

AN A MDO TIBETAN PASTORALIST FAMILY'S LO SAR  
IN STONG SKOR VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a single family's preparations and celebrations for the 2010 Tibetan Lo sar 'New Year' in Stong skor Village, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, PR China. It then compares the findings with other studies of Lo sar practices, and calls for more descriptive areal studies.

KEYWORDS

Lo sar, Mang ra, pastoral life, social and cultural change

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

*Lo sar* 'New Year',<sup>2</sup> is an important and highly anticipated part of the lunar calendar across the Tibetan Plateau. It is a time for visitation, eating, and spending time with family. It is also a time when such major lifecycle events as birthdays<sup>3</sup> and weddings are celebrated. As such, the Tibetan New Year period and the associated preparations are a rich repository of local folk practices and beliefs. Remarkably, however, a number of articles about *Lo sar* practices generalize about Tibetan practices regardless of differences across even small geographic areas and mostly focus on festival customs in agricultural areas (Duncan 1964, Tsepak Rigzin 2003, Tsering Bum et al. 2008, Dpal ldan bkra shis and Stuart 2009). Furthermore, although some scholars have recently begun to draw a distinction between pastoral and agricultural festival practices (Tshe brtan rgyal 2010 and Gcan tsha bkra b+ho 2011), their work tends to be prescriptive, providing – almost in list form – brief descriptions of general practices that pastoral or agricultural communities observe as part of their *Lo sar* traditions.

While the general practices described in many of these studies discuss practices found across a number of regions (Tshe brtan rgyal 2010 and Gcan tsha bkra b+ho 2011), it is in details that differences emerge, providing significant insight into fundamental differences between the lives of Tibetan farmers and herders, and shedding light on the strong influence of government policies on the fabric of Tibetan life. Details also show how certain traditionally accepted social divisions employed by anthropologists inadequately describe

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<sup>2</sup> Most areas of A mdo follow the Chinese lunar calendar (known locally as the *nong li* 'agricultural calendar'), and often refer to the Julian New Year as *rgya lo* 'the Chinese calendar'. Many areas of Khams and Dbus gtsang use the Tibetan calendar set by astrologers in Lhasa. In 2010, both calendars set the New Year on 14 February.

<sup>3</sup> Birthdays are not annual celebrations. Age in Stong skor Village is counted with the passing of each *Lo sar*, and only major landmarks are celebrated, particularly for the third and eightieth years.

the diversity of practices within these same areas. This article advocates a localized and descriptive ethnography, cognizant of the unique confluences of historical, political, and social factors that continue to affect traditions and daily lives.<sup>4</sup> We recognize that, since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, pastoral and agricultural dialectics, and even regional distinctions, are insufficient for understanding Tibetan cultural variation in the early twenty-first century. In the case of Stong skor Village, certain key factors include, but are not limited to, the area's traditional herding economic base, the political upheaval of the last sixty years, and historical migration patterns.

We describe a Buddhist family's Lo sar in a predominantly Bon village<sup>5</sup> by detailing the village's history and the family's daily routine for household work, Lo sar preparations, the actual day of Lo sar, and describing the events of the first fifteen days. In doing so, we address issues of social change in the A mdo Tibetan cultural region,<sup>6</sup> and ultimately confront the ways in which the nuances of Tibetan culture are often overlooked in scholarly contexts. A secondary goal is to continue the work already begun by Tsering Bum et al. (2008), and contribute to an increasing body of literature problematizing scholarship that focuses on cultural generalizations for Tibetans living across an enormous geographic area, engaged in vastly differing lifestyles and in some cases, practicing different religions as well (Rin chen rdo rje and Stuart 2009:250).

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the internal diversity of the Tibetan Plateau area, see Roche et al. (2010) and Makley (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Bon is a religious tradition in Tibet with ostensibly pre-Buddhist influences, although its current practice shows many similarities with Tibetan Buddhism (Tucci 1980:213-248 and Kvaerne 1995).

<sup>6</sup> A mdo is one of three major Tibetan cultural regions and refers to northern and northeastern Tibetan regions of China. Dbus gtsang refers to most of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), while Khams is composed of eastern Tibetan regions in China including the Chab mdo Region of the TAR, as well as parts of Sichuan, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces.

## INTRODUCTION TO STONG SKOR VILLAGE

Stong skor Village is a cluster of natural villages in the proximity of Mgo mang (Ch: Guomaying) Township, Mang ra (Ch: Guinan) County,<sup>7</sup> Mtsho lho (Ch: Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Ch: Qinghai) Province. It is located west of the township town and south of a desert of rolling dunes, and is accessed by a forty-minute car ride on mostly unpaved roads. The village is composed entirely of Tibetans, although several Han Chinese villages are interspersed throughout the area. Hui Muslims also live in many Tibetan areas, but there are none in Stong skor and only a few in the whole of Mgo mang Township.

Stong skor Village contains six herding *tsho ba* 'clans' originally from a region known as Stong che in present-day Khri ka (Ch: Guide) County, to the east of Mang ra. Stong che is historically a stronghold of the Bon religion (Tsering Thar 2008). Five of Stong skor's six *tsho ba* follow Bon; only the U Sin Clan practices Buddhism. The name U Sin is Mongol, and refers to the place where the original two families of the clan lived. The six clans of the 'Brog ru 'Nomad Tribe' migrated from the Stong che area over 200 years ago, and, according to local informants, eventually arrived in present-day Stong skor.

Mongols previously inhabited the area in which the present-day village of Stong skor is located; to this date, many local toponyms are Mongol and not Tibetan.<sup>8</sup> Although the Mongols had already left prior to the arrival of the Stong skor villagers' descendants and are not part of the village's experience, local elders in nearby villages continue to tell stories of conflicts with Mongols. Bands of Kazakh thieves fleeing persecution in Xinjiang roamed the area as recently as the mid-twentieth century, but have also since left.

After Stong skor came under the control of the central government in the late 1950s, the land on which Stong skor was located became part of a large military horse-breeding farm. Never a

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<sup>7</sup> The official county name is Kos nan, a transliteration of the Chinese term 'Guinan'. In this article, the locally preferred toponym Mang ra is used.

<sup>8</sup> See Janhunen 2011 for more on Mongol toponyms in Tibetan areas (particularly Mang ra County).

part of the Mgo mang or Mang ra County government lands, it has more recently become a part of the Guinan caoye kaifa youxian zeren gongsi 'The Guinan Grassland Development Limited Liability Corporation'. In 2000, the company began reforestation work to combat desertification. In 2010, the company rented land from the village on an annual basis, and also employed a number of locals for salaried reforestation work.

The name of the adjacent township, Mgo mang 'many heads', refers to the numerous springs in the area, a reason why the area was chosen as a breeding ground for military horses. This, in turn, encouraged the government to relocate many Han Chinese families to the area. The children and grandchildren of these original Han Chinese immigrants now live in villages named after the horse teams (Ch: *ma dui*) who originally worked there. Six such villages are now interspersed within the Stong skor Village territory. There are a total of eleven *ma dui* within the corporation's district.

During the mid-1990s, grassland privatization policies drastically altered the fabric of daily life in Stong skor.<sup>9</sup> Prior to this time, people lived in black yak-hair tents (T: *sbra nag*) throughout the year. Villagers now live in these traditional dwellings only during the year's four warmest months. During other months, they live in houses made of packed earth walls. Electricity reached these areas during the 1990s in the form of solar generators; power lines reached the area in 2008.

In 2010, Stong skor villagers lived in adobe houses in yards enclosed by walls approximately three meters high made of the same material. Most rooms in the house had concrete or brick floors, and the main rooms often had both a metal dung-burning stove and a *hedzee*.<sup>10</sup> Most houses had a television placed opposite the *hedzee*.

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<sup>9</sup> For a more systematic discussion of the changes implemented in Qinghai, with specific reference to Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and their accompanying environmental impacts, see Goldstein and Beall (2002:131-150). For a discussion of other areas of Qinghai, including grassland policy in Mang ra, see Mgon po tshe ring (2012).

<sup>10</sup> *Hedzee* is a colloquial term corresponding to the Chinese *kang*, the sleeping platform in the main room of a Tibetan fixed-dwelling home. Smoke is funneled beneath the platform from a stove before leaving the home, heating the platform in the winter.

Almost every Stong skor family subsisted by herding. Most men also worked for the local reforestation company during the summer but were free during the winter months. Salaries were over 1,000 RMB/ month, including the winter months. Additionally, every villager received a portion of the money that the company paid to the village as compensation for the communal grazing land that the company used. There was little out-migration because of this income, and few villagers (if any) relied on migrant labor to supplement their income.

The influx of many modern conveniences and the construction of fixed dwellings has changed traditional ways of obtaining wealth as people have responded to privatization and the opportunities provided in the Tibetan Plateau's new economy (Goldstein et al. 2008 and Bauer et al. 2010). In what was once all communal grassland, every family has been allotted a parcel of land based on family size. This family land has become winter pasture and the village's remaining lands are now communal summer pasture.

Winter pastures are now all fenced.<sup>11</sup> With limitations on land, families have sold many of their less profitable animals such as goats and yaks in order to maximize their allotted space. Herd sizes are reported to be less than one-third of their size prior to privatization. Whereas herd sizes were once used to judge family wealth, families now evaluate wealth in relation to income based on the salaries many villagers currently derive from the re-forestation company.

Finally, the privatization of previously public grassland has seen an increasing emphasis on education. Since families frequently lack the land to continuously divide their holdings evenly between their children, children are being encouraged to concentrate on their studies, with the ultimate aim of obtaining a lifetime, government job with a regular salary, which is seen as an additional way of ensuring their future livelihoods in the face of land restrictions.

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<sup>11</sup> For more on grassland privatization and enclosure movements in Guinan, see Mgon po tshe ring (2012).

WINTER LIFE IN STONG SKOR PRIOR TO LO SAR

Throughout January and February of 2010, we lived in the home of Mkhar 'bum rgyal (b. 1980), his wife Ko la (b. 1977), and their three children – Tshe dbang skyid (b. 1998), Nor bu 'bum (b. 1999), and Dka' thub tshe ring (b. 2000), where we observed the daily routine of winter life, and preparations for Lo sar and related festivities. Prior to the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month, and throughout the preparations for the New Year and the New Year period itself, Stong skor villagers engage in various herding activities. This section describes the family's winter routine framing the Lo sar period, providing insight into the division of labor and different people's roles.

During the winter, the day generally began between six-thirty and seven a.m. when Ko la got up, turned on the home's electric lights, made a fire in the main stove, and swept the floor. Afterwards, she poured fresh water into copper bowls, lit the butter lamps in front of the *mchod khang* 'family shrine', and set out offering bowls of fresh water; performed 108 prostrations in front of the shrine; and washed her face, hands, and occasionally her hair. Following this, she woke her daughter and later the sons. Finally she roused her husband, and (in our case) guests.

Between eight-thirty and nine o'clock, Ko la prepared a breakfast of *ja bsus*, made of *rtsam pa*,<sup>12</sup> butter, cheese, and milk tea. People drank most of the milk tea and mixed the powdered ingredients into a paste with their ring fingers. They then scooped the paste into their mouths with their ring finger. After they finished eating, an additional cup of tea was often drunk with bread. People generally ate homemade bread that was either baked outside the home in piles of smoldering ash or fried in canola oil. As the New Year neared, and throughout the New Year period, special red bread (see below) was served in its place. Bread that had begun to go stale was often dipped in milk tea before it was eaten.

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<sup>12</sup> *Rtsam pa* may refer to both roasted barley flour and the dough made from kneading barley flour, hot tea, butter, and dried cheese. Occasionally sugar and other ingredients may be added.

Everyone helped with the morning herding after breakfast. The rams were sent to the proper pasture: prior to the New Year, they were sent to pasture on the same side of the road bisecting the family's land as the house; after the New Year, they were sent across the road with the ewes where there was better grass. In 2010, the family had approximately 150 rams, 120 ewes, seventy lambs, sixteen cows, one *mdzo mo* (a female, yak-cow hybrid), three horses, and two dozen goats.

Ewes give birth in winter, and the herd had many weak mothers and newborns during this period, which were separated from the flock with their young early in the morning and fed a mixture of hay and canola seeds. The remaining ewes and goats were sent out to pasture without receiving fodder. The cows were then milked and, afterwards, hay was put out for them to eat during the day. Families that owned horses also put out hay for them, and children then fed hay to the cows and *mdzo mo*. Once every three days, all sheep were driven to a spring located approximately three kilometers away, called Mo khor, a Mongol name that locals say refers to a valley originating in a cliff or other steep declivity. About four hours is required for a round trip. Cows went to a well at one of the nearby *ma dui* villages for water every other day. If the family did not need water at that time, the cows were allowed to go of their own accord. Either Ko la or one of the children drove them back in the afternoon. These activities constituted the household's morning routine during winter.

Following the morning's herding, it was common for village men to gather in one of the Chinese villages and play mahjong (Ch: *majiang*, T: *ma cAng*), a locally popular card game similar to *teen patti*, or billiards. Many men also drank alcohol during this time. Drinks of choice included Yellow River Barley-flavored Beer (Ch: *Huang he qingke pijiu*), and a clear liquor distilled from barley or sorghum, depending on its origin, and locally referred to as either *chang* (in Tibetan) or *lajiu* (in Qinghai dialect). The most popular and cheapest drinks are sorghum-based liquors distilled in Sichuan Province, including *Liu fu ren jia*, which cost twelve to eighteen RMB per bottle in 2010.

The government recently had begun cracking down on gambling, making occasional raids and imposing fines of 500–1,000 RMB. Any gambling done in the open (largely the billiards) was done without money publicly exchanging hands. Instead, a system whereby playing cards were used like casino chips in lieu of money was created to elude officials.

While her children played in the pastures and kept watch for foxes that might attack weaker herd members, Ko la fetched water from one of the local *ma dui*, washed and mended clothing, prepared food, repaired punctured tires on the water cart, and collected dung to fuel their stove as the need arose. She had few free moments.

Stong skor's primary school taught the first and second grades. Students then went to the township town for further elementary school education. Students were on a schedule of twenty days of study and then eight days at home. Middle and senior middle school students boarded and attended classes in the county town, or in Chab cha (Ch: Gonghe), the capital of Mtsho lho Prefecture. When children returned home, their parents assigned them duties related to animal husbandry such as feeding cows and newborn lambs; birthing ewes; driving animals to Mo khor Spring, and watching animals in the pasture. In 2010, the school had a winter vacation beginning in late December and ending 4 March, after the completion of the fifteen-day Lo sar period. Students were assigned Tibetan, Chinese, and math homework to complete during the vacation.

Sheep and cows mostly returned to their enclosures of their own accord in the evening. Rams were kept in a pen that was dug into the ground, as were the bulls, whose nose-rings were tied to cords pegged to the ground. The *ma mo* 'ewes', their lambs, and the goats were kept in an aboveground enclosure with adobe walls about two meters high with a wooden gate. At around five p.m., food made from barley flour and boiling water mixed together and squeezed into pellets was prepared for the ewes, cows, and their young. Larger pellets were given to the cows, and smaller pellets were fed to the ewes. Nursing cows did not spend the night in an enclosure, but were instead given hay and stayed outside. Calves were kept in a small adobe enclosure protecting them from the cold and wind, and also

preventing them from nursing during the night, thereby ensuring that there would be milk the following morning.

Evening work was usually completed by eight p.m., and everyone went inside to watch television. The preferred programs were on the Qinghai Tibetan-language Television (T: Mtsho sngon bod skad brnyan 'phrin), and included the news, Chinese television series dubbed into the Tibetan A mdo dialect, such as *The Journey to the West* (Ch: *Xiyouji*, T: *nub phyogs su bskyod pa'i zin tho*), *The Plateau* (Ch: *Gaodi*, T: *mtho sa*), and other shows ranging from costume dramas (Ch: *guzhuang ju*) and city dramas (Ch: *dushi ju*) to programs about the Chinese Civil War and Tibetan-produced films. As the New Year drew near, and throughout the New Year period, the station re-aired previous Tibetan New Year variety shows similar to China Central Television's (CCTV) annual New Year's variety show (Ch: *Chunjie wanhui*) that has become a staple of Chinese television. These programs served to reproduce a particular image of Tibetan culture for viewers, emphasizing singing, dancing, and traditional clothing as important ethnic markers. Oftentimes, however, the television performers' clothing was radically different from what local Tibetans actually wore. Dancing of any sort – often portrayed as pan-Tibetan (Morcom 2007) – was not part of Stong skor villagers' traditional folk practice.

While men and boys watched television, women and girls prepared dinner, which generally consisted of hand-pulled square noodles (Ch: *mianpian*, T: *'then thug*) cooked in mutton or beef broth. A small amount of meat was first fried in a pan, and water was added to create the broth. The noodles were made from dough consisting of water and wheat flour that was rolled flat, coated with canola oil on both sides, and then cut into long strips. As the broth heated, the strips were flattened by hand and two or three people pulled bits off with their thumb and forefinger, flinging them directly into the broth. When guests were present, large amounts of mutton were boiled in the same broth and made available first to the guests and then to family members. Adult males and guests ate first, while children and women ate later. Lights were off and people were in bed by ten-thirty p.m. on most nights.

## LO SAR PREPARATIONS

Excitement about Lo sar began building on the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month. With only fifteen days until the New Year, children began talking about the coming event, and adults began making preparations in earnest. Many of the family's Lo sar-related food and clothing purchases had been made well in advance, and this last half-month was used for any remaining preparations.

### Cleaning

This section discusses the role of cleaning, food preparation, and religious practices in relation to creating the physical and ritual cleanliness necessary to ensure a successful New Year, and how it connects to Tibetan economies of fortune (Da Col 2007 and Sa mtsho skyid and Roche 2011) based on traditional ideas of purity.

While sweeping the floor was part of Ko la's daily routine, the nineteenth and twentieth days of the twelfth lunar month were reserved for cleaning the house's walls and ceiling. In 2010, Mkhar 'bum rgyal's family cleaned their home on the nineteenth. Family members moved all the furniture outside the house. The items that could not be removed were covered with cloth. Ko la then took a broom made from a yak's tail and swept the ceiling and walls. The floor was swept after the dust had settled from the ceiling. Furniture and belongings that had been moved out of the house were then dusted and put back in the house. Next, the windows were washed inside and out, and window curtains were also cleaned. We were told that windows and curtains may be washed on days other than the nineteenth and twenty-ninth.

Dirty clothing is washed prior to the New Year on days with fair weather. In 2010, the weather permitted such clothes to be washed on the sixteenth and twenty-eighth days of the twelfth lunar month. Mkhar 'bum rgyal's family owned an electric washing machine, although Ko la had to fetch extra water from the local Chinese villages on their horse-drawn water cart to supply the machine. A special trip was made specifically for this purpose. Most

modern clothes were washed in the washing machine, while Tibetan robes were washed by hand in a trough using a washboard because they were too heavy for the machine. Socks and underpants were washed by hand because they were considered impure and unfit to wash with other clothing. Clothes were then placed on drying lines in the sunniest spot of the yard.

These cleaning practices reflect the belief that everything should be new and clean for the coming New Year, including clothes. Informants suggested that in the past, men shaved their heads before the New Year to ensure that they took as little as possible from *lo rnying* 'the old year' into the new one.

### Red Bread

*Go dmar* 'red bread' is named for its reddish-brown color and is an important Lo sar food. It is considered a local delicacy, and is only made for festive occasions. In 2010, locals commonly baked bread in covered pots that were placed in piles of smoldering ash from burnt cow, sheep, or goat dung. Red bread, however, is deep-fried.

Three types of dough are used to make red bread. The first, *go re sog sog*, uses a dough made from flour, water, salt, ground prickly ash, sugar, and chives. The dough is rolled into a long, thin unbroken rope about a quarter of a centimeter in diameter, and then coated with rapeseed oil. It is then coiled so that it resembles a rope and placed on a plate. The person in charge of the frying uses chopsticks on the insides of the coils, places the dough in hot oil (see Figure One), and holds the chopsticks in the oil until the dough comes off by itself. Metal tongs are then used to remove cooked bread from the oil, and hold it over the pot to ensure excess oil drips back into the pot.

The second form of red bread is *go re bsles ma* 'braided bread'. The dough for *go re bsles ma* is made of flour, water, and sugar. It is made into two long cylinders of equal length, between half a centimeter and one centimeter in diameter. The two strips are placed cross-wise, braided together, placed in the oil, and deep-fried until reddish-brown. The dough for this bread is also used to create

*rgyal bo* 'kings', flower-shaped bread that is pierced in the middle.<sup>13</sup> *Rgyal bo* were historically made for every person in the family and also offered as gifts when visiting other families. Though *rgyal bo* are still made for individual family members, people no longer use *rgyal bo* as gifts, but instead offer tea bricks, jars of fruit (Ch: *guan tou*), and bottles of liquor.

The final type of red bread is known simply as *go re dmar ro* 'red bread'. The dough is made from flour, water, and baking soda, rolled very flat, and cut into ten-centimeter-wide rectangles. An incision is then made in the middle of the dough, and one end is folded through the slit with the final shape resembling a bowtie. These are also fried. This final type of red bread is the most common.



FIGURE 1. Sgrol ma uses chopsticks to put uncooked *go re sog sog* in oil.

Female family members collect dead wood from the communal area around Mo khor Spring several days prior to cooking red bread. Though cow and sheep dung are normally used for most

<sup>13</sup> See 'Brug mo skyid et al. (2010) for more on the use of *rgyal bo* in neighboring Khri ka County.

cooking, wood is used on this day because wood burns hotter and thus is deemed a better fuel for making red bread.

On the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth lunar month (9 February 2010), Ko la rose earlier than usual to prepare the dough. The three kinds of dough were then stored separately and covered with plastic to retain moisture. After completing their morning routines, three women from two neighbor families gathered to help prepare the large amount of red bread necessary to ensure a successful Lo sar. The three women who helped were Mkhari 'bum rgyal's mother, Sgrol ma; his sister-in-law; and a cousin. Men rarely participate in making any sort of bread, including *go re dmar ro*.

At one point during the bread-making process, children came in and made much noise, causing the oldest woman in the group – Sgrol ma – to comment on several taboos related to the making of red bread that were no longer observed. The first was that the door or tent flap should always be kept closed, no matter how hot or smoky it was inside. The second was that silence should be kept while making red-bread in fear that the noise would keep the oil from boiling, and the bread would not achieve the desired red color. A corollary to this taboo was that children were strictly forbidden from taking part in the process, as they were likely to make too much noise. Thirdly, the oil was not to be called *snum* 'oil', but *chu* 'water'. She explained that people lacked oil, and making red bread put a significant strain on the family's resources in the past. By calling it water, then, people felt they were using less of their wealth.

In total, approximately twenty-five kilograms of flour were used in this process. As the afternoon wore on, the piles of completed bread rose ever higher on a plastic sheet that had been cleaned and placed on the ground (Figure Two). When the process was nearly complete, Ko la prepared a meal of mutton, a soup made from rice-based 'glass noodles' (Ch: *fen tiao*), and freshly made red bread, which the helpers and host family then ate. On ensuing days, Ko la visited the helpers and the process was repeated at their homes.



FIGURE 2. Three different kinds of red bread are placed on a plastic sheet on the ground at the end of the day.

## Dumplings

Steamed stuffed dumplings, locally called *tshod ma*, are another common Lo sar food. While normal dumplings may be as large as a small fist and employ a variety of fillings, dumplings prepared for Lo sar should be about four centimeters in diameter and stuffed with minced mutton and chives. The wraps are made from dough composed of water and wheat flour, rolled into a long cylinder approximately three to four centimeters in diameter, and then pieces are cut off and flattened with a rolling pin. A small amount of filling is placed in the middle of the dough (Figure Three), and then the fingers are used to close the tops by pinching bits of dough together, moving in a circular motion.

Both men and women helped make these dumplings in 2010. The process was slow. Many dumplings were needed for the Lo sar period. The family worked several consecutive evenings before having enough. Children were not asked to help in Mkharr 'bum rgyal's home. The dumplings were then frozen in the family's electric freezer during

the daytime, and boiled in a soup of mutton, vegetables, and either *'then thug* or glass noodles. These are an important part of the *dgu rgyag* custom (described below) and are also served in meals throughout the Lo sar period.



FIGURE 3. Mkhar 'bum rgyal helps make New Year dumplings.

## Retreat

Mkhar 'bum rgyal's father, Lcags thar 'bum, entered into a seven-day religious retreat in his home beginning on the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month (29 January 2010). He stayed in his room reciting scriptures, spinning a prayer wheel, and meditating during this period. While in retreat, access to Lcags thar 'bum's home was restricted to family members and a few select guests. Lcags thar 'bum placed a pile of small stones outside the family's yard, one for each person who was permitted to enter the home at that time. This practice is not specifically associated with the New Year. Lcags thar 'bum performs this retreat annually, as a result of a vow he once made to a *bla ma*.

## Burning *bsang*

Conch shells echo across the grassland at around six in the evening on Lo sar eve as males of each household go to *bsang khri* 'altars' near their homes and burn *bsang*.<sup>14</sup> Although *bsang* is burned inside the family yard almost every morning, this evening's offering has added significance. The male household head burns *bsang* and pours liquor on the fire (Figure Four), then circumambulates the altar and prayer flags, chanting and throwing *rlung rta* 'wind horses' high into the night sky.<sup>15</sup> He, or another male family member, then blows a conch shell several times. Children gather several meters away around a piece of smoldering dung taken from the original sacrificial fire and use it to light fireworks. This continues each night for about a week into the New Year, although families who own racehorses may also perform this ritual the day before a race in the hope of receiving the deities' favor.

On the twenty-ninth day of the twelfth lunar month (12 February 2010), a big meal consisting of soup made with Lo sar dumplings was enjoyed. The twenty-ninth is a day for eating one's fill. As in other Tibetan areas there is a tale suggesting that Gshin rje chos rgyal, the Lord of Death and King of Dmyal ba<sup>16</sup> comes and weighs every person. A heavier weight is said to reflect or ensure good fortune in the coming year.<sup>17</sup> While some areas, including A mdo County in the Tibet Autonomous Region's Nagchu Prefecture (Wan de khar 2002-3:92), eat a special dish on this day called *dgu thug*, Stong skor residents do not eat such noodles, instead believing that it is most important to eat a very good meal on the evening of the twenty-ninth and be very full.

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<sup>14</sup> *Bsang* is "fumigation using aromatic and perfumed herbs" (Tucci 1980:200). Most fumigation in Stong skor involves juniper but, prior to and during Lo sar, Stong skor residents also offer alcohol and barley flour to deities.

<sup>15</sup> A *rlung rta* 'wind horse' is a small square piece of paper with a picture of a horse bearing a wish-fulfilling gem printed in the center, and a tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon in the four corners.

<sup>16</sup> Dmyal ba = the hell realm of the Lord of Death.

<sup>17</sup> The best published source on this that we have located is Tsering Bum (2007).



FIGURE 4. Mkhar 'bum rgyal burns *bsang* and pours liquor (Tib: *chab chang*) on the fire.

## Lo sar Eve

Although most of Lo sar eve was devoted to the herding tasks that characterize daily life in the village, several activities and taboos mark the day. One such tradition involves cleanliness. Women should not wash their hair on Lo sar Eve, although washing is acceptable for men. Nonetheless, this taboo appears subordinate to the idea that all should be clean for the New Year. In 2010, twelve-year-old Tshe dbang skyid did not wash her hair on the twenty-ninth day, and thus had to do this on the morning of the thirtieth, which earned her a scolding but, as she was a child, her offense was treated lightly.

At six-thirty p.m., while Ko la was putting animals into their pens and feeding the female livestock, Mkhar 'bum rgyal, the children, and the authors ascended the hill behind the house to offer *bsang* in the same fashion as the night before. Prayers were again recited, incense lit, fireworks ignited, a conch shell blown, and offerings made to a variety of deities to ensure prosperity, luck, and safety during the Lo sar period and the coming year.

The focal point of the evening was the New Year's Television program. Rather than the Chinese language Chunjie wanhui central to the New Year's Eve activities in many Han areas, Stong skor villagers watched the Tibetan language counterpart pre-recorded and aired by the Qinghai Tibetan-Language Television Station. The variety show included emcees from each of the three major Tibetan cultural and dialect regions of A mdo, Khams, and Dbus gtsang, and featured songs, dances, and comedy performances from such famous Tibetan performers as Sman bla skyabs and Kun dga'.

#### LO SAR TSHES GCIG 'NEW YEAR'S DAY'

The first day of Lo sar in Stong skor is traditionally a day of visiting family and friends. In 2010, after the conclusion of the Qinghai Tibetan-Language Television Station's New Year's program, most people went to bed at around ten-thirty p.m. hoping for a few hours' rest (though some did not sleep at all), and then got up at around two a.m. to arrange the food they had prepared, the candies and fruits they had bought, and to don their new clothing in preparation for visiting and receiving visitors. In addition to food that was set out for guests, the best candies, apples, and bread were placed on plates in front of the altar as offerings to the deities. A *thang ka*<sup>18</sup> painting was hung above the *hedzee* with offerings on a plate underneath the painting. Mkhaz 'bum rgyal also offered *bsang* outside, and fireworks purchased in Mgo mang Township Town were set off. These included strings of small firecrackers, cone shaped fountains, and small rockets. Families did not spend more than 100 RMB on fireworks in 2010, but this amount has increased in recent years.

The first visitors to the home arrived at around three-twenty a.m. and were offered food, candies, and alcohol. The family poured the first three cups of alcohol directly onto the hot stove as an offering to Thab lha 'Hearth Deity'. Food and alcohol were then offered to the guests. Most guests chatted for a short while, ate a bit, and then left for other homes. During this time and throughout much

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<sup>18</sup> *Thang ka* are "Tibetan religious scroll paintings" (Kunsang 2004:1140) frequently featuring a deity in the center.

of the remaining Lo sar period, food was eaten with disposable chopsticks, which allowed hosts and hostesses to spend time serving food and talking, and decreased the amount of time needed to wash re-usable chopsticks.

Children visited neighboring homes after daybreak, calling, "*Lo sar bzang!* Happy New Year!" before entering. Each family offered them food and tea and, when they left, gave them candy and money (usually five *yuan* per child). Adults also visited neighbors during this time. Men generally visited on the morning of the first day, while women stayed home to entertain guests.

That first evening was mainly for visiting family and clan members. After daybreak on the first day of Lo sar, visiting continued, and people went to other villages to visit family and friends. The second and third days of the period were times when women visited neighbors after serving as hostesses on the first day.

## Taboos

The first day of Lo sar was formerly associated with several taboos related to individual behavior, however, most such taboos are now only a memory. For example, if an animal died on Lo sar, it was said to be sleeping rather than dead. Additionally, as recently as the 1990's, young children were told not to fight, cry, or do or say anything bad on Lo sar because such actions on New Year's Day would set the tone for the coming year.

Various folk beliefs related to the environment are connected to the weather on the first day of Lo sar. Snow is considered especially auspicious, as reflected in a local saying, *mgron po lam dkar* 'guests with a white road ahead', suggesting auspiciousness associated with snowfall and visiting during the New Year period. The color white symbolizes an auspicious offering in the same way a snow-white *kha btags* is the best way to receive a guest. The Iron

Tiger Year's New Year's Day in Stong skor was clear and sunny,<sup>19</sup> and was considered neither auspicious nor inauspicious.

## Birthdays

Tibetans do not necessarily record their birth date. Instead, a person is considered to be one year old on the day of their birth. At the passing of their first Lo sar, children are considered to be two years old. Following that, they add a year to their age with each successive Lo sar. Thus, if someone is born on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month of Lo sar, they are considered to be two years old by the end of their first full day on earth. This also means that people often consider themselves to be a year older on the first day of Lo sar. Only two milestone birthdays are generally celebrated: a child's third birthday and an elder's eightieth birthday.

In 2010, there was a celebration for a child's third birthday in Stong skor Village, however, Lcags thar 'bum, Sgrol ma, and the authors did not attend. Instead they travelled about four hours by car to the home of Mkhar 'bum rgyal's maternal grandmother, in order to attend her eightieth birthday celebration, which was held in her home. She and her closest family members spent most of the time in her bedroom, sitting on the *hedzee*. Guests visited and paid respects throughout the day. Guests who were not family members often paid a quick visit to the person whose birthday was being celebrated, and then adjourned to the house's main room to chat with others. Seats on the *hedzee* and chairs around the stove were reserved for the most respected guests including elders and monks. Others sat on felt spread on the floor. Guests were served fresh tea, alcohol, soft drinks, dumplings, and boiled meat. They were also encouraged to eat bread,

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<sup>19</sup> Tibetan history is understood as a series of sixty-year cycles (T: *rab byung*). Each year is notated by the combination of an animal from the Chinese zodiac, and one of the five elements: earth (*sa*), wood (*shing*), fire (*me*), water (*chu*), and iron/ metal (*lcags*). The first year of the first cycle began in the year 1024 CE, thus 2010 was the twenty-third year of the seventeenth cycle.

candies, and fruits that had been purchased and prepared for the occasion, however, guests ate little out of politeness.

### The Lo sar Period

Housework and herding continued throughout the Lo sar period. Family work was more evenly divided between Ko la and her children during this period, to allow as many people as possible the opportunity to rest, visit, and attend weddings, birthdays, and other celebrations.

Other days of the New Year's period were largely uneventful. Work routines continued as normal, and visiting took place mostly in the afternoon and evening. In accordance with custom, guests brought a gift that often included either a tea brick, or a bottle of liquor to their hosts, and were gifted similarly in return upon leaving. When presenting the gift, people said, "*di nga'i lo rgyal yin* This is my *lo rgyal*." *Lo rgyal* is a contraction of the terms Lo sar and *rgyal bo*, the cross-shaped red bread that was once given as a gift when visiting (see above). Though such bread is no longer given, the term continues to be used to refer to any Lo sar gift. Visiting children were given money and candy. Guests who came during the afternoon often ate little, but evening guests often stayed for dinner and drinking.

The seventh and eighth days of the first lunar month are traditionally considered to be *nyin nag* 'black days' and visiting is taboo. Among the younger generations, however, this custom is less stringently observed than previously. For example, on the seventh day, Mkharr 'bum rgyal hosted several Han villagers from Ma si dui Village, and two Tibetans for food and drinking. On the eighth day, Mkharr 'bum rgyal visited other households.

During 2010, villages sponsored a horse race on the thirteenth day of the first lunar month. This is not a typical Lo sar event locally, but rather reflects the villages' enjoyment of horse culture, despite their gradual move towards motorcycles as the primary mode of transportation. The date of the horse festival was originally scheduled for the seventeenth day of the first lunar month (2 March 2010) but township officials cancelled the event. Instead, it was held on the

thirteenth day of the first lunar month (26 February 2010) on village land, far from government eyes.

As the New Year period neared its end, children spent less time playing. Realizing that classes would soon resume, they picked up their books and did the homework their teachers had assigned weeks earlier.

## Weddings

During this Iron Tiger Year's Lo sar period, five weddings were held in Stong skor Village: one on the third day, one on the fourth, two on the fifth, and one on the eleventh. Weddings in A mdo have been treated in detail elsewhere (Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. 2005, 'Brug mo skyid et al. 2010, and Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart 2007), and we do not provide a detailed description of the wedding process in Stong skor Village. We note, however, certain key differences between the weddings described in Ne'u na and Skya rgya villages (both Buddhist, agricultural communities) and those in Stong skor Village.

First, studies of Tibetan weddings often attempt to recreate, or tell the story of a typical wedding, but it was difficult to find a 'typical' example in Stong skor Village. During this New Year's period, three weddings were held in Bon families, while two were within the Buddhist U Sin Clan. Two weddings featured a *mag pa* 'groom' marrying matrilocally while one wedding featured a horse race sponsored for villagers by the groom's family. Other weddings had no horse race. All the weddings were arranged marriages.

Although certain wedding elements seemed to be fixtures across these five weddings, others were optional and dependent on the availability of qualified people. For example, all weddings began when a tantric practitioner (*A khu dpon*) was deputized to chant a scripture called *g.yang 'bod* 'calling prosperity'. In Buddhist weddings within the U Sin Clan, a literate clan member is often asked to act as a stand-in because there are no Buddhist tantric practitioners in the area. Next, the bride arrives in a procession of cars with her *a zhang* 'maternal uncles' who are the real focal point of the wedding celebrations. The arrival of the bride and the *a zhang* is

the first highly anticipated moment of the wedding (Figure Five), and almost all attendees of the wedding wait outside to see the grand entrance of the bridal party.



FIGURE 5. On the fifth day of the first lunar month (18 February 2010), the bride arrived, flanked by her two *bag rogs* 'bridesmaids.' Her *a zhang* 'maternal uncles' are behind.

As the bride leaves the car, a woman who is the same age as the bride receives her with a white silk *kha btags*. This woman is called the *rta kha len mkhan* 'holder of the horse's reins', harkening back to the time when a bride and her entourage rode horses to weddings. Another woman or two from the groom's village guides the bride into the home. These women serve as *bag rogs* 'bridesmaids' and are her attendants throughout the wedding. The bride is expected to cover her face and keep her head down at all times. Her *bag rogs* guides her into her new home and takes her to the main room in which the wedding is held, where she kneels on a cushion during the beginning of the ceremony. The bride's maternal uncles follow her into the home and into the main room. When a groom marries into a family, he is led by two of his *a zhang*.

Some weddings feature a *kha brda* 'conversation' between the head *a zhang* and an elder representative from the host side. This is an appreciated, but non-essential part of the wedding in Stong skor Village. The *kha brda* tends to be a speech genre both preferred by and reserved for village elders. A good *kha brda* should contain many *gtam dpe* 'proverbs',<sup>20</sup> and mention the history of previous weddings between the clans involved at that particular wedding, and feature advice from the maternal uncles to the bride's new in-laws. If both chief representatives are young, they may dispense with this process. However, if a regionally well-known speaker is involved, villagers and guests crowd into the room in which the *a zhang* are seated, and stand several rows deep outside to listen.

Village women rush in after the conversation and demand *bag ras* 'bridal cloth' from the *a zhang*, who give this to entreat the village women to protect and care for the bride in her new home. This may become a protracted debate if there are eloquent speakers among both men and women. If there are no such accomplished speakers, this wedding section is abbreviated. If the *a zhang* do not accede to the request through eloquent speech, the women push the men, grabbing at them and pulling one of them away to hold as a hostage to be ransomed for the cloth. Women debate with the men during this process. Eventually the *a zhang* give the cloth. At this point, men from among the *a zhang* and village women begin singing folk songs to each other in order to find a suitable singing partner for the *la gzhas* 'love songs' that will be sung outside shortly thereafter.<sup>21</sup> There was a great struggle before the cloth was given on the wedding held on the third day of the first lunar month. At other weddings in Stong skor during the Lo sar period there were no such struggles.

Singing moves outside the host family's yard to a place where village women and members of the *a zhang* can sing *la gzhas* away from the ears of village men. When a woman sings, she begins holding an open bottle of beer, and offers it to the man of her choice. After she finishes singing, the man sings back to her in response.

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<sup>20</sup> See Pirie (2009) and Tournadre and Robin (2006) for more on *gtam dpe*.

<sup>21</sup> For more on *la gzhas* and their accompanying taboos, see Anton-Luca's (2002) introduction to contemporary A mdo Tibetan love songs and Rossi (1992).

Songs are sung simultaneously, with several women and several men singing different songs with different melodies targeting their own singing partners. It is taboo for men and women from the same family to sing love songs in front of each other. To avoid this risk, village men are absent during this part of the wedding. Instead, they often stay in a separate room, eating, drinking, and singing folk songs. Some elders sit and talk with the elder *a zhang* who choose not to participate in the singing. Other villagers might sit apart in the family's home drinking alcohol and talking.

Following the *la gzhas* singing, all assemble back in the original room used to greet the *a zhang*, who then return home with the bride. All guests are fed after these *a zhang* have left. While hosts encourage everyone to eat more, it is considered impolite to eat too much – younger *a zhang* do not usually touch the food offered by the host family.

Occasionally, as on the wedding held on the fifth day of the Lo sar period, horse races are held. On that day, prizes for the winners were sponsored by the family hosting the wedding, and consisted of *phrug* 'woolen cloth' and a *sa gdan* 'rug' for the winner, rugs for those placing second through fourth, and a hat for the fifth-placed rider. Races were held in two separate categories: two-year old horses, and horses older than two years old. The races were held on an open area close to the host's home and approximately one kilometer in distance.

As might be inferred from the above description, the bride and groom play limited roles in the wedding activities. Although members of the host's immediate and extended families often must take active roles in food preparation and serving, some of this work may be contracted to local Han cooks from the *ma dui* villages.

### After the New Year

Following the end of the New Year period, food originally earmarked for guests was eaten. Candies, meat, and fruits that had been nibbled on throughout the previous fifteen days were then available to the family to eat. On 4 March 2010, children returned to school, family work returned to normal, and visiting decreased.

## A COMPARISON WITH SKE BA VILLAGE

Despite similar Lo sar practices across a number of areas on the Tibetan Plateau, the essay of Lo sar practices in Ske ba Village, a village in Mang ra County, by Tsering Bum et al. (2008), shows marked differences from those seen in Stong skor. These differences include making different types of red bread, offering different meats to guests, and a number of practices that were not present in one or the other of the villages. The examples provided below are representative rather than exhaustive, and illustrate how greatly practices may vary within a relatively small geographic region.

One difference between Stong skor and Ske ba lies in the idea of the New Year for livestock, held in Ske ba on the second day of Lo sar, which is described as (Tsering Bum et al. 2008:40):

a day for owners to serve their animals. In the morning, cattle, sheep, dogs, and pigs are given human food such as red bread and noodles. Cattle and sheep are given fresh winter grass. Livestock owners never beat animals on this day, for doing so brings bad luck.

There is no such tradition in Stong skor. Instead, the second day of the New Year period is treated as any other except that it is a day for extensive visiting. When asked directly, Stong skor villagers expressed no concept of a livestock's New Year. This difference is particularly interesting, given the importance of livestock to the livelihood of Stong skor villagers.

Additionally, Stong skor villagers do not celebrate Hearth Deity's Lo sar on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth lunar month. In Ske ba the family's Hearth Deity is offered special foods. Although Stong skor villagers offer the New Year's first three cups of alcohol to Hearth Deity, there is no specific day on which Hearth Deity is specifically venerated.

Third, whereas Ske ba villagers visit their ancestors' graves, about two kilometers west of the village, and prostrate to their graves (Tsering Bum et al. 2008:35), there is no analogous practice in Stong skor's Lo sar tradition. Stong skor villagers have traditionally

practiced both sky burial and earth burial, and burn *tsha gsur*<sup>22</sup> on the anniversary of the deceased's passing.

The final major difference to be discussed here lies in Stong skor holding no special events on the fifteenth and final day of the New Year period. While Ske ba Village celebrates the final day with circle dancing, singing, people dressed in their best clothing, and a gathering in the village meeting hall, Stong skor Village has no such traditions.

The origin of these differences is difficult to trace, and yet, these comparisons make clear that geographic proximity or any model suggesting a relatively geographically fixed monoculture is less than ideal in approaching the immensely diverse cultural practices within A mdo. Differences likely arise from several factors that deserve attention when discussing regional popular practice. Perhaps the most obvious difference is varying subsistence strategies. Ske ba villagers were once agro-pastoralists, but are now exclusively farmers. As a result of their lifestyle differences and changes, they have access to, and raise different types of animals (namely pigs). Conversely, Stong skor villagers were, in their recent past, entirely nomadic. Though they have since settled into fixed accommodations, they continue robust engagement with a pastoral lifestyle. Many of their differing practices reflect this. Swine, for example, play an important role in several different phases of the Ske ba Village Lo sar, while pork has no place in Stong skor, nor do Stong skor villages raise pigs. Additionally, Ske ba Village burial practices, and certain Lo sar activities seem related to their agro-pastoral roots, and display a greater attachment to place than in Stong skor.

Village histories may also figure in a village's customs. Stong skor villagers migrated from the Stong che region in present-day Khri ka County, which may explain the high percentage of Bon practitioners in the 'Brog ru Tribe, and shed light on religious and secular practices important to Stong skor villagers such as the making of *rgyal bo*, that are an important part of Lo sar practices in Khri ka (see 'Brog mo skyid et al. 2010:211-218). At the same time, it does not

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<sup>22</sup> *Tsha gsur* is an "offering made by roasting [a] mixture of *tsampa* [*rtsam pa*] w[ith] the three whites [milk, butter, and yogurt] and three sweets [honey, sugar, and molasses]" (Pema Kunsang 2003:2189).

account for all of the variation noted above as Ske ba villagers also trace their origins to Khri ka County.

Differences of practice between Stong skor and the agropastoral village of Ske ba described by Tsering Bum et al., suggest that geographic proximity and governmental administrative divisions are a relatively arbitrary basis for examining Tibetan cultural practices. This is similar to Roche's (2008:xxvi) assertion that, in the context of weddings, there exist, "significant [differences] in the wedding as lived experience, to the extent that a villager from [one village] would likely feel somewhat disoriented at a[another village's] wedding." Indeed, the situation in Stong skor is more complex than these differences indicate, and the village's unique migration pattern and history, Mongol toponyms, and religious complexity help explain certain differences in practice across small areas, and suggests the need for more detailed descriptive studies.

#### CONCLUSION: A NOTE ON SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE

We call for increased attention to cultural practices in pastoralist areas, and problematize simplifications and generalizations about Tibetan culture and cultural practices by showing differences in practice between two villages that are separated by a mere fifty or sixty kilometers. As such it serves as an addition to a growing body of descriptive scholarship that sheds light on the tremendous internal variation along the Tibetan Plateau (for example, Rin chen rdo rje and Stuart 2009, Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart 2007, Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. 2005, Kelsang Norbu 2011, and Klu mo tshe ring and Roche 2011). We also suggest that, in examining continuities in practice, simple geographic regions may not be the best way to structure such discussions. Care must be exercised to recognize that, in a part of the world in which nomadic pastoralism played an important role until recently, community histories and migration stories, as well as traditional lifestyles, may exert powerful influence on the form of Lo sar and other festival practices.

This study of Lo sar in Stong skor also highlights the rapid changes Tibetan culture faced at the close of the first decade of the

twenty-first century. In some cases, this involved the loss of traditional knowledge, such as the rapid disappearance of red bread-related taboos over the course of just two generations. In others, it represented the influence of mass media in its ability to provide standard representations of Tibetan culture, and to promote Han and Western cultural values. Indeed, even though Stong skor Village elders showed no interest in dance and modern music, these are the images of Tibetan culture eagerly absorbed on Qinghai Tibetan television by young Stong skor Tibetans.

Also, within six months of the 2010 Lo sar, a local NGO had provided running water to Stong skor Village. This alone has the power to change the nature of local, daily routines and responsibilities. It has yet to be seen how this may affect local culture, or New Year's practices, but it may prove a catalyst for profound transformation.

Young children often express very little interest in studying *gtam dpe* and *dmangs glu* 'folk songs', in favor of *skor bro* 'circle dances' and *rdung len* 'mandolin singing' that are often featured on Qinghai Tibetan language television, and on VCDs sold in Mgo mang Township Town and in shops across the Plateau. Although such images are reinforced throughout the year, it appears that the Lo sar period and the special Tibetan language variety show broadcast the night before Lo sar play an important role in this process, as traditions most strongly associated with a relatively distinct geographic region are then distributed both locally, and nationally, as exhibitions of Tibetan culture as a whole.

This descriptive article leaves much room for future studies to take a more analytic approach in recognition of the Lo sar period as a rich repository of both traditional knowledge and an evolving folk culture. Oral history, toponyms, and folk religious practices collectively play critical roles in understanding the unique make-up of Stong skor's history, people, and Lo sar practices. Meanwhile, taboos and customs often give insight into ideas of purity and lead to understanding of such concepts as *rten 'brel* 'causality'. Studying these festival events in relation to oral histories, toponymy, and folk religious practice would be profitable.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Brog ru འབྲོག་རུ།  
'di nga'i lo rgyal yin འདི་ངའི་ལོ་རྒྱལ་ཡིན།  
'then thug འཇིན་ཐུག།

A

A khu dpon ཨ་ཁུ་དཔོན།  
A mdo ཨ་མདོ།  
a zhang ཨ་ཇང་།

B

bag rogs བཀ་རོགས།  
bla ma ལྷ་མ།  
Bon བོན།  
bsang བསང་།  
bsang khri བསང་ཁྲི།

C

Chab cha ཆབ་ཇ།  
Chab chang ཆབ་ཇང་།  
Chab mdo ཆབ་མདོ།  
chang ཆང་།  
chu ཚུ།  
Chunjie wanhui རྟུན་ཇེ་འཇེ་ལོ་ལོ་མེ་ལོ་ལོ་

D

Dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་།  
Dgu rgyag དགུ་རྒྱུག།  
dgu thug དགུ་ཐུག།  
Dka' thub tshe ring དཀའ་ཐུབ་ཚེ་རིང་།  
dmangs glu དམངས་གླུ།  
Dmyal ba དམྱལ་བ།

F

fen tiao རེ་ལྕུ་ལྕུ་

G

go re bsles ma གོ་རེ་བསྐྱེས་མ།  
go re dmar ro གོ་རེ་དམར་རོ།

*go re sog sog* གོ་རེ་སོག་སོག

Gonghe 共和

Gshin rje chos rgyal གཤིན་རྗེ་ཚོས་རྒྱལ།

*gtam dpe* གཏམ་དཔེ།

*guan tou* 罐頭

Guo ma ying caoye kaifa youxian zeren gong si 过马营草野开发有限责  
任公司

*g.yang 'bod* གཡང་འབོད།

H

Han 汉

*he dzee*

Huanghe qingke pijiu 黄河青稞啤酒

Hui 回

K

*kang* 炕

*kha brda* ཁ་བར་ད།

*kha btags* ཁ་བཏགས།

Khams ཁམས།

Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

Ko la ཀོ་ལ།

Kos nan ཀོས་ནན།

Kun dga' ཀུན་དགའ།

L

*la gzhas* ལ་གཞས།

*lajiu* 辣酒

*lcags* ལུགས།

Lcags thar 'bum ལུགས་ཐར་འབུམ།

*Liu fu ren jia* 六福人家

*lo rgyal* ལོ་རྒྱལ།

*lo rnying* ལོ་རྫིང་།

*lo sar* ལོ་སར།

*lo sar bzang* ལོ་སར་བཟང་།

M

*ma cAng* མ་ཙཱང་།

*ma dui* 马队

Ma si dui 马四队

majiang 麻将

ma mo 嘛嘛

Mang ra 嘛嘛

me 嘛

Mgo mang 嘛嘛

mgron po lam dkar 嘛嘛

mian pian 面片

Mkhar 'bum rgyal 嘛嘛

Mo khor 嘛嘛

Mtsho lho 嘛嘛

Mtsho sngon bod skad brnyan 'phrin 嘛嘛

N

Ne'u na 呢呢

Nong li 农历

Nub phyogs su bskyod pa'i zin tho 呢呢

nyin nag 呢呢

P

phrug 普

Q

Qinghai 青海, Mtsho sngon 嘛嘛

R

rab byung 嘛嘛

rdung len 嘛嘛

Rgya lo 嘛嘛

rgyal bo 嘛嘛

rlung rta 嘛嘛

RMB (abbreviation for Renminbi) 人民币

rta kha len mkhan 嘛嘛

rten 'brel 嘛嘛

S

sa 嘛

sa gdan 嘛嘛

Sgrol ma 嘛嘛

shing 嘛嘛

Ske ba སྐེ་བ།  
 skor bro སྐོར་བོ།  
 Skya rgya སྐུ་རྒྱ།  
 Sman bla skyabs སྐྱེན་བླ་སྐུབས།  
 snum སྐུམ།  
 Stong che སྐོང་ཚེ།  
 Stong skor སྐོང་སྐོར།

T

Thab lha ཐབ་ལྷ།  
 thang ka ཐང་ཀ།  
 Tsering Bum, tshe ring 'bum ཚེ་རིང་འབུམ།  
 Tsering Samdrup, tshe ring bsams grub ཚེ་རིང་བསམ་གྲུབ།  
 tsha gsur ཚ་གསུམ།  
 Tshe dbang skyid ཚེ་དབང་སྐྱིད།  
 tsho ba ཚོ་བ།  
 tshod ma ཚོད་མ།

U

U Sin ལུ་སིན།

X

Xinjiang སོ་ཇུང་ཁྲོན།

Y

yuan 元