"I, YA RI A BSOD, AM A DOG": THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF A TIBETAN MENDICANT SINGER

Skal dbang skyid (Independent Scholar), Sha bo don sgrub rdo rje (Independent Scholar), Sgrol ma mtsho (Independent scholar), Gerald Roche (Qinghai Normal University), Eric Schweickert, and Dpa' rtse rgyal (Reed College)

ABSTRACT
The life and music of Ya ri A bsod, a Tibetan composer and singer who lived in the early twentieth century, is described. Ya ri A bsod wandered through Tibetan nomad areas where contemporary Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces meet in China. Texts and transcribed melodies of Ya ri A bsod songs are presented. These songs are contextualized in terms of their contemporary transmission, and the historical and autobiographical circumstances of their composition.

KEY WORDS
Ya ri A bsod, Tibetan folk song, A mdo, Mgo log
INTRODUCTION

An icy wind cuts across the night-shrouded grassland but otherwise nothing moves or makes a sound. It is the middle of the night, and the two inhabitants of a tattered black yak-hair tent are both asleep. Suddenly a dog begins barking, shattering the stillness. Woken by the sound, the mistress of the tent calls to her son. "Ya ri A bsod!" Go see what the dog is barking at. Maybe it's a thief!

Wearily, Ya ri A bsod raises his head and peers out of the tent flap from the bundle of robes he is sleeping on. Without rising further, he sings to his mother:

1 The dog is outside
2 The horse is over there
3 The female yak and the ewe are here
4 Mother and son are inside
5 So what is missing?

---

1 Tibetan terms are written using the Wylie transliteration system (Wylie 1959). A list of Tibetan terms can be found in Appendix One.
2 The Tibetan given here is oral, not literary.
3 This account was collected from five separate consultants: 'Jam dbyangs, G.yang kho, Sngags chen, Bsam 'phel, and Rdo rje tshe ring. See 'Consultants' (below) for more information. Where possible, we site the source of all oral accounts.
This paper describes a collection of songs from the Tibetan singer and composer Ya ri A bsod, who lived in the early twentieth century on the grasslands where contemporary Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu provinces meet in Western China. Examples of song texts are given and contextualized in terms of previous studies and recordings; the songs' regional, social and historical circumstances; the life of Ya ri A bsod; singers who currently sing the songs; and genres and their salient features. These songs vividly depict early twentieth century Tibetan pastoral life—stealing horses, praising leaders, beseeching lovers—and people's thoughts and feelings about their lives.

PREVIOUS STUDIES AND RECORDINGS

The only work dedicated to Ya ri A bsod previously produced was a cassette\textsuperscript{4} with a spoken introduction of approximately thirty seconds giving biographical details on Ya ri A bsod. The remainder of the cassette contains a single song, called Ya ri A bsod's Heart Speech (Ya ri A bsod kyi snying gtam) sung by Rdo red (from Rma chu) in the late 1990s, accompanied by mandolin. The cassette was published by Pag mo bkra shis, a broadcaster and comedian who, at the time of publication, worked for Qinghai Tibetan Broadcast Radio. Each side of the cassette is approximately twenty minutes long.

Two written sources about Ya ri A bsod and his songs exist (Dbang rgyal and Pad ma rdo rje 1995, Anonymous n.d.) and both are called Ya ri A bsod's Heart Speech. The biographical information in both texts is the same, and is identical to the information on the cassette. All three biographies are in literary rather than oral Tibetan. There are

\textsuperscript{4} ISBN 7-7994-0072-2. See Appendix Two for images of the cassette case.
some small differences between the texts in terms of vocabulary, but not in content. In both texts, the lyrics are identical to those of the song in the cassette, but the stanzas are ordered differently.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The songs this study focuses on were recorded in January and February of 2007 in Dngul ra and A dban tshang townships, Rma chu County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province; A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province; and Rta bo Township, Rma chen County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. This area straddles the boundary of two ethnically Tibetan nomad grassland regions: Phyi 'brog (see Ekvall 1977) and

---

5 The first two authors visited these places as well as Henan Mongol Autonomous County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province; Bla brang County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province; and Hongyuan and Rnga ba counties, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. They did not locate any singers able to perform Ya ri A bsod songs in these areas. Their research trip lasted from 12 January to 14 February 2007. The first two authors conducted fifteen qualitative, semi-structured interviews with both singers and non-singers. From these interviews they gathered data about Ya ri A bsod's life and his songs. See Appendix Three for locations.

6 Ekvall uses this term (which he spells Shimdrok), which literally means 'outer pastures' to refer to a specific area. However it is actually a somewhat pejorative term designating remote pastoral regions.
Mgo log\textsuperscript{7} both of which lie in the cultural and linguistic Tibetan region of A mdo.

These areas are high-altitude grasslands, exceeding 3,000 meters above sea level. Horlemann (2002: 243–244) describes weather conditions in Mgo log Prefecture; the other recording sites are not significantly different:

The average annual temperature is around 0\textdegree C, whereas during winter temperatures can drop to as low as -48\textdegree C. In summer, temperatures can rise to about +20\textdegree C during the day, and still fall to freezing point at night.

These areas have a rainy and sunny summer, and a snowy, windy winter. Because of the high precipitation, there are many rivers and marshes.

Local people in these areas subsist by herding sheep, yaks, and horses. They typically live in black yak-hair tents in summer and in houses during winter. Older houses are made of wood, willow, mud, dung, and stone. Modern houses are made from bricks, concrete, wood, stones, and glass. Family summer camps are typically spaced at intervals greater than 250 meters. During summer, families usually change pastures three or four times. Summer camps are generally at a higher altitude than winter camps.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the government began implementing two policies regarding herders in this region. The first was the institution of a householder responsibility system that privatized lands and herds. The second policy involves the relocation and settling of herders. The following is an account of privatization and resettlement in Rma chu

\textsuperscript{7} In the following description, we make generalizations about areas in Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces. In the past, these regions had much in common, but now differences in administration have resulted in divergence. All dates and descriptions are approximate.
Prior to 2005, people only talked about resettlement and fencing, but nothing was done. Beginning in 2005, the government told local people to build fences for their village territory, which was done during 2005 and 2006. The government also divided the village territory among households. However, the villagers tried to delay this as long as possible, believing that livestock with limited pastures and limited access to water would not be fit and healthy.

Another policy is that each person in a family can only have twenty yaks. Consequently, many families sold many yaks. Some families tried to entrust their surplus yaks to other families who had fewer yaks than the limit allowed. Locals were upset about having to sell their herds, and said, "Before, we could move to new pastures wherever we needed. Whenever there was no more fresh grass or if there was inadequate water, we could simply move on. But after the government implemented that policy, we have no place to move to and our territory has shrunk. We are always stuck in one place and the livestock cannot graze well. We are worried that our livestock will all die and we will not be able to continue our way of life."

While implementing these privatization policies, the government built about 300 houses in the county town and made them available cheaply (for about 10,000 RMB) and encouraged nomads to resettle there. However, the nomads did not clearly understand what was happening; they gave up their pasture and traditional way of life without understanding what they were doing. Now, many more houses are being built, and many local people think that all

---

8 For general surveys of privatization and resettlement, see Yan et al. (2005) and Bauer (2005).
the nomads will soon be forced to leave the grassland.

Currently, people commonly have electricity in their winter houses. Electricity started to become common in these areas in 1999, although there are blackouts as often as once every two days and they may last for four or five hours. More serious outages happen two or three times a year and may last for up to twenty days. In recent years solar electricity generating panels have become more common, but only a few households have such panels at the summer camp.

About ninety percent of these places have no access to broadcast or satellite TV. However, people commonly have Qinghai Tibetan Broadcast Radio and Chinese music radio. Many people in these areas do not understand Modern Standard Chinese⁹ and therefore only listen to Qinghai Tibetan Broadcast Radio. A very few households or camps near the town watch broadcast TV that shows government-sponsored news and Chinese dramas.

Transport infrastructure is poorly developed, especially in summer camps that commonly feature dirt tracks for roads. Horses and yaks were used for transport when moving camps, herding livestock, going to the county town, fetching water, or looking for lost livestock before about 1988. Afterwards, tractors were increasingly used. Rough tracks were created by repeatedly taking the same route; there were few roads. In the early years of the twenty-first century, people, especially young men, began using motorcycles. Road construction, especially to county towns, township towns, and winter villages, has greatly increased since 2005. For example, the road from Mδzo dge County Town to A skyid Township Town and A skyid Village were paved in 2006-2007.

---

Commonly, people only receive medical treatment at Traditional Tibetan Medicine clinics at local monasteries. Sometimes people must pay for this medicine, sometimes they do not. The cost depends on the illness and is generally low. For example, a patient might need to pay fifteen RMB for a course of pills, which is much cheaper than in county town hospitals, where a course of pills might cost thirty or more RMB. At the monastery clinic, people may not need to pay if they cannot afford it. Monastic health clinics also provide bone setting, moxibustion, and acupuncture treatments. Again, the cost is low, negotiable, and might be waived in certain circumstances. Stomach problems and tuberculosis are common.

These factors—climate, livelihood, privatization, resettlement, electricity, mass media, transport, and health—all affect the transmission of Ya ri A bsod's songs. In order to understand how and why these songs were initially composed, we examine the social context of the times in which Ya ri A bsod composed the songs.

RECONSTRUCTING PAST SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The last century witnessed dramatic changes in social life in A mdo pastoral areas (see for example Horlemann 2002, Manderschied 2002, and Yeh 2003). The social world Ya ri A bsod inhabited and the social world of today are vastly different. The social organization of Ya ri A bsod's time, to some extent, can be understood from ethnographic data (e.g., Ekvall 1977, 1968). Contextualizing Ya ri A bsod's songs in this way allows a clearer picture of who he was singing to and why.

The fundamental unit of social organization was the family (khyim tshang), consisting of an extended nuclear family: a married couple and their children, and paternal grandparents. Traditionally, the family lived together in a
single tent. Families, in turn, were organized into encampments (ru skor) that had between five and forty tents. Several ru skor combined to form a village (sde ba) headed by a mgo ba (sde dpon). A higher but looser level of social organization was the tribe or clan, tsho ba, which typically had about half a dozen sde ba, and was also headed by a mgo ba (tsho dpon). Apart from local mgo ba, lamas, elders (rgan bo), communal leaders (dpon po), and kings (rgyal po) were also important. Each will now be described.

Monasteries and lamas wielded power within communities beyond the religious sphere. The important monastic center of Bla brang (now in Bla brang County) for instance, was responsible for conflict resolution and assisting in the selection of leaders (among other duties). High-ranking lamas had social influence and impact extending beyond their religious role and personal charisma.

The role of the elders (rgan po) and the power they wielded varied, as described by Ekvall (1977, 37):

In some tribes, the position of the chief is little more than an empty title, the real power of control and administration being entirely in the hands of the [rgan po]. At the other extreme are tribes in which the chief is all powerful... the [rgan po] is here nothing more than an advisory group, whose function is to nod assent to the orations of the chief.

Dpon po was a hereditary position; the eldest son usually inherited this position from his father. Dpon po were powerful individuals who had much property that was acquired, in part, by payments for aiding in conflict resolution. Such leaders presided over as many as 1,000 households (stong dpon) and 10,000 households (khri dpon).

Rgyal po translates as 'king'. Several local rulers held

---

10 Mgo ba is a generic term meaning 'head man' and sde dpon is the specific term referring to a village leader.
this title in the early twentieth century. Ekvall (1977) notes the existence of three such persons, but does not give details.

In summary, eastern Amdo's nomad areas contained socially stratified tribes and a constellation of leaders wielded various powers, constraining the lives of ordinary people. The extent of leaders' local influence is implied in the following oration, collected by Joseph Rock, in which a local leader declares independence from various forms of non-local authority (Rock in Kornman 1998: 78):

You cannot compare us [Mgo log] with other people. You obey the laws of strangers, the laws of the Dalai Lama, of China, and of your petty chiefs. You are afraid of everyone; to escape punishment you obey everyone... We [Mgo log], on the other hand, have obeyed none but our own laws, none but our own convictions... This is why we have ever been free as now, and are the slaves of none—neither of Bogdokhan nor of Dalai Lama. Our tribe is the most respected and mighty in Tibet, and we rightly look down with contempt on both Chinaman and Tibetan.

This statement powerfully evokes the absence of non-local authority in the region during the early twentieth century. However, far from being evidence for universal autonomy and independence among the nomads of northeast Tibet, as it is usually interpreted, this statement also testifies to the strength of local hegemonies. For an itinerant beggar such as Ya ri A bsod, who lacked social and family networks (see below), local authorities' patronage was particularly significant. In the next section, we examine Ya ri A bsod's life, and his motivations for composing songs.
BIOGRAPHY OF YA RI A BSOD

Ya ri A bsod lived in the early twentieth century—his birthdate is unknown. His home was probably Dngul ra Village in Rma chu County.\textsuperscript{11} People called him A bsod for short.

Ya ri A bsod was an only child and never knew his father. He lived with his mother and lacked other relatives to depend on. A typical nomad family had at least 200 head of livestock (sheep and yaks), as well as several horses, and a number of dogs. In contrast, Ya ri A bsod's family only owned one ewe, a dog, and a horse.

Ya ri A bsod, as an adult, was renowned for being unattractive and poorly dressed. It was often said of him, "Bltas mdog med gi He doesn't look colorful," meaning that he was shabbily dressed and generally unattractive. He had a girlfriend at one time,\textsuperscript{12} but never married. After his mother's death when he was in his late twenties or early thirties, he spent his life wandering, singing to those he met, and eventually becoming well-known locally.

Ya ri A bsod sang, often improvising new songs and in return, receiving food and lodging. He composed hundreds of songs in his lifetime. Through goading, chastisement, and parody, he encouraged compassion and kindness.

It was commonly thought that his songs foretold what would happen to those he sang about, partly owing to the seemingly automatic and extemporaneous nature of the songs. The following account demonstrates this:

Once, Ya ri A bsod was invited to Bla brang Monastery for a

\textsuperscript{11} The majority of consultants agreed on this. An alternative account provided by Dkon mchog tshe ring, places Ya ri A bsod's birth place in 'Bul Village, Mdzo dge County.

\textsuperscript{12} See the song below.
ceremony and was asked to sing. Two dge bshes\textsuperscript{13} transcribed the lyrics as A bsod sang. When he finished, one dge bshes asked him for a lyric he had missed. A bsod replied jokingly, "How should I know what the lyrics are? I only sang the song!"\textsuperscript{14}

Because of his improvisational skills, Ya ri A bsod is often compared to the religious mendicant and composer Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol.\textsuperscript{15} That they both led a mendicant life aids the comparison.

Several stories attest to the predictive powers of Ya ri A bsod's songs. For instance, a woman who worked as a servant for a wealthy family was arrogant and haughty despite her subservient position. Ya ri A bsod sang to her, criticizing her arrogance and depicted her constantly carrying a broom. Four or five years later, she had lost her position, was destitute, and was forced to work hard all the time, sweeping and carrying a broom.\textsuperscript{16} On another occasion, A bsod traveled in contemporary Rma chu County and met an old woman, who, when she recognized A bsod, was frightened, and entreated, "I'll give you a pack\textsuperscript{17} of butter, please don't sing for me!" Had he sung something negative, she was sure it would have come true.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} Dge bshes are monks who have obtained the highest scholastic degree in the Tibetan monastic system.
\textsuperscript{14} Consultant: Rdo rje tshe ring.
\textsuperscript{15} Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol was a nineteenth century yogin from Reb gong County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. He composed hundreds of mgur glu 'songs of spiritual realization'. See Ricard and Wilkinson (2001) for a translation of his autobiography and Kapstein (1998) for a brief biographical account.
\textsuperscript{16} Consultant: Rdo red.
\textsuperscript{17} A sheep stomach full of butter.
\textsuperscript{18} Consultant: Kun 'brom.
Ya ri A bsod's life was full of misery, which he at times portrayed comically. He often wandered alone, with no place to sleep and nothing to eat. On one such occasion, he was heard to sing:

1 Wealth is something that cannot be found,
2 But in this life, we have the chance to accumulate wealth.
3 Hunger is something which cannot be satisfied,
4 But if someone feeds me, I'll follow them.\(^{19}\)

At another time, he wandered to a tent. When the housewife gave him a pack of butter he sang:

1 Aunty likes to make donations,
2 Her face is just like the Treasure God's.
3 She gives things without (me) begging.\(^{20}\)

Despite his own poverty, Ya ri A bsod was famous for defending the poor and down-trodden. He often intervened on their behalf with various leaders, and persuasively advocated for them. Leaders often called Ya ri A bsod to entertain them, or to employ his predicative and persuasive

\(^{19}\) Consultant: Kun 'brom.
\(^{20}\) Consultant: Kun 'brom.
powers for their benefit. For example, he sang to the Bzhag sdom\textsuperscript{21} chieftain's wife, who had eloped, persuading her to return to her husband.\textsuperscript{22}

Ya ri A bsod was also a thief and on at least one occasion, went to Rta bo Township, Rma chen County and stole dozens of horses. The horses' owners gave pursuit and shot and wounded him. A few days later, Ya ri A bsod died.\textsuperscript{23} At the time of his death, Ya ri A bsod was probably in his forties.\textsuperscript{24}

Having examined how and why Ya ri A bsod's songs were composed, and having previously discussed factors affecting the songs' transmission, the context of the songs' contemporary performance will be examined. Contemporary singers will be discussed first, followed by a discussion of different genres.

\textsuperscript{21} The Bzhag sdom Tribe is located in the area of contemporary Mdzo dge County. D'Ollone, who travelled through Mdzo dge in 1906, and therefore perhaps at the time when Ya ri A bsod was alive, described the local social and political structure thus (D'Ollone 1995 [1912]:240):

The confederation of Dzorgei (sic) consists of twelve tribes. The authority of the chiefs is not great; they are scarcely more than more distinguished and influential notabilities. All the heads of families take part in the general decision, such as a change of residence, or a question of war or peace; but for the rest they act in perfect liberty, starting on their raids or pillaging expeditions without consulting others.

\textsuperscript{22} Consultant: O skyid.

\textsuperscript{23} Consultant: Chos rgyal.

\textsuperscript{24} Ya ri A bsod's death date is unclear. One consultant (Rdo rje tshe ring) believed that Ya ri A bsod died in the 1940s or early 1950s. Other consultants (e.g Tshe ring sgrol ma) believed that Ya ri A bsod died in the early twentieth century.
PRESENT-DAY SINGERS

The singers all grew up in pastoral areas and included four men and three women. All but one were born before 1951. The oldest singer was born ca. 1920. They all grew up in pastoral areas.

Before the 1980s, formal schooling was unavailable in these areas and monasteries were few and far between. Only the youngest consultant, born in 1976, had any formal schooling—six years of primary school. Two male consultants could recite Buddhist scriptures but were unable to read and write. The others were totally illiterate.

Pastoral life provides many opportunities to sing and practice songs. Herders sing to themselves and to other herders while herding, which allows them to memorize songs by listening and repeating them. Most singers traditionally learnt songs when they were ten to fifteen years of age. People typically begin herding when they are around eight years old. None of the singers were taught the songs. O skyid and Tshe ring sgrol ma from Mdzo dge both reported that they had heard the songs from their parents, who had heard them from Ya ri A bsod himself. None of the others learnt from family members, but from lyrics written by a literate religious practitioner, from an old reel-to-reel audio recording, and from other herders.

---

Gruschke (2001:81) reports that in pastoral areas of A mdo, nomads were served for a long time by mobile tent camp monasteries, with many of them being turned into domiciled monastic complexes, including adobe or brick structures, not earlier than during the 20th century.
CONSULTANTS

- Sbyin pa (male, b. 1947), Dngul ra Village, Rma chu County, a pastoralist who lived with his wife and two grandchildren, provided two songs, and information on Dngul ra Village (Ya ri A bsod's birth village).

- Chos rgyal (b. 1945), a herder from Rta bo Town, Rma chen County provided three songs and also told how Ya ri A bsod was shot and killed while stealing horses.

- Chos rgyal's son-in-law, Mchod rten (b. 1976), a professional singer famous for singing love songs (la ye) and rdung len (a modern musical genre, see below), provided one song and gave information about how Ya ri A bsod songs were learnt in the past from reel-to-reel tape.

- Rdo rje tshe ring (b. 1946), a pastoralist from A dban tshang Township, Rma chu County, provided one song and an alternative view on when Ya ri A bsod lived.

- Tshe ring sgrol ma (female, b. ca. 1920), a pastoralist from A skyid Village, A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County provided one song. Her mother met Ya ri A bsod.

- O skyid (b. 1949), a herder from A skyid Village, A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County, provided four songs, but was unable to provide biographical details about Ya ri A bsod.

- E kho (b. 1935), a pastoralist from A skyid Village, A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County provided three songs. Her mother met Ya ri A bsod.

- 'Jam dbyangs (male, b. ~1955), G.yang kho (female, b. •192•
ca. 1955), Sngags chen (male, b. ~1955), Kun 'brom (female, b. ~1930), and Bsam 'phel (male, b. ~1955) all from Rma chu County, provided details of Ya ri A bsod's life.

TRANSLATION NOTE

In the following examples, we have tried to produce translations accurately representing what was sung and to convey a sense of the poetics of Ya ri A bsod's lyrics. This proved challenging owing to the age of the singers and the resulting unclear pronunciation, mis-remembered lyrics, and occasional confusion regarding the ordering of lines and verses. Furthermore, the authors' unfamiliarity with the dialects used by the singers rendered the meaning of certain words and phrases inaccessible, despite consultation with members of those dialect communities. Closer consultation with the singers would have produced better translations. Nevertheless, presenting these unique materials with certain unclear passages and occasional awkward translations has great value.

GENRE

This collection of fifteen songs represents five genres. The composition and performance context for each genre is given. A sample song text is provided for each genre, and musical transcription is given for four of the five songs.

Robber Songs (jag glu)

The term jag glu is identical in both written Tibetan and oral A mdo Tibetan and literally means 'robber song'. Such songs
are composed and sung during night-time raids on livestock. If the raid goes awry, singing expresses the raiders' sorrow in an attempt to mollify the anguish felt and describe the negative situation. *Jag glu* are also sung in the hope that sympathetic parties might hear the song and come to the raider's assistance, and to bring luck.

These songs are also sung when children lose their livestock, when people are caught in storms and become wet and cold, and if livestock eat fodder saved for winter.

In the robber songs collected for this research, Ya ri A bsod sang about the situation he was in while being pursued by the owners of the horses he had just stolen. Two *jag glu* were collected. Both were sung by Chos rgyal in Rta bo Town, and relate to the same circumstance. One example is given below:

Example One

1. རྒྱུ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
2. ཀྲུ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
3. མཆོད་ཀྱི་ཁྱེར་ཁྲི་མི་ལྡན་མཛོད
4. མཆོད་ཀྱི་ཁྱེར་ཁྲི་མི་ལྡན་མཛོད
5. ལོ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
6. རྒྱུ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
7. འཐུ་བབ་བདུན་ལུགས་འཇུག་པ་འཚེ་
8. རྒྱུ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན

9. བྱིན་བཞི་བྲག་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
10. རྒྱུ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
11. རྒྱུ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
12. རྒྱུ་ཐེག་ཆོས་བྲེལ་འཕྲིན
The mountain pass is an eight-petaled lotus,
(And) the sky is a full blue lake.
The mountain is full of yaks,
(And at) the middle of the mountain is a lake full of butter.

(At) the edge of Bsang Valley,
When the beautifully multicolored horses are driven,
Beside the rde’u ‘bum on the pass,
The pursuers appear in a dark cloud of dust.

My mount is a small black bird,

26 The name of a river valley, whereabouts unknown.
27 A pile of mostly white stones used to subdue such local evils as gdon—an evil spirit.
(But) how could there be a horse like a bird?
(When) a black\(^{28}\) enemy arrives in front (of me),
The land (suddenly) folds (up) like (a) grey (piece of)
paper,\(^{29}\)
(And) the road rolls (up) like a ball of string.
Blasting and blasting like cannons on the upper pass,
If you look at the pursuers, they are as fast as birds.

I, Ya ri A bsod, am a tiger,
(But) how can there be a man like a tiger?
(When) a black enemy appears in front (of me),
My teeth chatter like thunderclaps,\(^{30}\)
(And) my eyes shine like lightning.\(^{31}\)
If you look at the pursuers, they are as fierce as tigers.

The gun on my shoulder is a thunderbolt,
(But) how can there be a gun like a thunderbolt?
The gunpowder (in the pursuers' guns) has been mixed
well,
(And) the metal bullets fall in rounds.
If you look at (the pursuers' guns), they are thunderbolts.

\(^{28}\) Black, as used here, suggests evil and bad luck.
\(^{29}\) Ya ri A bsod's pursuers are approaching so quickly that it seems as if the grey, paper-like grassland is folding up underneath them, hence shortening the distance and allowing the pursuers to travel very rapidly.
\(^{30}\) His teeth chatter because he is terrified.
\(^{31}\) His eyes are red (or pink, like lightning) because he is about to cry.
Persuasive Song (*kha 'bud pa'i glu*)

The oral Tibetan for persuasive song is *kha 'bud pa'i glu* and the written form is *kha twa slob gso'i glu*. *Kha 'bud pa'i glu* literally means 'persuasion song' and *kha twa slob gso'i glu* literally means 'guidance song'. Both terms refer to songs that persuade people to do the right things. O skyid, Mchod rten, and Chos rgyal sang three persuasive songs and are from Mgo log and Mdzo dge.

Elders compose persuasive songs and sing them to younger people. Teaching songs, or *khrid glu*, are a similar genre. Both genres attempt to educate the listener. However, when teaching songs are sung, the audience is unfamiliar with the content and context of the song. They listen carefully and willingly. However, when persuasive songs are sung, the audience is already familiar with the songs' content and context. These songs can be sung in any circumstance in which the singer wishes to guide or persuade listeners to do something, often against their wishes.

In the persuasive song below, Ya ri A bsod tries to persuade his lover to marry someone else, so that her parents would not be punished by the local leader:

---

32 Transcriptions do not include details of vocal nuance and ornament. They represent an average performance of all the verses in a song. The age of the singers and their lack of vocal control caused variability between verses. This made transcription difficult. In the case of one song (example four) transcribing an average rendering was impossible.
Example Two

1. དབུས་བོད་པ་བས་ཏེ།
2. གཞན་ཉིད་བོད་ལ་བྱེད།
3. ཕོ་མེད་བོད་ལ་བྱེད།
4. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།

5. དབུས་བོད་ལ་བྱེད།
6. རང་བར་བགས་བབས་བར་བལ།
7. ཉེས་པའི་འོང་བཞི་བཞི།
8. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།

9. དབུས་བོད་ལ་བྱེད།
10. རང་བར་བགས་བབས་བར་བལ།
11. དབུས་བོད་ལ་བྱེད།
12. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
13. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
14. དབུས་བོད་ལ་བྱེད།
15. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
16. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།

17. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
18. རང་བར་བགས་བབས་བར་བལ།
19. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
20. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།

21. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
22. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
23. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།
24. བོད་ལ་བས་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གཞིས་སོ།

•198•
1The colorful plateau's happiness,
2Has a relationship with the tree.33
3When you do not follow a good example, you cannot recall
   (this scene),
4(But) when you take the example of the Khri ka34 boy (you
   can recall it).

5The beautiful mirror-like ground,
6(Is) like dark brown silk spread out.
7When you do not follow the good example, you cannot recall
   (this scene),
8(But) when you take the example of the middle Tsha
   shur35 (you can recall it).

33 Meaning unclear.
34 An unknown location in Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous
   Prefecture, Qinghai Province.
35 An unknown location.
9Now (behold) the large, orderly village,
10Ya! (And) the six sons from each of the big camps.
11The old smoky tent,36
12(And) the Rnga ba37 leader's goat.
13The old goat at the back of the tent is large,
14(And) the large heaped piles are good.38
15The one who (sits) on the carpet of khu lang39 and kheb si,40
16(Sits) on the untainted lambskin (which is) inside the silk.41

17The back like six-jointed bamboo,42
18(is the back of) fifteen year-old Rnga bza' mtsho mo.43
19Your two grateful parents,
20You are like a walking stick for them.44

21Your bride-price45 is yellow gold,

36 Indicating that the fire always burns in the tent, and hence that the family is wealthy.
37 Rnga ba County, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province.
38 The large heaped piles refer to the leader's possessions along the sides of the tent. These piles and the large old goat suggest the leader's wealth.
39 Expensive black cotton cloth.
40 A small woolen carpet for important personages to sit on.
41 Lines fifteen and sixteen describe the Rnga ba leader sitting at the back of the tent.
42 The back is very straight and beautiful.
43 Ya ri A bsod's lover.
44 This expresses the importance of the daughter to her parents: they will rely on her when they are old.
Measured on a scale.
Your bride-price is white silver,
Stacked in a white box.

Your bride-price is an A mdo horse,
(That has been) tethered.
Your bride-price is white sheep,
(That have been) driven into the camp's yard.

Your two grateful parents,
(And your) happy colorful valley, Skong ser.

Rta mgrin mgon po, leader of Dbal shul,
(Rnga bza' mtsho mo) is surrendered to you.
(She) should make you (as) happy (as),
A young man in his finest clothes.

Transcription Two

Traditionally, the groom's family gives gifts to the bride's family. The amount and nature of the gifts are negotiated with the family by a matchmaker.

An unknown location. Apparently, two lines are missing from this verse.

The man to whom Rnga bza' mtsho mo was betrothed.

Praise Songs (Bstod glu)

The literary Tibetan and oral A mdo forms for praise song are both bstod glu 'praise song'. Three singers from Mdzo dge and one singer from Rma chu sang four songs praising religious persons, and mountain deities, respected people's horses, and leaders. A related genre, which is perhaps the direct opposite of the praise song, is smad glu 'cursing song', sung to insult others, in jest or in earnest.

Apart from the special occasions when these songs are sung to important personages, they might be sung to children who respect their elders, to women skilled at housework, and to men able to earn a good living.

Example Three

1. བྱུང་ཙུལ་བའི་དབྱིངས།
2. མདོ་པའི་བྱིངས།
3. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
4. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
5. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
6. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
7. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
8. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
9. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
10. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
11. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
12. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
13. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
14. བྱིན་པའི་བྱིངས།
1. All-knowing 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa,\(^{49}\)
2. There is nothing unknown to you.
3. It is impossible that there is something you do not know,
4. (Because) you have attained the level of a Bodhisattva.

5. You are the great Dam chen,\(^{50}\)
6. Belonging to the great northern Dge lugs pa grub thob.\(^{51}\)
7. Yang! Among the great monasteries,
8. Yang! A coral tree is planted.
9. Yang! Ten million monks assemble,
11. Your Dharma is as reliable as a sturdy pillar.

12. You have taken the fine road of enlightenment,
13. (And) the great Dharma has enlightened you.
15. Yang! (You were) born into the six realms of existence.\(^{52}\)

\(^{49}\) The founding reincarnation lineage at Bla brang Monastery.
\(^{50}\) A powerful male deity often depicted in Tibetan Buddhist dances.
\(^{51}\) A section of the Dge lugs sect of Tibetan Buddhism.
Yang! (For) the Chinese Emperor,
Yang! There is only one ultimate victory,
(But by) doing the work to attain happiness,
(You), the great son, eager for life,
Hold the fate of (all) mothers and sentient beings (in your hands).

Yang! Dam chen, King of the Afterlife,
You have three hundred and sixty attendants.
You are learned in the right spiraling Lam rim bde chen,
And the left spiraling Bka' thang srung ma.
Hold fast to the teachings and instructions!

Transcription Three

Prayer Song (bsod pa 'debs glu)

The literary Tibetan for prayer song is bsod 'debs glu, whereas the A mdo oral form is bsod pa 'debs glu. Both literally mean 'prayer song' and are sung to lamas and deities. O skyid, E kho, Sbyin pa, and Rdo rje tshe ring sang five

---

52 Gods, demi-gods, humans, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals.
53 Lines fifteen to nineteen compare the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa to the Chinese Emperor, stating that the latter has limited, worldly powers, while the former's powers are more extensive.
54 Both Lam rim bde chen and Bka' thang srung ma are Tibetan Buddhist scriptures.
prayer songs. Praise songs request assistance from authority indirectly while prayer songs beseech direct, immediate help. Three of the five prayer songs we recorded ask for children for a tribal leader and one is on behalf of a tribal leader—the Bzhag sdom leader's wife had absconded with a servant, and Ya ri A bsod sang a song wishing for her return. The final prayer song is for the safety and protection for Ya ri A bsod himself.

These songs are sung when people want children and when making daily bsang offerings.55

Example Four

1 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་།
2 སྐོད་སྐོབ་མཚོན་ལྟ་ལྡ།
3 སྐོད་སྐོབ་མཚོན་ལྟ་ལྡ།
4 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།

5 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།
6 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།
7 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།
8 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།

9 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།
10 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།
11 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།
12 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།

13 སྐོད་སྐོབ་འཕར་མ་ལྟ་ལྡ།

55 Bsang refers to conifer needles, barley flour, and sugar that are offered daily to local mountain deities.
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

•206•
1O! (At) the beautiful Mt. Nyin thang, 56  
2(The) twelve confederations 57 which disagree,  
3(If they) stay, discuss, and are agreeable,  
4This (will be) a prosperous place (for them) to herd livestock—calves and sheep.  

5(On) the central (land) which has arisen from the ocean,  
6O! (Is) the snow of one thousand horses. 58  
7(There) is seen the A mdo mare's mane,  
8(And) a small stallion is seen beside that.

56 A mountain in Mdzo dge County.  
57 A collection of tsho ba (cf. D'Ollone 1995 [1912]), see above.  
58 The horses are so numerous that they blanket the ground like snow.
9(On the) su ru-covered\(^{59}\) plateau, the homeland of the yak,
10(is) the holy mountain of the black yak.
11(There), the hair on the female yaks and the heifers quiver,
12(And) a small calf is seen beside them.

13The blue rocky slate mountain,
14(is) the holy mountain of the white sheep.
15(There), the sheep's wool vibrates as it bleats,
16(And) a lamb is seen beside it.

17(The action of) karma (is like) a proverb.\(^{60}\)
18(And having good) karma (is like having) the seven precious jewels.\(^{61}\)
19The lake of butter (has been) acquired,
20On the fifteenth day of summer's beginning.

21The great, capable,
22Ancestor bestowed the young man (upon us).
23When showing the result of three arrows
24The unhappy man must be happy.\(^{62}\)

25The holy mountain's top almost reaches,
26Dragons in the sky.
27(Your) voice is like a male dragon's,

\(^{59}\) A small bush, about one meter high, commonly used as fuel and found in high altitude areas, indicating good grass for grazing.

\(^{60}\) Like a proverb, karma follows its own logic.

\(^{61}\) They are the jewel, queen, horse, elephant, wheel, general, and minister and are often seen together on temple decorations and thang ka, and on such domestic items as bowls.

\(^{62}\) The exact meaning of this is unclear, but it may imply taking an oath. The complainant must respect the outcome.
26 (Because you are) the son of a small dragon.

29 When bringing a gift, show gratitude,
30 (To) the holy mountain-top on the beautiful plateau.
31 A wild yak lives on the plateau,
32 (And when) the wild yaks gather on the mountaintop,
33 The wild yak's son (is there with them).

34 When bringing a gift, show gratitude,
35 (To) the paradise forest on the holy mountain.
36 A tiger lives in that forest,
37 (And when the) beautiful red tiger comes out from his den,
38 Yang! (And) the striped back appears,
39 O! The beautiful red tiger's son (is there).

40 When bringing a gift, show gratitude,
41 O! (For the) leadership of the Thang lung leader,
42 Especially his leadership of his family.
43 O! (If) your protector deity follows you,
44 Then, wherever you (decide to) go, you can remain.64
45 Yang! Son like a thunderbolt the size of a wall.65
46 These words are the root.66

---

63 The Thang lung 'plain and valley' Tribe lives in contemporary Mdzogdge County, near Rma chu County.
64 People might not be able to stay in a new place if they have a bad relationship with the gzhi bdag (local owner deities) or with local people—this is particularly true of leaders. If people can stay wherever they go, it implies that they are capable and powerful.
65 The son is physically powerful.
66 This implies that the words are true, trustworthy, and meaningful.
Story Song (ma mo'i rnam thar)

A song that tells a story about people or animals is called ma mo'i rnam thar in oral A mdo and in literary Tibetan. O skyid sang in A skyid Village, recounting a ewe's difficult life—insects bite her and herders mistreat her. Ya ri A bsod composed such songs about people and animals, and sang them to both people and animals. Nowadays, such songs are sung to show sympathy to those experiencing misfortune.

Example Five

1. \( \text{བོད་ཕྲིད་སྣ་བཅོད་དེ} || \)
2. \( \text{ཤི་བྱ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} || \)
3. \( \text{ལྷོ་ལྟེ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་བལ་རུམ} || \)
4. \( \text{དྭ་ཤིག་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་བལ་རུམ} || \)
5. \( \text{ཨུ་བྱ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} || \)
6. \( \text{ཤི་བྱ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} \) 67
7. \( \text{བྲལ་ཅུ་པར་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} \)
8. \( \text{མུ་མོ་མྲ་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} \)
9. \( \text{འབྲས་སྤྱན་གྱིས་བྲེ་དེ} || \)
10. \( \text{དུས་ཐེ་ཁོ་བང་པེ་ཞི་ཞིག་པ} \) 67
11. \( \text{ཤི་བྱ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} \)
12. \( \text{ལྷོ་ལྟེ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་བལ་རུམ} \)
13. \( \text{དྭ་ཤིག་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་བལ་རུམ} \) 68
14. \( \text{ཨུ་བྱ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} \)
15. \( \text{མི་ལོ་དྲུག་པོ་ཞིག་པ་ཤིཝ} \)
16. \( \text{ནོར་བྱ་ཞིག་པ་ཤི་གསང་བཞི} \)

67 ཤི་བྱ་ཞིག་པ
68 རློ་ཞིག་པ
17. འི་དེ་གཤིག་པའི་གནང་གི་ཚོས་དུས།
18. རུ་ལི་ལོ་ཐོ་འདས་པ་གསུམ།
19. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
20. བོད་ཡུལ་ལྡན་ཀུན་པ་ལྷན་དཔེ་ནི་བཤད་པར་ན།
21. དད་ཤལ་བ་ཁྱད་ཀྱི་གྲོ་རྟེན།
22. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
23. དད་ཤལ་བ་ཁྱད་ཀྱི་གྲོ་རྟེན།
24. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
25. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
26. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
27. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
28. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
29. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།

30. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
31. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
32. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
33. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
34. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།

35. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
36. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
37. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
38. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
39. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།

40. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
41. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
42. དབང་ལུགས་བཞི་བདེ་རྩ་ནི།
43. གྷུན་ལེགས་ི་བཤིས་བཤད་པ།
44. ཁྲིད་བཤིས་བཤད་པ་དེ་བཤད་པ།
45. རྩོམ་ཱན་བཤད་པ་དེ་བཤད་པ།
46. ཁྲིད་བཤད་པ་དེ་བཤད་པ།
47. ཁྲིད་བཤད་པ་དེ་བཤད་པ།
48. ཁྲིད་གཏིང་།
49. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
50. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
51. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
52. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
53. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།

54. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
55. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
56. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
57. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
58. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
59. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
60. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
61. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
62. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།

63. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
64. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
65. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
66. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
67. གནས་སྐབས་གཏིང་།
1O! The white shepherdess (who) is a conch,
2(Her) cry is auspicious.
3Yang! In the first month of spring,
4As spring begins,
5(She) makes clothes from sheep wool,\textsuperscript{69}
6Gathers sheaves in the wheat (field and),
7Piles up cheese and butter (in the tent).
8Though she makes the work appear easy,
9Appearances can be deceptive.

10Between the fourth and fifth months, in summer,\textsuperscript{70}
11Grass and other plants wave (in the breeze).
12Black hair waves on the yaks,
13(As the) grass bears (their) black backs.
14Evil people claw at the (yaks') backs,
15(They) reach (out) and (they) take skin.
16(They) pour white silver (ornaments) into (her) lap,

\textsuperscript{69} Literally, 'The white sheep are the owner of the clothes' but here indicating that the woman cares for the sheep to get wool and make clothes.

\textsuperscript{70} A reference to the lunar calendar. Summer begins after the third lunar month; this line refers to the first two months of summer.
(And that is) another benefit she receives (from her labors).\(^71\)

Though she makes the work seem easy,

Appearances can be deceptive.

\(20\) Yang! In the first month of autumn,

\(21\) The ewe's back is fatty,

\(22\) (And) the much-loved lamb is inside the ewe.

\(23\) The fatty meat will fetch a high price,

\(24\) (And) the price of lambskins will increase.\(^72\)

\(25\) Hot water will be boiled on its back,\(^73\)

\(26\) (And) tying on the lambskin (will be) like (bestowing) a treasure.

Your leg is shaking and you have forgotten how to walk,

You don't know how to stay (because) your leg is shaking.\(^74\)

Wealth is difficult to create.

You won't know how to stay in the afterlife,

\(31\) (You are) the only spot on a beautiful bird,

\(32\) (And) you will not become old.

\(33\) You can't find her because she is in the afterlife.

\(34\) If you can't meet there, there's no helping you.

---

\(^71\) In addition to the piles of food described in the verse above.

\(^72\) Sheep are fattest in autumn, when they are slaughtered. After lambs are born, most male lambs are killed and their lambskins are sold. Lines twenty to twenty-four describe the potential wealth hidden in the pregnant ewe.

\(^73\) The lambskin makes the wearer, a male, warm enough to boil water with his body.

\(^74\) This may suggest that the ewe is afraid, aware that it must be killed for people to realize its potential wealth—fat, meat, and wool.
You won't know how to stay in the afterlife.
Coarse thread made from the beautiful wool,
(And) you will not become old.
You can't find her, she is in the afterlife.
If you can't meet there, there's no helping you.

(This is) the biography of the sad ewe.
Chant ma Ni\(^75\) for her.\(^76\)

When the starlight (had) faded, he returned,
Meeting his lover's uncle,
Who said, "Your arrival is good."
Actually his arrival was not good,
(And) the lover, like parents, was left behind.
The white silk hung like a trace.\(^77\)
(And) he, on the rectangular hub rdzas.\(^78\)
Yang! Gave the black metal key.
Inside the black metal pot he,
Yang! Boiled tasty tea.
Yang! Inside the white six-sided bowl he,
Yang! Poured milk and yogurt from the female yak.
On his Chinese plate,\(^79\)
A pile of food was placed,
Even though he didn't want to eat even three mouthfuls of food,

\(^75\) Buddhist mantras.
\(^76\) This appears to be the end of the song, but the singer continued, apparently grafting lyrics from a different song onto the same melody.
\(^77\) Here, the white silk is a kha btags, an auspicious white silk scarf. Kha btags are hung on a family gate when a girl elopes from her home.
\(^78\) A heated sleeping platform.
\(^79\) The correct translation would be 'Chinese soul', but it is clear that the singer is referring to a plate.
Even though he didn't want to drink even three mouthfuls of tea.
The man surrounded by people, Blows out blue smoke.
Smoking and smoking, he thinks, (And) takes nine steps in the morning.
(But) those nine steps (were actually) nine sighs.

The rivers' confluence, 
(Is the place where you) belong to the Bzhag sdom leader (who is) in the picture.
Beautifully born mother mdzo mo,80
Your birthplace is Smong ra.81

In the upper regions of your home place, 
The cuckoo sings in the fourth month of summer, 
(And) among the grass and the plants, 
The bees sing folk songs.

The mother's birthplace, Smong ra, 
Helps you recall this scene.

Unless you're a stupid donkey, don't forget (what I've said).

Transcription Four

--- 96

80 A female yak-cow hybrid, renowned for the quality of its milk.
81 An unknown location in Mdzo dge County.
LYRICAL AND MUSICAL FEATURES

Lyrical Features

Each line of verse in all the songs consists of seven syllables. The verses vary in length. Generally, all songs differ from the pattern used in both glu 'folksongs' and la ye 'love songs',\(^2\) adhering more to the freer form used in sgrung (narrative, see Namkhai Norbu (1995) for a description of the form).

The vocables yang, ya, da, and o occur in praise songs, prayer songs, and persuasive songs. Metaphors play an important role in robber and story songs. Below are three examples of metaphors used in the songs we recorded:

\[
\text{དབེན་པའི་བོན་པོ་རེ་}
\]
I, Ya ri A bsod, am a tiger

\[
\text{ནང་ཐེན་དག་ཐུབ་པོད་ཀྱི་མེ་}
\]
The place, Skong ser, is a lake of ghee

\[
\text{འོ! སྐྱེད་ིབས་དེ་ཽརེ་}
\]
O! The white shepherdess (who) is a conch

Similes occurred several times in robber, persuasive, and prayer songs, e.g.:

\[
\text{སྤོན་ཐེན་དེ་ནི་བོ་མོ་ནས་}
\]
How can there be a man like a tiger?

\[
\text{སྤོན་ཐེན་ཅི་ཤིང་གནམ་པོ་}
\]
The back which is like six-jointed bamboo

---

\(^2\) See Anton-Luca (2002) for descriptions of these genres.
Employing Kohn's (1997) summary of Stein's list of Tibetan literary devices, we note the use of spatial orientation, parallelism, split lines of verse, strong and evocative nature imagery, riddles, and repetition. The usage of such literary devices in the songs of Ya ri A bsod, as do many Tibetan oral traditions, blurs the distinction between oral and literary traditions.

Musical Features

The length of the collected songs varied between one and three and a half minutes. Robber songs were about ninety seconds long, persuasive songs ninety seconds long (one song lasted thirty seconds), prayer songs about two and half minutes long, and praise songs were about eighty seconds long. Finally, the single story song we recorded was three and a half minutes long. The form of each piece is strophic—the melody is repeated for each verse but lyrics change.

All the songs have a narrow dynamic range and narrow pitch range. Melisma is only present in robber songs. Grace ornamentation is employed in all the songs. Phrases are generally short and undulating, with some use of vibrato. All these songs were sung solo in a natural voice, without accompaniment.

Each tune uses a pentatonic (five pitch) scale. Vocal ornamentation alters some of the pitches, but the overall melodic line is almost the same in each verse. In addition to purposeful ornamentation, there were some changes in pitch, possibly due to the age of the singers or to the unaccompanied nature of the songs.

The meter of each song is mixed, with measures in duple time being predominant throughout. The meter is
adjusted at appropriate times to fit the syllables of each verse. The rhythms stay fairly regular throughout each verse. Hesitations in the rhythms are likely to be caused by breathing and memory lapses. There is often a pause before moving to the next verse. Tempos were regular throughout, except for these pauses.

Modern Adaptations of Ya ri A bsod

As noted above, a cassette of Ya ri A bsod music has been published, consisting of a single song, thirty-three and a half minutes long. It employs a narrow dynamic range and a narrow pitch range. It is sung solo with mandolin accompaniment. Grace ornamentation and vibrato are used and phrases are generally short and undulating.

This modern adaptation differs from traditional renderings. It is sung accompanied by a mandolin in the modern regional style of rdung len 83 and more grace ornaments and vibrato are evident than appear in the examples presented here, recorded from singers who were old and who no longer sing loudly with much melisma. The singer of the song in the cassette sang in a strained rather than a natural voice. On the cassette, stanzas varied between ten and sixty-six lines.

CONCLUSION

In an alternative version of the robber's song presented above, Ya ri A bsod, as he lies dying, sings, "I, Ya ri A bsod, am a dog." This powerfully reflects on a life of hardship: begging, stealing, itinerancy, homelessness, putting himself at the mercy of local leaders, and even convincing his own lover to

83 Rdung len is a modern style of Tibetan song from A mdo in which singers accompany themselves on the mandolin.
marry another man. Such is the picture of Ya ri A bsod's life that emerges from his songs and biography. This material not only casts light on this single tragic figure, but also provides a vivid, affective picture of Tibetan nomad life in the early twentieth century.

While noting that in a largely illiterate society, a large corpus of improvised songs, sung only once to limited audiences was likely to have vanished, the current moribund nature of this tradition is likely only to be exacerbated by the factors mentioned above. There is little chance that Ya ri A bsod's songs will survive in the local context for another decade, owing to changes associated with electricity, the mass media, and modern forms of transport. Privatization and resettlement also hamper continued transmission. Furthermore, modern attempts to preserve the work of Ya ri A bsod have involved modification. Ya ri A bsod's songs, and the way of life they described are already a quickly dimming memory.
REFERENCES

Anonymous, n.d. *Ya ri a bsod kyi snying gtam*, manuscript fragment.


APPENDIX ONE: TIBETAN TERMS

A
A dban tshang འདབ་ཐང, *place name
A mdo འདོོ, *place name
A skyid འསྡིག, *personal name

B
Bka’ thang srung ma བཀ་ཐང་སྲུང་མ་, *scripture name
Bla brang བླ་བྲང, *place name
bltas mdog med gi བླིས་མོད་མི་, '(he) doesn't look colorful'
Bsam 'phel བསམ་ཕེལ, *personal name
bsang བོན་, incense/ smoke offering
bsod 'debs glu བོས་དེབས་གྲུ་, prayer song (literary Tibetan)
bsod pa 'debs blu བོས་པ་དེབས་བྲུ, prayer song (oral A mdo Tibetan)
bstod glu བསྟོད་གྲུ་, praise song
'Bul བུལ, *place name
Bzhag sdom བཞེང་སྦོམ, *tribal name

C
Chos rgyal ཇོ་རྒྱལ, *personal name
Chos sgron ཇོ་སྒྲོན, *personal name

D
Dam chen ཆུང་, *deity's name
Dbal shul དབལ་ཤུལ, *tribal/ place name
dge bshes དགའ་བོས, highly learned Tibetan Buddhist scholar/ monk
Dkon mchog tshe ring དཀོན་མཆོག་ཚེ་རིང, *personal name
Dngul ra འངུལ་ར།, *place name
Dpa' rtse rgyal དཔའ་རྒྱུས་རྒྱལ, *personal name

•223•
*dpön po* རྡོོན་པོ།, leader

E

E kho རྡོོན་མ།, *personal name

G

G. yang kho རྡོོན་པ།, *personal name

Gdon རྡོོན་མ།, evil spirit

gzhi bdag རྡོོན་པ།, territorial deity

H

*hub rdzas* རྡོོན་པ།, heated sleeping platform

J

*jag glu* རྡོོན་པ།, robber's song

'Jam dbyangs རྡོོན་པ།, *personal name

'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa རྡོོན་པ།, *title/ rank

K

Kan lho རྡོོན་མ།, *place name

kha 'bud pa'i glu རྡོོན་པ།, persuasive song (oral A mdo Tibetan)

kha twa slob gso'i glu རྡོོན་པ།, persuasive song (literary Tibetan)

kheb si རྡོོན་མ།, an expensive carpet

khri dpon རྡོོན་པ།, leader of 10,000 (households)

Khri ka རྡོོན་མ།, *place name

khrid glu རྡོོན་པ།, teaching song

khu lang རྡོོན་མ།, expensive cloth

khyim tshang རྡོོན་མ།, family/ home

Kun 'brom རྡོོན་མ།, *personal name

L

*la ye* རྡོོན་མ།, love song (oral A mdo Tibetan)

Lam rim bde chen རྡོོན་པ།, *scripture name

•224•
Ma mo'i rnam thar ཆུང་མོ་ལྨ་ཞྲ་, The Ewe's Biography 
ma Ni མ་ཉི།, Buddhist Sanskrit chant
Mchod rten གྲོང་ཐོན་, *personal name
Mdzo dge མདྱོ་ནས་, *place name
mdzo mo མདྱོ་ཐོ་, female yak/ cow hybrid
mgo ba བྲག་པ།, headman
Mgo log བློ་ལོང་།, *place name
mgur glu ཨཧཱུ་, song of spiritual realization

Nyin thang རྒྱུན་ཐང་།, *place name

O skyid བློ་སྐྱུད་, *personal name

Pag mo bkra shis བྲག་མོ་བསྡེ་བསྡེ།, *personal name

rde'u 'bum རྡེ་འུ་ིི་ོམ་, protective pile of white stones
Rdo red རོ་རེད།, *personal name
Rdo rje tshe ring རོ་རེ་ཚེ་རིང་།, *personal name
rdung len རྡུང་ལེན།, Tibetan mandolin music
Reb gong རྡེ་བོང་།, *place name
rgan po རྗུན་པོ།, elder
rgyal po རྒྱལ་པོ།, king
Rma chen རྫམ་ཆེན།, *place name
Rma chu རྫམ་ཆུ།, *place name
Rma lho རྫམ་ལྷོ།, *place name
Rnga ba རྡང་བ།, *place name
Rnga bza' mtsho mo རྡང་བཟས་མཚོ་མའི།, *personal name
Rta bo རྐྱ་བོ།, *place name
Rta mgrin mgon po རྒྱུན་མོང་ལྡག་པོ།, *personal name
Ru skor, camp

S
Sbyin pa, *personal name
sde ba, village
sde dpon, village leader
Sgrol ma 'tsho, *personal name
Sgrung, narrative
Sha bo don sgrub rdo rje, *personal name
Skal dbang skyid, *personal name
Skong ser, *place name
smad glu, cursing song
Smongs ra, *place name
Sngags chen, *personal name
stong dpon, leader of 1,000 (households)
su ru, a bush found on the Tibetan Plateau

T
thang kha, two dimensional Tibetan religious image
usually painted on cloth
Thang lung, *tribal/ place name
Tsha shur, *place name
Tshe ring sgrol ma, *personal name
tsho ba, clan/ tribe
tsho dpon, clan/ tribal leader

Y
Ya ri A bsod, *personal name
Ya ri A bsod kyi snying gtam, Ya ri
A bsod's Heart Speech

Z
Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *personal name

•226•
APPENDIX TWO: YA RI A BSOD'S HEART SPEECH CASSETTE

Cassette front with Rdo red in the inset and, supposedly, Ya ri A bsod.
B. Cassette back, showing Rdo red.
APPENDIX THREE: MAP AND LOCATIONS

Map of the Study Area (adapted from www.thdl.org)

Machen = Rma chen
Machu = Rma chua
Ngawa = Rnga ba

Xiahe = Bla brang
Zolgi = Mdzo dge
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Prefecture</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gansu</td>
<td>Kan lho</td>
<td>Rma chu</td>
<td>Dngul ra</td>
<td>Dngul ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A dban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tshang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>Mgo log</td>
<td>Rma lho</td>
<td>Rta bo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>青海</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Henan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>河南</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reb gong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>Rnga ba</td>
<td>Mdzo dge</td>
<td>A skyid</td>
<td>A skyid 'bul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>四川</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hongyuan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rnga ba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>