decrease. The water of the Keriya, therefore, flows into the canal in Tongsbusti during the period from around the 20th of October to the 30th of April, under normal conditions. The water in the canal is frozen over from mid-December to mid-February. Most of the villagers acquire water from the nearest branch of the canal during the time when the water flows into the canal, but they have to rely on the water drawn up from wells during the half year around summer when no water flows in the canal.

For a distance of about one kilometer from the inflow point of the Keriya river, the canal, which drains out into a sand plain, is four to five meters in width and several tens of centimeters in depth. Its banks easily crumble since there is no bank protection along the canal. The provincial government, therefore, has to execute repair and dredging works with tractors in summer when no water flows into the canal.

The canal is divided into three branches at the southwestern corner of the hamlet. Each one is smaller than the main canal. They are several tens of centimeters in width and twenty to thirty centimeters in depth. Even in the wet season, it is

necessary to distribute water one branch at a time because of the weak water flow. There's no particular mechanism for distributing water at a branching point. When the stipulated hour of distribution comes, a man who is entrusted by the provincial government with dividing water changes the watercourse using sand.

There are four wells in Tongsbusti as of November, 1998. All of them are community wells, and were dug and have been repaired by the cooperative work of villagers. Two of them lie in the sand dune area and another two are in the sand plains. Since all wells are just holes dug into sand, they easily collapse and get filled up with surrounding sand. Actually, the two wells that existed in the sand plains had already been buried with sand, and are not now used. Another two, which were dug in the sand dune area in 1991 and 1992, have been maintained through dredging done every one or two weeks. Even though water from the wells in the sand dune area is of comparatively good quality, it contains considerable salt.

Both of the wells in the sand dune area have a diameter of two and three meters and a depth of 1.1 and 1.5 meters respectively, from the surface to the underground water. Water drawers go up and down by using a ladder made of a notched log. Both wells have a depth of underground water of twenty centimeters each.

In addition to low rainfall throughout a year, no water flows into the canal during the summer season from May to September when most crops need much irrigation water. Due to these circumstances, there has been no farming activity, not even small kitchen gardens, in Tongsbusti. The villagers, therefore, have depended upon supplies from other regions, especially the Yutian oasis, for all agricultural products, not to mention manufactured goods.

## V Economic Activities and Hierarchy Differentiation among Families

### 1. Livestock Farming

Except for forty households receiving livelihood assistance from the provincial government by reason of old age or infirmity, whole households, including the twelve retail traders, carry on sheep-grazing in Daryaboyi. A detailed study on livestock farming in Daryaboyi and Tongsbusti will be presented in the next issue, so the author would like to report on the historical development of livestock farming in Tongsbusti here.

The exact origin of the Tongsbusti hamlet is unknown, but it is said in a legend that it dates back about three hundred years, and villagers have been engaged in sheep-grazing since that time. According to interviews with residents, each family raised 100~500 head of sheep and cattle in Tongsbusti until 1959 when the People's Corporation was established. Differences in numbers of livestock reflected differences in the size of grazing land owned by each family. There were three large absentee landowners in Tongsbusti who lived in Yutian, and each controlled land of an area of about 6,000 hectares. Most of the families in Tongsbusti were self-sustaining sheep-grazers raising sheep and cattle on their land. There were two or three families grazing their livestock on rented land, and five families were employed by the landowners and grazed landowner's livestock.

Meat and milk from cattle and sheep had been an important food source. Cattle was raised mainly on the land along the Keriya river in which fodder grass grew comparatively thick. Cattle raising, however, disappeared in the 1960s because of a decrease in natural fodder growth stemming from the decrease in volume of water flow in the Keriya river. This itself was a result of an increase in volume of use for irrigation water in the upstream

oases.

Sheep, cattle and wool had been bartered for daily necessities, such as wheat flour and clothes, that were brought in by peddlers who came to visit the hamlet three times a year. In the era of the Kuomintang, villagers began to have to pay taxes according to the heads of livestock they raised. They began to go to the bazaar at Yutian to sell their livestock and acquire some cash once or twice a year. They designated a group of two or three persons who drove about fifty head of herd animals comprising several families' livestock. It was a ten day journey one-way from Tongsbusti to the bazaar in Yutian.

The system of livestock farming in Daryaboyi changed to the People's Corporation System in 1959. All families in the province were organized into a single People's Corporation encompassing the whole area of the province and raising twenty-six thousand animals cooperatively, such as sheep, camels and donkeys. The number of livestock decreased remarkably to fifteen thousand, until 1984 when the People's Corporation was abolished. It is said that the economic life of members was miserable throughout the period of People's Corporation. They often had to eat livestock suffering from illness or already dead, because there remained little surplus after offering the quota delivery.

When the People's Corporation system was abolished in 1984, the land and livestock belonging to the People's Corporation were distributed equally among the member's families in proportion to numbers of laborers. The areas of land distributed, however, were not equal since they were distributed with consideration of quality and distance from the family. About twenty-seven thousand hectares of land remained with the provincial government in preparation for future population increase, and parts of the land have

been lent out.

## 2. Commerce

There were four retail stores in Tongsbusti in November, 1998. As mentioned above, villagers in Tongsbusti got their daily necessities from peddlers visiting the hamlet three times a year. In the period of People's Corporation, foodstuffs, clothing and miscellaneous goods were supplied by the prefectural government according to the fixed standard through a branch shop of the Cooperative Society in Yutian, which was opened in the hamlet. The branch shop carried its supplies in on camels and donkeys once every two months from Yutian. The shop has continued doing business as an ordinary retail shop in the hamlet, even after the abolition of the People's Corporation system, and is selling mainly wheat flour, some kinds of clothing, and miscellaneous goods.

After the introduction of the policy of the reformed and open economy in 1984, another three retail stores were founded in the hamlet. Every store is managed by a local resident.

The largest was opened in 1984 and its shop is an independent one-story building about six meters wide and four meters in depth. The manager of this store is a member of the prefectural judiciary and lives in the hamlet. The whole business of the store, however, is ordinarily in the hands of his wife. The store deals in about fifty kinds of commodities, such as clothing, shoes, batteries, dried noodles and cookies. These commodities are trucked in once a month from Yutian by his eldest son, nineteen years old.

The second large store sells vegetables, fruits and tobacco. The store contains a restaurant and its menu mainly consists of noodle-based cooking. The manager of the store is a son-in-law from Yutian who became a member of his wife's family. His wife's family is engaged in a sheep-grazing, but

since he was in poor health, he opened the retail store about ten years ago. He lives with his wife's family and uses a corner of the house as the store and restaurant. The last store does business on the land contiguous to the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest store, and sells chiefly clothes.

These four retail stores stand facing the square in the center of the hamlet. As Tongsbusti is the seat of provincial government, and the location of the only mosque in Daryaboyi, many people visit especially on Friday. The four stores operate not only for the villagers in Tongsbusti, but also for visitors coming from all over the province. Hence their trade area extends over one hundred kilometers from north to south in radius. Most residents, besides the villagers in Tongsbusti, have to visit Tongsbusti to purchase daily necessities. They travel over several tens of kilometers on foot or by riding camels and donkeys. There are many reasons for them, therefore, to buy necessities from the peddlers who visit the main hamlets in Daryaboyi once a month. They unite with four or five other people and peddle using a ten ton truck fully loaded with many kinds of commodities.

### 3. Hierarchy Differentiation among Families

In the period of People's Corporation, whole families (except a branch shop of the Cooperative Society) engaged in livestock farming and received equal earnings according to working hours. In this, it can be said that there was little difference in the economic life among families.

After the dissolution of People's Corporation, its land and domestic animals were distributed to its members and the national government granted the right to use land and the right of ownership of livestock. The relatively equalized society of Tongsbusti has begun to change with this policy. As a result of the freedom to choose jobs and own private property, comparatively large differences

in income among families have been created.

There exist six families engaged in jobs other than livestock farming (four retail traders, a broker of medicinal plants produced in the local area, a farrier) in Tongsbusti in November, 1998. Besides a retail trader, all of them began their businesses after 1985. Their incomes greatly exceed those of livestock farmers and this can be seen in their large houses or in their nice furniture and utensils. The income differences also have affected the sheep-raisers. The differences in abilities and enthusiasm for sheep-grazing among sheep-raisers have created differences in birth rate of sheep and maturation of sheep that can be sold for high prices. It is said that the average number of sheep per raiser is about three hundred in Tongsbusti, but there's a large disparity in the real numbers.

Taking the case of the largest retail store, the manager raises about one hundred head of sheep and entrusts another family with this. His eight family members are living in another house two hundreds meters from the store. Since he gains income from three sources wages of seven hundred and ninety Yuan as a judiciary, profits from store operation, and income from selling sheep his house is the biggest among the families in the hamlet and contains some fine furniture. He also has a truck worth over one hundred thousand Yuan (about one million and five hundred thousand Japanese Yen). On the other hand, there are many students who are bare-foot and unable to buy even textbooks for school.

## VI Summary

It is the object of this paper to describe the locational environment of a sheep-grazing village and the situation of villagers' lives as a first report on livestock farming as it is carried out in the Taklimakan desert. The hamlet discussed in this

paper is Tongsbusti, Daryaboyi province, Utian prefecture, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in China.

The hamlet of Tongsbusti is situated on a border area of the sand plain and the sand dune. The former extends along the Keriya river flowing from the Kunlun Shan, and is covered with grassland of *Phragmites Communis* and occasional sparse groves consisting of *Tamarisk* and *Populus Pruinosa*. The hamlet has about twenty households, and the population is 218. Since Tongsbusti is the administrative center of the province, it contains the provincial office, primary and secondary schools, a clinic and a mosque.

Since Tongsbusti is in the middle of the Taklimakan desert, it receives very little precipitation and the quantity of water flowing in the Keriya river is limited. The villagers, therefore, have no experience of farming and have depended upon sheep-grazing.

The water for daily needs of villagers has been drawn from several community wells. After digging a canal from the Keriya river into the hamlet in 1989, villagers have been able to get water from both wells and canal. During half of the year from May to mid-October, when the water level of the Keriya river is dropping, there is no water in the canal. So the wells become the only source of water. Tongsbusti is about 230 km away from Yutian, the nearest urban settlement, by a path running through the desert. Hence the lives of villagers until the mid-1950s had been one of semi self-sufficient economy, in which they purchased minimum living necessities from peddlers coming from Yutian. After the People's Corporation was organized in 1950s, a portion of these necessities was rationed, but there was no real change in the character of the semi self-sufficient economy.

Under the policy of reform and open economy propagated by the national government after 1984,

and the popularization of transport by trucks from Yutian since 1974, four retail stores opened in Tongsbusti and a commercial economy began to penetrate the semi self-sufficient economy. As a result, economic class differentiation among villagers has been expanding, whereas they were relatively equal during the period of People's Corporation.

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#### Notes

- 1) Kazuo MITSUI and his group described in their paper



the length of the Keriya river as follows : \* In 1991, the length of the Keriya reached almost 200km, from Yutian to the lower stream of Dariyaboyi. In 1992, however, the river disappeared at a point located 130 km away from Yutian. At the end of the river, the water went underground as a wave disappears into a sandy shore. \* MITSUI Kazuo, KODERA Koji, HOSODA Hiroshi, TANABE Hideo, TSUBOI Sotaro, YANG Yicho, ZHOU Xingjia, ZHAO Jingfeng (1995) : Hydrological Characteristics of Three Rivers in South Western Part of Taklimakan Desert, Xinjiang, China, "ENVIRONMENT and PEOPLE of the SOUTHERN TAKLIMAKAN DESERT" , HOSEI UNIVERSITY, p.4.

- 2) Population in the largest hamlet is 220.
- 3) There exists an elementary school and a junior high school on the same grounds. They were established by the provincial government in 1989 and 1994, respectively. The former has 125 pupils from first grade to fifth grade, and the latter has fifteen pupils in the third grade in November, 1998. The elementary school has a

branch school which is over one hundred kilometers south from Tongsbusti. Fifteen pupils of the first grade learn there. A total of sixteen teachers teach in the schools in the principal school, and one teacher teaches in the branch. As pupils over the fifth grade have to learn at the principal school, the pupils who are not able to go to the principal school are living in a school dormitory established on the same campus. Among 140 pupils on the roll in the principal school, 98 are boarders.

- 4) The clinic was established by provincial government in 1989 and has four medical doctors including a veterinarian. Besides them, three male nurses are working there.

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## 要 旨

タクリマカン砂漠における牧羊集落の立地環境と住民生活  
 -中国新疆ウイグル自治区トングスバスティの事例-

澤 田 裕 之

本稿は、タクリマカン砂漠で行われている牧畜に関する第1報として、牧畜の基盤をなしている牧羊集落の立地環境と住民の生活状況を明らかにすることを目的としたものである。本稿で考察対象とした集落は、中国新疆ウイグル自治区ウーティエン県グリアブイ郷トングスバスティである。

トングスバスティの集落は、この地方の中心都市ウーティエン北方約180km、崑崙山脈から流れ出すケリア川右岸に位置する1牧羊集落である。同集落はケリア河畔の砂地平野と、その背後に広がる砂丘地帯との境界地点に位置している。砂地平野はタマリスクや灰楊からなる疎林を混えた蘆葦の草原に覆われている。トングスバスティはグリアブイ郷の行政中心地であるため、郷政府事務所・小中学校・診療所・モスクが存在するほか、人口218、20戸弱の民家からなっている。

トングスバスティはタクリマカン砂漠中に位置するため、年間降水量は40mm以下と少ない。ケリア川の水量は年による変動が大きく、豊水期でさえ河水がこの集落付近まで到達しない年もある。さらにケリア川上流のウーティエン・オアシスにおける1950年代以後の灌漑農業の著しい発展が、夏季を中心にケリア川からの取水量を激増させたため、トングスバスティ付近では夏を中心とする半年間は河水を得ることはできない。そのため住民は農業の経験をもたず、蘆葦原での牧羊と牧牛に依存する生活を送ってきた。しかしケリア川上流部での灌漑用水取得量の増加に伴う河流の減少により、飼料である蘆葦の生育が悪化したため1960年代に牧牛は消滅し、それ以後は牧羊のみに依存するようになった。羊は春から秋にかけては蘆葦原で放牧され、冬には民家隣接地の羊囲いの中で干した蘆葦を飼料として飼育される。主要食用源として自家消費されたのちの余剰羊は、ウーティエンのバザールで換金される。

降雨がほとんどないため、トングスバスティの民家は灰楊の枝の骨組みの上を灰楊やタマリスクの小枝を編んだ壁材で覆っただけのもので、屋根には泥が塗られている。すべての民家は陸屋根の平屋づくりである。郷政府は石油発電機を所有し祝祭日その他特定の日時のみ発電を行うが、その場合でも配電は政府事務所その他若干の公共施設にとどまり、一般民家は電気を利用できない。政府事務所ですら電話はなく、ここでの郵便制度は機能していない。

住民の日常用水は数箇所の共同井戸から汲み上げられてきた。1989年にケリア川からこの集落に1本の用水路が掘られてからは、住民は井戸と水路の双方から水を得ることができるようになった。しかし5月から10月中旬にかけての半年間は、ケリア川の水位が低下するために水路への水の流入はない。したがってその間は井戸が唯一の水源となる。

トングスバスティは、最も近い都市ウーティエンから砂漠中を走る踏み分け道経由で230kmも離れている。そのため住民の生活は1950年代中頃まで、ウーティエンからやってくる行商人から最低限の生活必需品をえるという半自給的な経済のもとにおかれていた。1950年代に人民公社が組織されてから生活用品の一部は配給されるようになったが、それでも彼らの半自給的経済に変化はなかった。1984年以降国の政府によって進められた改革開放経済政策と、1974年以後におけるトラック輸送の普及のもとで、4軒の小売商店がトングスバスティに誕生し、商品経済が浸透しはじめた。それは人民公社廃止後における土地と家畜の個人への分配と牧羊の個人化とあいまって、住民間の経済格差を拡大させている。