AN INTRODUCTION TO AMDO TIBETAN LOVE SONGS,
OR LA GZHAS

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THE TERMS

La gzhas, or Amdo Tibetan love songs, are sung between young men and women to express their love to each other. Several terms are available for this type of love song in Amdo Tibetan. La gzhas is the most common term for such songs in written Tibetan, la meaning 'mountain pass' and gzhas 'song'. In oral Amdo Tibetan, it is la-ye, a homophone of the literary term. Ri glu literally means mountain song, and this term matches the Chinese term for love songs, shan'ge. These two terms indicate where this song is often sung, in the mountains, far away from houses, villages and tents, in places where there are few people around. Rogs 'then has a more romantic connotation, rogs meaning friend or lover, and 'then meaning to pull, or hookup.

The lyrics of la gzhas express feelings between men and women. Typically, love songs can be divided into the following categories, resembling the progress of love between a young man and woman (Mtsho sngon zhing chen mang tshogs sgyu rtsal khang 1981):

1) Tse mgo rtsom pa'i skor 'Starting'  
2) Rogs 'grogs pa'i skor 'Getting to know each other'  
3) Zhe mthun pa'i skor 'Falling in love'  
4) Rogs dran pa'i skor 'Longing for each other'  
5) Kha 'bral ba'i skor 'Parting'  
6) Rogs 'gal ba'i skor 'Breaking up'  
7) Bde mo 'jog pa'i skor 'Farewell'

Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang (2002) categorize the songs into more types, adding detail to the stages: 1) Starting; 2) Uncertainty or ordeal; 3) Promising to each other; 4) Getting to know...
each other; 5) Falling in love; 6) Parting; 7) Longing for each other; 8) Sadness; 9) Breaking up; 10) Competing for a lover; 11) Ending the singing party. Some collections, such as Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub (1993), include 'others' or 'new collections' in the list, which obviously means that categories other than those listed above are available. It is also common to find other divisions.

The love songs are in even-syllable poetic formats. Each song usually consists of two parallel stanzas, the first being metaphorical and the second containing the literal meaning. Each stanza has between two and sixteen lines, but most commonly features four to six lines, with mostly seven syllables in each line.

In 2006, the government of Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture nominated la gzhas to be included among the first group of items listed in the national level intangible cultural heritage register by the State Council of China, and Chos skyid sgrol ma, a woman born in a rural village in Khri ka (Guide) County, was nominated as the genre's exemplary tradition-bearer.

**SOCIAL NORMS OF LA GZHAS**

La gzhas are sung in most Amdo Tibetan areas. Amdo roughly means the northeast part of the Tibet Plateau according to traditional Tibetan geography, which, in today's administrative division of China, includes Qinghai Province, except Yul shul (Yushu) Autonomous Prefecture; Kan lho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Dpa' ris (Tianzhu) Tibetan Autonomous County in Gansu Province; and Rnga ba (Aba) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province.

In daily life, la gzhas are mostly sung in the mountains or grasslands, by young male and female herders, alone or to each other. In farming areas, these songs are often heard when young women are weeding in the barley or wheat fields. They may also be sung in gatherings of young men and women during festivals. Individuals also commonly sing la gzhas alone, while herding yaks and sheep on the grassland, or on mountain slopes. It is also not uncommon that herding men and women sing to each other from a distance during
herding, regardless of whether they know each other or not. However, there are delicate norms relating to the situations in which it is appropriate to sing love songs. One basic taboo is that one should not sing *la gzhas* in the presence of close relatives of the opposite sex, that is, for a girl to sing in the presence of grandfather, father, uncles or brothers, or for a boy to sing in the presence of a grandmother, mother, aunts, or sisters. It is even inappropriate for these two sides to be at a singing party at the same time. Even listening to and talking about love songs and other 'delicate matters' is inappropriate between father and daughters, mother and sons, or brothers and sisters. Therefore, the right circumstances are important for singing *la gzhas*.

Nonetheless, the norms vary slightly from region to region. During the Glu rol festival in Reb gong Tibetan villages, there is one occasion on which singing love songs is a part of a performance by young men and women, in front of an audience of villagers, including these performers' close relatives. Also, during the summer *lab tse* festival, a ritual offering for the mountain deities, in Khri ka (Guide) County, singing *la gzhas* is an essential part of the ceremony.

What are the appropriate situations for singing these love songs, then? The most obvious answer would be that they are sung between men and women who are not close biological relatives. This could be between individuals or groups, with the latter being more common, as they are often sung during gatherings as a form of entertainment or competition.

Singing Amdo love songs, therefore, is appropriate when a young man and women 'fall in love with each other' and express feelings. We do not need to doubt the primary function of love songs, which is to express true feelings between men and women, but there are also romantic cases in which a man and a woman get to know each other through singing *la gzhas* and fall in love with each other afterwards. In practice, the singing can also be a form of entertainment or competition, in which cases one should not take the meaning of the songs too seriously. It occasionally happens that a Tibetan sings *la gzhas* to a non-Tibetan during a party, and the latter is astonished to learn the meaning of the song through translation – which might be "You're the only one for me in this life and I want to
marry you" – and does not know how to deal with such a sudden 'crush'. If one has a little knowledge about this particular culture, he or she could avoid such embarrassment with ease; the latter can even sing back, expressing their own 'true love'.

Love song competitions between men and women are popular during festivals and other gatherings. For instance, in Rdo sbis Township, Xunhua County, Qinghai Province, on the fifth day of the fifth month according to Chinese lunar calendar, the Lnga ba'i dbyar ston summer festival is held. During the festival, young men and women go on a 'pilgrimage' to a stupa in the area. In the afternoon, they gradually gather in a willow forest about one kilometer from the stupa, in order to realize the real purpose of this 'pilgrimage' day. Men from the same village form a group and send messengers to invite a group of women from another village as singing partners. The men and women then sit in two circles near each other and start the singing party. For a good singer, it is common to sing hundreds of love songs, not only without repetition, but also in direct reply to their partners' songs. It is said that some can sing for a few days.

Consequently, the art of Amdo la gzhas is not only in the beauty and richness of the lyrics, but also lies in the competitive element between the singing and response. Singers need a comprehensive repertoire in order to be able to make a well-judged response to a challenging song, one which might not only conquer one's counterpart, but also attract praise from the audience. Success in la gzhas singing competitions does not depend so much on the number of songs one can sing, as on the talent, sharpness, and creativity of one's singing. And of course, voice is always an essential quality for a singer of any type.

While talent, sharpness, and creativity are some qualities for good la gzhas singers, they should also be able to memorize a large number, usually hundreds, of songs. There are already hundreds of common la gzhas lyrics, passed down for generations, which form a foundation for this singing practice. Yet there are no fixed answers to any song and thus the singer chooses the most appropriate lyrics as the singing evolves. With a rich database of memorized lyrics, it is not difficult for a singer to improvise for a given situation by modifying the lyrics, using similar patterns or elements. Therefore, although the
practice of memorizing songs might seem to hinder creativity, it has never actually stopped singers from creating new lyrics and melodies. I will present some new love songs at the end of this paper.

Diplomacy is an important aspect of singing love songs. In Rdo sbis, for instance, it might be a delicate matter for a group of men from a village to invite a group of women from another village to sing love songs with them. While such invitations might be common practice during festivals, they may lead to conflict if a group of men from outside visit another village at night, as sometimes happens, to organize its young women to sing love songs. In this male-dominated society, male villagers' permission is essential for such gatherings. While the young women informing their male villagers about such party is one way to solve the problem, seeking a 'diplomatic' solution by the visiting men's side and asking for permission for the activity from the men of the host village may be a more effective way. In this way, the visitors not only get permission, but also, most probably, receive logistic assistance from the men of the host village.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Few studies are available on la gzhas,1 as those who have conducted research on this topic have mentioned (Lha lung tshe ring 2008:3, Me tog skyid (2012:1). While there may be various reasons for this, one must be that few 'respectable' Tibetan writers are willing to touch this 'pornographic' topic – it is almost like discussing sex in public – particularly in a very conservative society. Another reason may be that in the past, most Tibetan scholars had strong religious backgrounds and thus were not interested in such secular topics.

However, some writers have made efforts to study this elusive topic. Several papers are available on this topic. Mtsho sngon zhing chen mang tshoks sgyu rtsal khang (1981) was probably the first publication of a la gzhas collection in Tibetan history. After this, more collections became available: Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub (1993); Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang (2002); Sha bo tshe ring (2011); and Bka' ma mkha' bum and Tshe rgyal (2012). Among these,

1 My study deals only with the Tibetan literature on the topic.
Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub (1993) includes a section of newly created songs, which represents the evolution and enrichment of the la gzhas genre. G.yang mo skyid's (2013) substantial volume on Tibetan folk culture gives a very brief introduction to la gzhas. Lha lung tshe ring (2008) and Me tog skyid (2012), both graduate theses, are the most detailed studies so far on the topic. Both studies provide detailed backgrounds and information on the social norms for singing these songs, and give examples of each stage of the singing process. However, neither of them has studied the art of singing and responding.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study is based on my familiarity with Amdo love songs as well as many years of participation in la gzhas singing. While I am rather familiar with the social norms of this singing practice, I am not myself a singer of this tradition and know very few songs. The aim is not only to provide a basic introduction to the social practice of this singing tradition, but also, more importantly, to illustrate the artful communication between two singers – the skills used in expressing feelings in antiphonal singing. For this reason, I am specifically required to have a good collection of songs in mind and obtain certain knowledge of the logic of singing, i.e., how to respond to a song appropriately. However, this is exactly the challenge I face, although I do have a certain 'common sense' about it. In order to overcome this limitation, I consulted some singers in my rural home place,² and also listened to recorded singing competitions. Most examples of songs in this paper are chosen from published love song books.

This paper focuses on the lyrics of la gzhas and does not compare la gzhas with similar songs in other Tibetan regions, such as Khams and Central Tibet, nor with similar singing traditions of other ethnic groups in the region, such as hua'er in northwest China.

² I consulted Skal bzang rin chen, Rdo rje rgyal, and Rig 'dzin in 'Dod rtse Village, Rdo sbis Township, Xunhua County, Qinghai Province in 2014.
THE LOVE SONGS

Now I turn to the songs, themselves, following the order mentioned above.

*Rtse mgo rtsom pa'i skor 'Starting'*

These stanzas allow singers to introduce themselves to each other, as well as greet the audience. Singers who have not sung to each other in the past will get to know each other and those who already know each other will greet each other by singing. When only young men and women gather together, singing *la gzhas* can start directly.³

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:1)

¹ མཚེ་མགོ་ལེན་ན་མཚེ་མགོ་ལེན།
² མཚེ་མགོ་དགོངས་ན་གནམ་ལ་ལེན།
³ བོད་ད་མ་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
⁴ མཚེ་མགོ་ས་མ་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
⁵ མཚེ་མགོ་'ེ་ས་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
⁶ བོད་ད་མ་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
⁷ མཚེ་མགོ་ལེན་ན་མཚེ་མགོ་ལེན།
⁸ མཚེ་མགོ་'ེ་ས་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
⁹ བོད་ད་མ་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
¹⁰ བོད་ད་མ་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
¹¹ བོད་ད་མ་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།
¹² བོད་ད་མ་འདབ་བ(ད་གདན་ལ་འདེང་།

¹ Let me sing the starting song,
² Sing the starting song to the sky.
³ Let me pitch the blue sky as a pavilion,

³ To make the lyrics easier to read, I use a reading pronunciation of Tibetan terms based on Amdo Tibetan, rather than transliterating the terms in Wylie. For example, I write Atse Datse instead of *a rtsed da rtsed.*
Stretch out the ground as a carpet,
And invite the sun and moon as guests,
While also entertaining the numerous stars.

Let me sing the starting song,
Sing the starting song to the great village.
Let me pitch the black tent as a pavilion,
Stretch out the rugs from Upper U-Tsang as carpets,
And invite both our own villagers and others as guests,
While also entertaining the numerous friends.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:1-2)

† སྣང་མེ་ལེན་ན་མེ་ལེན།
‡ སྣང་ཁ་ལ་གཞས་ར་ཞིག་བ་ལ་ལེན།
§ སྣང་དཀར་པོ་དར་དཀར་འཐེན་ན་ལེན།
¶ སྣང་$ེ་མགོ་ལེན་ན་$ེ་མགོ་ལེན།
¶ སྣང་$ེ་མགོ་'་ཆེན་གངས་ལ་ལེན།
¶ སྣང་ཁ་ལ་གཞས་Uར་ཞིག་Uབ་ལ་ལེན།

1 Let me sing the starting song,
2 Sing it to the snowy mountains,
3 Sing it to offer a white scarf to the white snow.

Let me sing the starting song,
Sing the starting song to the great village,
Sing it to pitch a love song pavilion.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:5-6)
1 In the place named Upper Atse Datse,
2 A dzo and dzomo⁴ are playing with their horns,
3 It is not that they want to compete with each other,
4 We two play, following that example.

5 In a place named Lower Atse Tatse,
6 A boy and a girl are playing with words,
7 It is not that they are really quarrelling,
8 We two play, following that example.

Female (Stag 'bum thar an Skal bzang 2002:6)

1 མི་ཁྲགས་རི་ཁང་། འོ་དོད།
2 ཐེ་ཕ་ལོ་ཁང་། འོ་དོད།
3 རོགས་ཁང་། འོ་དོད།
4 རོགས་ཁང་། འོ་དོད།
5 རོགས་ཁང་། འོ་དོད།
6 རོགས་ཁང་། འོ་དོད།

1 The (monastery in) Upper U-Tsang is like the sun,
2 The golden roof ornament is like the shining moon,
3 I will go there with the expectation of glimpsing the gods.
4 The great village is the like the sky,
5 And the young lovers are like stars,
6 I will go there with the expectation of playing with them.

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⁴ Dzo (mdzo) is the general term for a crossbreed of a cow and a yak, and dzomo (mdzomo) is the term for its female.
There is another situation for commencing love songs, but it is trickier. For instance, during a village wedding, at which individuals of all ages are in attendance, it is common to sing folk songs as part of the celebration. As the night goes on, young adults may want to switch to sing love songs instead of folk songs, but uncles and aunts, or other relatives, still remain in the audience. Then, young men might quietly ask a senior man for permission to sing love songs, which is usually granted. Then a young male singer will stand up to sing the following 'ice-breaking' song:

1 རི་མཐོན་པོ་ཡོད་ན་དམའ་མོ་ས།
2 གང་ས་ལ་ང་ཆེན་འདུར་ཡིན།
3 གང་ས་ཡོད་ན་སེམས་ས།
4 གས་ཡིད་པའི་ན་ལེན་ཡིན།

1 If there are high mountains, please be lowered,
2 I, the Garuda, the king of birds, will take off.
3 If there are individuals who should 'respect' each other, please be cautious,
4 As I am going to sing great secular songs.

With this obvious warning song, seniors, and those whose close relatives of the opposite gender are among the youths, will depart, leaving the space open for young adults. Having secured this safe ground, young men and women can start singing love songs.

_Rogs 'grogs pa'i skor 'Getting to Know Each Other'_

After greeting each other, the two sides begin to test each other by expressing their uncertainties about and interest in each other.
Male (Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub 1993:43)

1. In the orchard of Kamdo,
2. It's not that there are no tasty fruits,
3. But according to my particular interest,
4. I'd prefer to eat the grapes.

5. In the great village's singing party,
6. It is not that no attractive ones are present,
7. But according to my particular interest,
8. I'd prefer to befriend you.

Female (Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub 1993:46-47)
1 You, the big dipper in the North,  
2 Is your beam of light straightforward?  
3 If your beam of light is straightforward,  
4 I shall abandon the moon from my heart,  
5 Abandon it, and shall fall in love with you.  

6 You, the popular girl in the great village,  
7 Will you have feelings for me if we are together?  
8 If you will have feelings for me once we are together  
9 I shall abandon my duplicitous lover,  
10 Abandon her, and give my heart to you.  

**Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:106)**

1 བདེ་བསམས་ན་ཞོག་+ག་གི།  
2 རོགས་Uང་ལོ་)ིང་ལ་+ེ་བོ།  
3 དེ་བསམས་ན་འ)ོགས་U་-ག་གི།  
4 ཚེན་པོ་མི་ཁ་+ོད་གི།  
5 བསྐོལ་དཔོག་གི།

1 Oh horse, white as an egg,  
2 As soon as I saw you, I wished to ride you.  
3 But the path is long and narrow,  
4 And stones on the way are sharp and angular,  
5 Thinking of that, I fear to ride you.  

6 Oh darling, dear to my heart,  
7 As soon as I saw you, I wished to be with you.  
8 But the rumors in the village are vicious.  
9 And the parents are ruthless,  
10 Thinking of that, I fear to fall in love with you.
Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:108)

1 Oh cuckoo, dear to my heart,
2 Please pass the forested mountains and come over.
3 Although it is true that my branches are weak,
4 I guarantee that you'll never fall down to the ground.

5 Oh darling, dear to my heart,
6 Please pass the villages and come over.
7 Although it is true that the parents are ruthless,
8 It's impossible to keep you outside the door.

Zhe mthun pa'i skor 'Falling in Love'

If the relationship between the man and woman further develops, they may 'fall in love' with each other. In this session, the couple expresses their deep love to each other.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:129)
The vulture's homeland is Upper Lingkar,
But it has alighted on the red, rocky cliff.
The red cliff where it has alighted is so comfortable that I forgot my homeland in Upper Lingkar.

The birthplace of the young man is his own village,
But I am now playing in another's village.
The girl from the other village is so sweet that, I have forgotten my own village.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:135)

Although the cuckoo and lark, Were not born together, They have gathered in the same forest, And fallen in love atop the same tree.

Although both the young man and woman, Were born in different places, They have gathered in one village, And fallen in love with each other at the party.
Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002: 144)

1 Glancing up the Tongdan Valley,
2 Among the thousands of beautiful flowers,
3 You are the flower I focus on.
4 Will you continue blooming?
5 If you continue blooming,
6 I, the golden bee,
7 Shall wait for you, even in the frozen winter.

8 Glancing down at the singing party,
9 Among the hundreds and thousands of friends,
10 You are the one I focus on.
11 Will you, my lover, remain unchanged?
12 If you remain changed,
13 I, a boy of good linage,
14 Shall wait for you, until the age of thirty.
Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002: 147)

1 I, the sandalwood tree,
2 Shall not wither in summer's heat,
3 Nor die in the winter's icy winds.
4 In the absence of a steel axe, I
5 Shall be a tree that lives a century.

6 I, the childhood lover,
7 Shall not fear village gossip,
8 Nor be stopped by parents,
9 In the absence of the lord of death, I
10 Shall be a lover for a century.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:148)
Upper U-Tsang, the place of Dharma, is the place
Where the blessing-possessor Shakyamuni abodes.
Do you sincerely wish to worship there?
If you do not sincerely wish to do so,
Please do not waste your time with prostrations,
Which kick up dust while you accumulate sin,
And do not fool we gods.

Tsotruk, the village where friends gather to party,
And young couples fall in love freely.
Do you sincerely wish to play with us?
If you do not wish to play with us,
Please do not waste time with meaningless talk,
Do not make yourself guilty with promises,
And do not fool we friends.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:148-9)
Please tell the garment with dragon patterns,
It is not that I do not wish to wear you,
From the time I put you on,
You ought to protect me from rain in the summer months,
And cold winds in the winter months.
You should never say that you can't do it.

Please tell the lover in the village,
It is not that I do not wish to play,
From the time I begin playing,
You should tolerate the villagers' rumors,
And leave the parents, dear to you.
You should never say no to it.

*Parting*

Lovers must part ways at the end of the party. Before departure, the two sides express their sadness about leaving their lover. Meanwhile, they also express their wishes and promises to each other.

Male (Sha bo thse ring 2011:208)
Looking up in the sky to see  
The green dragon leaving the clouds,  
Please don’t feel sad for its departure,  
And wait between the white and black clouds,  
I shall return without delay.

From the solemn village,  
When I depart from here,  
Please don’t feel sad for my departure,  
Wait for me at the gate,  
And I shall return without delay.

Female (Sha bo thse ring 2011:212)

When you go through large and small lakes,  
Please do not forget the central island.  
Although I am not saying that you will,  
You may forget when you see similar lakes.

When you go through large and small villages,  
Please do not forget your intimate lover,  
Although I am not saying that you will,  
You may forget when you meet similar friends.
Male (Sha bo thse ring 2011:213)

1. The cuckoo leaves the forest
2. It is the karma of the bird.
3. From the day we, the birds, depart,
4. You, the bird with similar wings, remain unchanged,
5. I shall definitely return to the forest,
6. And you will be the only one I look for.

7. The lover shall leave for his home,
8. This is my karma.
9. From the day we leave,
10. You, the loved one, please stay unchanged,
11. I shall definitely return to the village
12. And you will be the only one I look for.

Female (Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub 1993:167-168)

1. རྟགས་དབུ་སྙན་ལ་བོད་སློབ་ཅིག
2. རྟགས་དབུ་སྙན་ལ་བོད་སློབ་ཅིག
3. རྟགས་ལྷ་སྲོལ་བོད་སློབ་ཅིག
4. རྟགས་ལྷ་སྲོལ་བོད་སློབ་ཅིག

20
When the vulture leaves the forest,
Do not turn back to look at the forest,
If you see the forest,
It will make you reluctant to depart.

When you, the beloved, go elsewhere,
Please do not turn back to look at the village.
If you see the village,
It will make you reluctant to leave.

*Rogs dran pa’i skor 'Longing for Each Other'*

Due to their deep love for each other, the young couple may miss each other during temporary separations, and expresses their sadness and longing for each other. In practice, they sing to each other face-to-face as if they were separated.

Male

1. When the vulture leaves the forest,
2. Do not turn back to look at the forest,
3. If you see the forest,
4. It will make you reluctant to depart.
5. Please do not turn back to look at the village.
6. If you see the village,
7. It will make you reluctant to leave.
When I travel in the rocky mountains,
I feel thirsty at the edge of the mountains.
It is not that there are no mountain springs,
But if there is no blue water from the Yellow River,
I cannot quench my thirst at mountain springs.

When I travel through the village,
I feel sad at the village entrance.
It is not that I have no friends there,
But if I do not see my loved one,
I cannot control my sadness, even though there are many friends.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:223)

Dear cuckoo in the middle of the forest,
Although you are gone from the forest,
And I, the lark, remain behind in the forest,
You are my unforgettable bird.

Dear darling from the great village,
Although you have left the village,
And I remain outside the village,
You are my unforgettable beloved.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:202-3)
When the cuckoo departs the forest,
Its heart is still attached to the trees.
If it is an unfamiliar forest,
There is no reason to miss it.
But the lark with the great singing voice,
Remains behind in the bushes,
This is why the cuckoo is reluctant to leave.

When the lover leaves the village,
His heart is still attached to the village.
If it is an unfamiliar village,
There is no reason to miss it.
But the beloved one, since the age of fifteen,
Remains behind with rumors around.
This is why I am reluctant to leave.

Female (Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub 1993:46-47)
1 Please tell the bird with the turquoise head
2 On the tree in the dense forest:
3 The forest is wide and dense,
4 Until the next time we meet each other,
5 The tops of the trees shall not dry due to sunlight,
6 And I will not toss the fruits to others.
7 Oh, blue cuckoo,
8 Please do not forget us, the forest.

9 In the middle of the solemn village,
10 Please tell my angelic darling:
11 The village is wide and large,
12 Until the next time we meet each other,
13 I will not seek fair-weather friends elsewhere,
14 And will not speak even three words to others,
15 Oh my bosom friend, a boy of good lineage,
16 Please do not forget us girls.
Rogs 'gal ba'iskor 'Breaking up'

Just as two lovers can break up in real life, two singers break up in singing competitions as well. In this section, the two sides find shortcomings with each other and reproach each other with sarcastic words.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:269)

1 When hundreds of birds gathered in the sky,
2 I, the vulture, was excluded.
3 I do not see why I should have been excluded,
4 But if I have to be kept out of the group,
5 I shall not stay, but will leave.
6 After I am gone, the hundreds of birds should be in harmony,
7 It would be shameful if you were not.

8 When hundreds of friends gather in the village,
9 We, the boys, were excluded,
10 I do not see why we should have been excluded,
But if we have to be kept out of the group,
I, the intimate friend, shall not stay, but will leave.
After I am gone, the friends should be in harmony,
It would be shameful if you were not.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzangs 2002:275)

Oh, the clear Yellow River,
In the past, when you wanted to flow,
You were as clear as nectar dew,
But now, when you do not want to flow,
You use golden fish and silver fish as excuses.
You do not need to find excuses,
Why don't you just say that you no longer want to flow?
I shall not say that you must flow.
Oh, friend with sweet words!
In the past, when you wanted to play,
11 You were dearer than parents.
12 But now, when you don't want to play,
13 You use rumors as excuses.
14 You do not need to find excuses,
15 Why don't you just say that you no longer want to play?
16 I shall not say that you must play.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:287)

1 བས་གསེར་སྲང་གི་དིལ་ན།
2 རོ་ལེི་བོ་དང་བ'་དང་སྐྱོང་ཡོད།
3 དེའི་ནང་ནས་རང་གི་བཞོན་ས།
4 གཉིས་པ་སོགས་པོ་བཞི་ནས།
5 དེའི་ནང་ནས་རང་གི་རོགས་ལོས།
6 ་ས་དེང་སང་གཞི་བས་ན།
7 དེའི་ནང་ནས་རང་གི་རོགས་ལོས།

8 བཅས་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་པའི་ནང་ན།
9 བཅས་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་པའི་ནང་ན།
10 བཅས་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་པའི་ནང་ན།
11 བཅས་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་པའི་ནང་ན།
12 བཅས་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་པའི་ནང་ན།
13 བཅས་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་པའི་ནང་ན།
14 བཅས་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་པའི་ནང་ན།

1 In the center of the place named Golden Valley,
2 There are hundreds of thousands of horses.
3 Among them is my own stallion,
4 Which has never kicked its legs at me.
5 But now he does, so it is obvious that,
6 He has met a bad master,
7 And is controlled by his bridle.
In the solemn village,
There are hundreds and thousands of friends.
Among them is my own lover,
Who has never told me any nonsense.
But now she does, so it is obvious that,
She has met a bad boy,
And is controlled by his words.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:271-2)

1 The beautifully horned female wild yak in the beautiful mountains,
2 Thinking about its round beautiful horns,
3 It is hard to forget her for a while.
4 When she turns to the mountain springs,
5 I wish to throw stones to her.
6 But thinking carefully, there is no reason to do so,
7 Because it is impossible for a wild yak to turn into livestock.
8 The friend with sweet words in the village,
9 When thinking about entertainment and good relationships,
10 It is hard to forget her for a while.
11 When you go with the fair-weather friends,
12 I want to say some harsh words,
13 But thinking carefully, there is no reason to do so,
14 Because it is impossible for you to become my spouse.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:290)

1 Oh the mouse-like goat, what do you think?
2 Do you think that I have put a blessed cord on your neck?
3 I will never leave the white sheep,
4 And put the cord on a goat's neck.

5 Oh, fair-weather friend, what do you think?
6 Do you think that I've chosen you this time?
7 I shall never leave my intimate darling,
8 And exchange words with a fair-weather friend.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:306)

1 Oh the mouse-like goat, what do you think?
2 Do you think that I have put a blessed cord on your neck?
3 I will never leave the white sheep,
4 And put the cord on a goat's neck.
1 The growing trees twist and bend,
2 And their fruits taste sour and bitter.
3 I tasted them last year by mistake,
4 And I swear that I will never have them again.

5 The friends I have played with are senseless and thoughtless,
6 And their words are stumbling and mumbling.
7 I played with you last year by mistake.
8 And I swear that I will never play with you again.

Bde mo 'jog pa'i skor 'Farewell'

In this section, the two sides say goodbye to each other.

Male (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:317)

1 The water in the Yellow River shall not stay, but leave,
2 And the round pebble will not leave, but stay.
3 I, the water in the Yellow River, shall flow far away,
4 And you, the pebbles, please remain peacefully on the river bed.
We, the boys, shall not stay, but leave,
And leave you ladies behind.
We shall go far away,
And you ladies please remain.

Female (Stag 'bum thar and Skal bzang 2002:315)

1 I shall say goodbye once and again,
2 Oh golden sun, please be well.
3 My farewell goes not only to the sun,
4 But also to the moon.

5 I shall say goodbye once and again,
6 My childhood sweetheart, please be well.
7 My farewell goes not only to you, my sweetheart,
8 But also to our peers.

NEWLY CREATED LA GZHAS

As mentioned in the introduction, the lyrics of la gzhas are evolving as time passes. Although I have no access to some of the newest songs, I present some examples of novel love songs below. In terms of their meaning, they can be categorized under the above-mentioned headings.
Song 1. (Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub 1993:288-9)

1 Oh, the plastic lotus
2 Appears superficially attractive.
3 But can you send forth the fragrance of flowers?
4 If you can send forth such fragrance,
5 I shall offer you to the Maitreya Buddha.

6 Oh, my fifteen-year-old lover,
7 Appears superficially attractive.
8 But are you reliable?
9 If you are reliable,
10 I promise not to break up with you.

Song 2. (Skal bzang and Skal bzang don grub 1993:290)

1 གོད་ལོ་ཟེར་ནོ།
2 ྲ་བ%ས་ན་མིག་ལ་ཡག་གི
3 གོད་བཅོ་'འི་རོགས་ལོ་ཟེར་ནོ།
4 གོད་བཅོ་'འི་རོགས་ལོ་ཟེར་ནོ།
5 གོད་བཅོ་'འི་རོགས་ལོ་ཟེར་ནོ།
You, the women, should be vehicles on ground,
And we, the men, should be airplanes in the sky,
And our relationship should be the phone between us.
If we find our soul mates, I will phone you.
If we don't get along, bombs shall be dropped on you.

These newly created songs use Chinese words, suliao 'plastic', qiche 'vehicle', dianhua 'telephone', and zhadan 'bomb' that are commonly used in daily Amdo Tibetan dialect. These new songs were collected in the early 1990s, and so are not very new. More recently, a new format of la gzhas known as dgu tshig, meaning nine syllables, has become popular among singers, but I shall leave it to other researchers to describe it in more detail (Lha lung tshe ring 2008:53).

With the above examples of Amdo Tibetan love songs, I believe that readers have a preliminary understanding of this aspect of Amdo Tibetan culture. Yet again, there are related topics that I was unable to include in this paper – love songs from Khams or Central Tibet, comparisons of Amdo love song with other forms of Tibetan folk songs or with love songs of other ethnic groups. All of these remain topics for further research.
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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Dod rtse 都達寺
Aba 阿坝
Amdo 阿壩
Bka' ma mkha 'bum 傲馬阿木乎
Chos skyid sgrol ma 賽寺所羅門
Dgu tshig 得其所
dianhua 电话
Dpa' ris 達則
G.yang mo skyid 甘孜蒙古
Gannan 甘南
Glu rol 達日
Guide 黃德
Hainan 海南
Hua'er 花儿
Kan lho 噶爾