TIBETAN STUDIES

Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the
International Association for Tibetan Studies
FAGERNES 1992

VOLUME 2

edited by
Per KVAERNE

The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture
Oslo, 1994
THE MARRIAGE CUSTOMS OF RU-THOG (MNGA'-RIS)

Lobsang SHASTRI (LTWA, Dharamsala)

This paper is an attempt to describe in detail the marriage customs and the gnya'-glus of Ru-thog. In the past Ru-thog was ruled by one of the eighteen ancient Zhang-zhung kings from the Eya-ru-can dynasty named En-dha 'Od-kyi bya-ru-can. It was in this land where Fort Sme-ru-tsel of Ghchen-pa, was built during Ge-sar's life-time. It is one of the "three surrounded regions" (mnga'-ris bskor-gsum) of Mnga'-ris and its traditional name is "Ru-thog, the land surrounded by water". Mnga'-ris, the land of the three surrounded regions, has six districts under its jurisdiction, of which Ru-thog is one.

Ru-thog is divided into three regional communities, each having a number of regional sub-communities. The gnya'-glu (marriage ceremony songs) texts of these communities are basically the same, but one can see slight differences such as the order in which the songs are arranged and so forth. The byang-pas of The Nine Leb-tsho communities do not seem to have elaborated marriage customs and gnya'-glus, as their marriage ceremonies are generally very brief. It is learnt that the people of Bkra-thsang community have their own gnya'-glu text, but it is no longer available as they could not bring a copy when they fled Tibet in 1959. However, I learnt during my visit to Ladakh in July 1991 that the people from this group settled in Bkag-zhung, Ladakh have a gnya'-glu text identical to this. Very little is known about the marriage customs and gnya'-glus of Sger-tse and Sger-rgyas, which are also parts of Ru-thog.

The present text, the Ru-thog gnya'-glu'i gzung, is the traditional gnya'-glu text of The Nine leb-tsho. This gnya'-glu text is now gaining popularity in the Tibetan settlements of Ladakh and is sung during the marriage ceremonies by the people from different regions in Ru-thog, such as Byang-pa, Ra-bang, Ting-tshe and Ru-dor, as well as the people from Sger-tse and Sger-rgyas. The reason why Ru-thog gnya'-glu'i gzung is becoming popular in those settlements is perhaps because the professional gnya'-glu singers are mostly from Ra-bang.

As mentioned above, Ru-thog gnya'-glu'i gzung has two names, viz. Seng-ge kha-bab and Gangs-skya ra ring. The full name of the present text is Ru-thog khyung-rdzong dkar-po'i gnya'-glu chab-bzhi dang bcas-pa which means the gnya'-glu and its chab-bzhi of Ru-thog khyung-rdzong dkar-po. From this name, it appears that gnya'-glu came into being long ago in Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar rdzong (modern name, Khyung-lung) in the Gu-ge region and spread from there. Khyung-rdzong dkar-po, as mentioned in the title, should be understood as the fort of Khyung-lung dngul-dkar and not as that of Ru-thog. The fort of Ru-thog is called Ru-mo mkhar-rdzong or Gnang-rdzong mkhar. The meaning of the term chab-bzhi in the title is not clear. It might have something to do with water (chab), the four big rivers of Mnga'-ris, otherwise it would not make proper sense in this context. Considering that this text was compiled in order to arrange the gnya'-glus in such a way that it coincides with the order of the programmes taking place during a marriage ceremony, the term chab-bzhi should be read as char-bzhi which means 'plan'. Thus the title should be Ru-thog khyung-rdzong dkar-po'i gnya'-glu char-bzhi dang bcas-pa, which means the gnya'-glu and the plan (of the marriage ceremony) of Ru-thog khyung-rdzong dkar-po. However, the text I used for my reference, a manuscript, has the earlier mentioned title. Whether the term chab-bzhi in the title is corrupted or a misspelt form of char-bzhi, or whether it means something else is a matter
that needs further examination. Another name of Ru-thog gnya’-glu’i gzung is Gongs-skya ra-ring, which means the Fence of the Long White Snow Mountain Ranges. Also, Gongs-skya ra-ring is another name of the Mnga’-ris regions. It is so named due to the white snow mountain ranges that surrounded Mnga’-ris, a region generally known as the “navel of the earth”, where the sacred Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar are both located. However, in the present text it is wrongly written as Dga’-rgya ra-ring. This is a wrong pronunciation inherited from long ago. For Gongs-skya ra-ring, Ru-thog people simply say dga’-rgya ra-ring just as they say rgu-rgyud for ge-khod.

Very little is known about the origin of this text. According to the oral tradition of some, it is said that the custom of marriage came into being in Tibet in mid-7th century, when king Srong-btsan sgam-po married the Chinese Princess Wen-cheng Kong-jo, gradually spreading and reaching Ru-thog. Another version, as mentioned above, is that a marriage custom came into being long ago in Guge, gradually spreading from there. Yet, according to the oral tradition of a section of the people, it is said that over a hundred years ago, one named drung-yig from Ru-dor, in order to improve the then existing social custom, composed a collection of eighteen gnya’-glu texts to be sung during the marriage ceremonies. They believed that drung-yig frequently travelled to Lhasa and other regions in Central Tibet, thus enabling him to compose such a large collection of gnya’-glu texts. If this were true, then the gnya’-glu of the Ru-thog regions would have some influence from the Central Tibetan customs, but this is not evident. If there is any gnya’-glu text which pre-dates the present one, it is not known. However, the marriage custom that spread in those regions certainly existed long ago, right from the time when the land of Ru-thog first came into being. It is said that, long ago in the remote past, when the land of Ru-thog first came into being, there were seven families who ran the administration of Ru-thog fort; these families were named the Seven dbang-pos (also called ang-pas).6 It was from them that the people of Ru-thog gradually developed and divided into several regional communities. For instance, the communities of the East, South, West, North and the five Communities of celibates and non-celibates (skya-ser tsho-linga) etc.

It is certain that the custom of marriage was known to these communities. With the passage of time, these communities developed further, and as a result the tradition of gnya’-glu gradually declined. It was about 60 years ago that the decline of the gnya’-glu tradition saw a turning point. In order to meet the growing needs of the society at that time, an ex-monk named Skal-bzang ‘phel-gyas from Ru-thog monastery took the initiative to compile a collection of gnya’-glu. For this, he condensed the eighteen gnya’-glu texts into nine and then he further condensed these into three. These three texts became the accepted gnya’-glu texts of Ru-thog of today. The present text, Ru-thog gnya’-glu’i gzung, is the shortest version.5 As mentioned above, it is not clear whether drung-yig composed the eighteen texts or compiled them. The descriptions given above are based on oral information which the present author managed to collect from various people. It seems that the extended version of the gnya’-glu text was used during the very elaborated marriage ceremonies that gradually came into being in the Ru-thog towns. However, now this extended version of the gnya’-glu text is not available. None of the contemporary gnya’-bos (representative singer of bride and bridgroom) knows this text by heart. All they say is that such a text existed long ago.

The present text, Ru-thog gnya’-glu’i gzung, was brought to India by elderly Tibetans from Ru-thog when they fled Tibet in 1959. The number of copies they could bring at that time seem to be very few, not more than one or two, but slowly they produced many hand-written copies. These days there are quite a few copies available, I had the opportunity of seeing many such copies, but I could not identify the master copy brought from Tibet. The text I studied for the present work is a manuscript written in tshugs-ring scripts. It is 14 x 18 cm and has 177 pages. This is the hand-written copy produced by the son of the gnya’-bo Tshe-dbang stobs-rgyal. Its master copy was the one owned by Tshe-dbang stobs-rgyal himself. The title of this text reads: Ru-thog
khyung-rdzong dkar-po'i gnya'-glu chab-bzhi dang bceas-pa. Every professional gnya-bo
now living in the Tibetan Settlement in Ladakh has a copy of the gnya'-glu text which
they each keep with great care. They showed much reluctance when asked to show it.
Consequently, I did not have the opportunity to inspect them.

The actual sung body of the present text has 31 parts:

Songs sung in the house of the bridegroom:
1. General introduction to gnya'-glu
2. Rmi-lam skabs-bzhi (the dreams of gnya'-bo)
3. Mda'-dar gyi glu (the song in praise of the arrow)
4. Gnya'-bo sgying-glu (song of gnya'-bo in a haughty manner)
5. Gser-skyems kyi glu (gser-skyems offering)

Songs sung by both the gnya'-bos:
6. Bsu-ma'i glu (reception song)
7. Chags-rabs kyi glu (song about the formation of the world)
8. Gangs-rgyud chags-rabs kyi glu (song about the formation of snow mountain)
9. Tho-bo'i glu (the line of thos)
a) Rgyang-tho dkar-byang (the thos of wall)
b) Bya-mo tho-bzhi (the four thos of the hen)
c) Bhod-pa'i tho-bzhi (the four installed thos)
d) Grags-pa'i tho-bzhi (the four thos of reputation)
e) Lha-tho spun-gsum (the three brothers of the divine tho)
f) Bsaang-tho spun-gsum (the three brothers of incense tho)
g) Rgyal-chen tho-bzhi (the four thos of the four guardian kings)
h) Tho-bzhi sgo-'byed (the four thos for door opening)
i) Srid-pa'i tho-mo che (Principal tho of the world)
j) Srid-pa'i tho-dgu (the nine thos of the world)
k) Khriins-kyi tho-dgu (the nine thos of the laws)
l) Rgyags-pa'i tho-dgu (the nine thos of satisfaction)
m) Dgos-pa'i tho-dgu (the six thos of need)
n) Gnyan-pa'i tho-bzhi (the four thos of wrath)
o) 'Byung-ba lnga-tho (the thos representing the five elements)
p) Dgra-sdar dyra-'jig (the tho to make the enemies tremble and vanish)
q) Dkar-shis tho-linga (the five thos of good luck)

10. Sgo-glu (the song in praise of doors)
11. Gyang-bu sne-linga'i glu
12. Dkyil-'khor mjal-glu (the song of mandala)
13. Chos-gnas mjal-glu (the priest meeting song)
14. Mda'-dar 'bul-ba'i glu (the song of arrow)
15. Bkra-shis the-gral gyi gdan-glu (the song in praise of carpets)
16. Bzhes-gro, Shrang-rgyas sogs chab-gchi'i glu (the song in praise of 'Brang
rgyas offering)
17. Yab-yum mjal-glu (the song of meeting father-mother)
18. Gzhung-glu bka'-shis bcu-gsum (the thirteen auspicious song)
19. Chab-gchi (the song of chang)
20. Dar-rgyas kyi glu (scarf offering song)
21. Bkog-glu
22. 'Gro-glu (the farewell song)

757
Ceremonial songs to be sung in the house of the bridegroom:
23. Pha-bzang bsu-ma (the reception song)
24. Gzhung-glu bkra-shis bsu-gsum (the thirteen auspicious songs)
25. Nu-rin phul-ba'i glu (the song of milk compensation)
26. Gyang-rtsa 'bebs-glu (the song of chang)
27. Bkag-glu
28. Dar-bog gi glu (the song of taking off an arrow)
29. Thod-bkrol gi glu (the song of taking off a hat)
30. 'Gro-lu (the farewell song)
31. Lha-rgyal gi glu (the song of incense burning)

The Marriage Ceremony in Ru-thog

Traditionally, when a girl gets married she leaves her home and joins her spouse’s family. This is called sending the girl in marriage (mna-'ma ster) and this is a custom normally followed everywhere. In some cases it happens that a son leaves his home and joins the bride’s family. This is called giving the son as a bridegroom (mag-pa ster). A girl is called mna-'ma from the day she joins her in-law’s family and a boy who joins his in-law’s family is called mag-pa from that day on. According to the marriage custom of Ru-thog, the marriage ceremony of mna-'ma and mag-pa are basically the same. The marriage procedure presented below is focused on the marriage ceremony of mna-'ma and not mag-pa. Traditionally, the marriage ceremony of mag-pa is performed during the days of the month when the moon is in the waxing state and that of mna-'ma is performed when the moon is in the waning state.

As mentioned above, there are several ways of marriage, such as love marriage, arranged marriages, demanding a girl’s hand after winning the competition of war-sports and so forth. Also, as mentioned above, marriage is the source from where the family lineage, relatives, brothers and sisters etc. develop. Considered thus, in Ru-thog and other regions of Tibet, marriage was treated with importance in the past, so that one’s family lineage was saved from being broken and the khral-rkang (tax payee) retained intact.

The procedure of the marriage ceremony in the Ru-thog region

1. First of all, the family members concerned make sure that the boy and the girl who are engaged are not blood-related. Then inquiries are made into the family lineage to which the girl belongs. Also, consultations with lamas and deities are made in order to find out if such and such a named girl would be suitable as the bride of one’s son.\textsuperscript{8}

2. After having done this, an astrologer is consulted in order to examine whether the elements, spar-kha, sme-bu, personality and life-force, etc. of the boy and the girl agree with each other. If found agreeable the girl’s hand is requested. However, there is still provision for the girl’s parents to refuse. If they do not refuse, the proposal is carried out in accordance with the predictions foretold through divination, horoscopes, etc.

3. First of all, a scarf is sent to the girl’s house as a present through an honest gentleman. In ancient times an amount of about 15 srangs or an amount of money according to one’s wish was enclosed. The present is received by the girl’s parents. If the present is accepted then the boy’s parents go ahead in asking for the girl’s hand. Then the honest gentleman accompanied by the boy’s parents and some older relatives carry scarves, money and several other gifts called chu-rten and call on the girl’s parents. They tell them all about the good predictions foretold through divination and horoscope etc. asking for the girl’s hand.
4. As for the engagement, five or six members from the boy’s family call at the girl’s house and offer each family member a scarf. Tea is served to all the relatives present and also a scarf is offered to each. Once the marriage proposal is agreed upon, the boy’s parents distribute meat and wine called sha-chang9 to all the relatives and neighbours. This is done in a similar manner as we distribute invitation cards today. Also, wine called “wine for discussion” (gros-chang)10 is served to all the relatives present. It is at this wine party that all the family members and the relatives discuss and decide the date for the marriage ceremony. Therefore, it is called “wine for discussion.” They select the year, month, day and the time on which the marriage should take place. In this respect, the date selected for the marriage is generally one considered convenient for the girl’s parents. They select an auspicious year, month, day and time which is convenient for them (the girl’s parents).

5. After having concluded the wine party for discussion and the feasts that follow, the parents of the boy or the girl in the nomad area where people have their base camps far off from one another, may shift their base camp and relocate it somewhere nearer to the other family. In some cases, both families may shift their base camps and relocate them nearer to each other. This is done with a view to carry out the preparations for marriage more conveniently, as it involves a lot of activities to be taken care of by both the families. These include looking for a priest and a professional gnya-’bo, arranging tents, preparing wine and so forth. In the past, people in the nomad areas had their base camps at a distance of several days’ journey from one another. In such circumstances, they find it hard to arrange the marriage ceremony. Such problems of course no longer exist in the Tibetan refugee settlements in India.

6. One day before the actual day of the wedding, a group of three or four people from the boy’s house consisting of a gnya-’bo, an assistant gnya-’bo and a bride’s maid etc., go to the girl’s house to offer the head-dress for the priest.11 A head-dress made from cloth of five different colours is offered to the priest and also to the gnya-’bo as well as being placed upon the main door. Then a piece of white cloth is given to each person present. This is followed by the song in praise of the head-dress. Also a white scarf is offered to the family patron deity. There are many songs to be sung when the head-dress is taken off. First, one sings the songs in praise of garments. Then follows the song in praise of ornaments etc. The song in praise of the head-dress is similar to that of the song in praise of a hat. A short interval follows at the end of these songs. Then the arrow decorated with the cloths of five colours and other objects, such as gei, turquoise, mchong, mirror, spindle, se-long and yarn thread etc. are placed in the priest’s hand followed by the songs in praise of the arrow.

7. At this point the time for the actual marriage ceremony is decided. This is followed by the songs about how the universe came into being etc. In the past when the time was good, people sang many songs on this occasion. They sang the songs from different gnya-’glu texts, such as Dga’-rgya ra-ring, Gro-shod, Ga-ra be-ra, Rgyal-blon-gyi gzhung, and Tsha-bo gnyen-gyi gzhung etc. The gnya-’bo of the bridegroom had to tell the gathering the types of songs he could sing. Accordingly, he was requested to sing. Such was the manner in which the ceremony was conducted in the past. Today, however, things are changing and the custom is fast disappearing. It has disappeared to such an extent that there are now very few who can sing one or two songs from Dga’-rgya ra-ring.

After having decided the time, the marriage ceremony will take place on the following day, and after having sung the songs in praise of the head-dress as
mentioned above, the gnya'-bo accompanied by his assistant and the bride’s maid etc. return to their homes.

At the bride’s house, the gnya'-bo explains his dreams. He talks about the good dreams he had dreamed during the past night. This is followed by the song called gnya-bo'i 'gling glu and gser-sk' yems kyi glu (gser-sk' yems offering song). Then the gnya'-bo of the bridegroom leaves for the house of the bride and meets the bride’s gnya'-bo within the proximity of one’s eye. At this stage the bridegroom’s gnya'-bo becomes the phyi-gnya’ (external) and the bride’s gnya’-bo becomes the nang-gnya’ (internal). The bride’s gnya’-bo sings the song of reception called gser-sk' yems and bkag-glu. This is followed by the song called the chags-rabs and gangs-rgyud chags-rabs.

8. Then the members of the girl’s family burn incense for purification and the priest performs the rite of lha-grol to release the girl from the bonds of her family’s patron deity. Also the priest performs the rite to secure gyang. As soon as the rite to secure gyang has begun, the girl is released from the bonds of her family patron deity.

In ancient times, the Bon religion was prevalent in Tibet. In those days the priests who performed the above mentioned rites were known by many names. Such names are for instance Bon-po, Divine Bon-po or Tantrist Bon-po (sngags-bon). This is described in the Bon-po texts, Ming-rgin dpal-dgos and Lha-bkrol lha'-dogs.

A similar type of rite is performed immediately upon the girl’s arrival at the boy’s home. This time, it is not the lha-grol ritual, but lha’-dogs which means to bind the bride with the bridegroom’s family patron deity. With this rite the girl is introduced to her in-law’s family patron deity and is accepted as a member of the family just as her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law are. An article published in Kruong-go'i bod-kyi sles-rig12 explains the lha-bkrol and the lha’-dogs in the following manner:

When one’s son gets married, one performs the lha’-dogs ritual. On an auspicious day according to that year’s almanac, all the family members go up onto the roof-top of their house. Having done so, they invoke their family patron deity and raise up on the roof-top a new prayer flag after it has been touched by the newly arrived bride. This is called lha’-dogs ritual. From that day on, the newly arrived bride becomes an accepted member of that family.

After a year or so the girl who has married and left her home goes back to visit her parents. On that occasion on an auspicious day, her parents and all the family members go up onto the roof-top of their house to perform the deity invocation rite. On the roof-top they raise a new prayer flag which has been touched by her. This is called lha’-bkrol ritual. From that day on, the girl is separated from her family.

In short, when a girl gets married and is about to leave her home, her family members perform the rite to invoke the deities, the rite to secure phywa, the rite to secure gyang and the rite to release the girl from the bonds of her family patron deity. Also, immediately upon her arrival at the boy’s house, the members of her in-law family perform the rite to invoke deities, the rite to secure phywa, the rite to secure gyang and the rite to introduce the newly arrived bride to their family patron deity.

9. The two gnya’-bos meet; they exchange the greeting songs, and offer each other scarves.
10. The bridegroom’s *gnya’-bo* who is also called ‘*dogs-lha,*' is received by the bride’s family. Three different receptions are hosted; one at the distance; another at the half-way; and the last one at the bride’s house. A boy and girl whose names are auspicious, whose parents are alive, and who possess good moral characters are selected to receive *gnya’-bo.* The boy holds a bunch of burning incense in his hands and the girl holds a kettle full of white wine adorned with a scarf. In this way, the bridegroom’s *gnya’-bo* is received by the members of the bride’s family. At every reception, the bridegroom’s *gnya’-bo* has to sing several songs. He is not allowed to pass through if he does not sing the demanded song. In case the *gnya’-bo* is not a talented singer, it will take weeks to pass through all three receptions. Thus, how many days the reception ceremony will take depends on how far the *gnya’-bo* can demonstrate his talent for singing. If, however, he proves himself weak and untalented, he is penalised by having to offer scarves. It is compulsory for a *gnya’-bo* to sing when he reaches the third or the last reception.

11. Both the *gnya’-bos* continue singing songs in praise of *tho.* To praise each *tho,* they sing a song. Some *thos* are to be moved to the right and some to the left; some are to be stepped over; some are not to be moved; some are to be offered a white scarf and some a red one; some are to be kicked while dancing; some are to be cleared off and so on and so forth. Of them, the one named *srid-pa’i tho-bo-che* is never destroyed for it is deemed the principal *tho.* It is believed that by virtue of doing so, one frees oneself from the evil influences of *nāga* serpents. Just as people perform rites to free themselves from the evil influences of gods above and the lower *nāga* serpents below, one does this rite of the *thos* to make the marriage ceremony go smoothly.

12. On arrival at the main door of the bride’s house, the bridegroom’s *gnya’-bo* sings the song in praise of the door.

13. Then follows the song called *gyang-bu sne-lnga,* *deyil-khor mjel-glu* (seeing the mandala), *chos-gnas mjel-glu* (meeting the priest), *nda’-dar ’bul-ba’i glu* (song of the arrow), *bkra-shis lha-gral gyi gdan-glu* (song of the carpet), *chab-gzi,* *gzhang-glu bkra-shis bcu-gsum* (thirteen auspicious songs), *gyang-rtsé ’bebs glu* (changeling song), *dar-rgyus kyi gliu* (song of offering the scarf), *bkag-glu* and *bkrol-glu* (riddle songs) and ‘*gro-glu*’ (farewell song). After each song a scarf is offered.

14. This is followed by the *gsar-skems* offering and the arrow which was offered to the priest is taken back. This is done following the song called the song of the arrow (*nda’-glu*).

15. When the bride is about to leave her home, the *gsar-skems* offering is made. The rite to secure a *phlywa* and *gyang* is performed. The parents then present her with a scarf and farewell gifts of meat, tea packets, money and several other things.

16. The bridegroom’s family then hosts three receptions — the first, second and the third.

17. As soon as the bride accompanied by her maternal uncle reaches the bridegroom’s house, her uncle is asked to sing and if he fails to sing, he is not allowed to dismount from his horse. The bride is received from her horse by the members of the bridegroom’s family; each holding in their hands incense sticks and jars filled with chang and tea.
18. Then she goes up to the door where the priests perform the bag-gtor ritual. This is done to dispel the evil spirits, such as “hidden spirits”, nāga serpents and the evil spirits called snar-dre. Cha-har dge-bshes Blo-bzang Tshul-khrims (18th cent.) and Kong-sprul Yon-tan rgya-msho (1813-1899) have written texts on the bag-gtor ritual. The latter perhaps is the one used by the people of nomadic regions of Tibet. In any case, this ritual is considered one of the most important during the marriage.

19. The bridegroom’s mother then comes with a full bucket of milk, a rope and a gold ring. She washes the bride’s hand with milk. This custom is also followed in the eastern regions of Tibet. Then she puts the gold ring in the bride’s right hand. As the mother is the source of the family’s fortune, it is considered important that the gold ring is given to the bride by the bridegroom’s mother.

20. The bride enters the door followed by the songs called pha-bsang-bsu-ma (reception song), gzhang-glu bdra-shis bez-gsum (thirteen auspicious songs), gyang-rtsa ‘bebs glu (chang song), bzing-brol gyi glu (riddle song), dar-bog-gi glu (taking-off an arrow song), and lha-rgyal gyi glu (good fortune song/incense burning song).

21. As soon as these songs come to an end, rice mixed with bro-ma rice is served. It is here that the priest performs the rite of lha-dag. During this rite the bride holds a red thread symbolising the female constituents (khams-dmar-po) and the bridegroom holds a white thread symbolising the male constituents (khams-dkar-po). Bonpos use blue and white thread whereas the Ru-thog use white and red. Then the bridegroom’s mother brings dkar-bcos and phy©e-mar, and feeds the new couple a spoon each. From this point on, the new couple is considered to have formed a new family.

22. Arrangements for the gyang-rtsa is made. After that chang and liquor are served again while each one helped by the gnya-bo and the chang girls sing the songs in praise of gyang-rtsa. Everyone who drinks is forced to empty three cups of wine which is indeed a difficult job! When the gyang-rtsa ceremony is on, everyone is forced to drink chang. Those who do not drink chang must drink butter tea or black tea. Drinking something during this ceremony is considered good.

23. The gyang-rtsa ceremony is followed by the song called Thirteen Auspicious songs. The song leaders, who are present at the ceremony, are given a white scarf and asked to sing.

24. When this ceremony comes to an end, a meal is served. In past Tibet, songs in praise for each variety of food were sung. Plates filled with meat and wine etc. are served during the meal. Meat is served in different sized cuts depending on the position held. For instance, a cooked and dressed but uncut whole, half or one quarter trunk of sheep etc., is served accordingly to people in different positions. These trunks are decorated with cloths of five colours (viz. blue, white, red, green and yellow) and have various cross lines drawn on them. Family members, such as parents, uncles, aunts, sons and daughters are served each with his/her share which differs in size. One is entitled to receive one’s share of meat and wine depending on the singing of a song.

25. Songs in praise of food are sung during the meal. Members present must sit in rows. Sitting in rows was considered very important in the past. No one is permitted to stand, without given permission by the gnya-bo. People coming with hats off, turbans turned upside down or back to front, are viewed as offenders and are
penalised. The penalty consist of being made to drink more wine. If one wants to leave the row even for a while, one needs to get permission from the gnya'-bo. In this way, strict discipline is followed during the ceremony. This indicates the moral discipline of the society.

26. The gnya'-bo then sings songs such as the Thirteen Auspicious songs, the Thirteen Riddle songs and so forth. The song called bkag-glu are sung by the guests when the chang girls persuade them to drink more. In order not to have more drinks the guests sing this song. If the girl fails to sing in response, she is made to drink instead. Perhaps half of these songs are sung as exchanges between the chang girls and the guests in the style of question and answer.

   As soon as this song comes to an end, the parents and relatives of both the bride and the bridegroom are introduced to the people present. This introduction is done by the singing gnya'-bo. Then a compensation is paid for her mother’s milk. As far as the fee for the mother’s milk is concerned, there is no fixed rate. According to one’s living standard, one can give as many turquoises, corals, and yaks as possible. As for the compensation money, it is said to be about eight old silver coins in the past and nowadays about 800 rupees. According to Gna'-rabs bsdus kyi chang-sa'i lam-srol written by Bar-zhi Phun-tshogs Dbang-rgyal (1914-1983), the fee for the mother’s milk is very high in the Tsang region.

   Then a testimony concerning the matrimonial relation, if deemed necessary, is written down and signed, following the testimony song performed by the gnya'-bo. The share of the family’s property that the bride will be given by her parents is decided upon when the testimony (gnyen-gan) would then be written. Concerning these there are no predetermined limits, the parents decide, giving her a share according to their living standards. The present gnya'-glu book of Ru-thog does not have a song of testimony.

27. Finally, when the ceremony comes to an end and the guests are about to leave, bsu-ma and gser skyems offerings are made, followed by the farewell song. The next day a meal is arranged for members of both the families and all the relatives. Traditionally, in the past a marriage ceremony lasts for about four days. The first day is for meat and wine; the second for the bride’s arrival; the third for the feasting; and the fourth day is for deity invocation with recitations. Hence this way, a marriage ceremony is concluded.

To sum up, the custom of marriage is like the life-force that keeps a family from disintegration. Also, it is through this custom that a new family is formed. Descriptions given in this article are limited and show only a general outline of marriage ceremonies of the Ru-thog regions. However, the songs that are sung during the marriage ceremonies, no matter to which regions of Tibet they belong, reflect a vivid picture of ancient Tibet. Among them, the song about how the world came into being and the song about the land, the people and the environment of Tibet are very important and interesting. Furthermore, the marriage rituals such as Ming-sring dpal-bgos, Lha-sgrol tha-'dogs and Gyang-'gugs, the marriage ceremonies of the different regions, the marriage songs, the difference between Bon and Buddhism in terms of the manner in which the Bag-gtor ritual is performed, etc., are now gradually disappearing. It is important to preserve them.

This field is looked upon as a minor field of learning and has been neglected. Considering the importance, I would like to continue my research in this field. Suggestions from learned scholars will be highly appreciated.

763
NOTES

* I would like to thank Mr. Tashi Tsering, Senior Research Scholar of LTWA, for his guidance and for allowing me to use some of the valuable materials from his personal library. My special thanks go to my friend Mr. Thupten K. Rikey who did the English translation of this paper, and also thanks to Pema Khangkar for editing. However, I take full responsibility for any errors that may be found herein.

1. Traditionally, Fort Sme-rue-tse is said to be the fort of Gshen-pa during Ge-sar’s lifetime. As to who built this fort, no reliable materials have so far been found. The stupa in the fore-court of the fort, that contained the corpse of Gshen-pa was recorded in the district record book, and my parents have seen it. The story of Ge-sar says:
   From the roof-top of Fort rdzong-mo Ru, the man of reputation,
   Gshen-pa invite my protector deities,
   the eight Mgon-pos from Dpal Lhun-grub chos-ling monastery.
   Ru-thog Fort is known by various names, such as Ru-mo mkhar-rdzong, Mthong-snmo Grags-pa or Sme-ru tse, the fort of Gshen-pa etc. For more information, see Grub-dbang Bstan-dzin Rin-chen, ’Dzam-gling gangs-rgyal ti-si’i dkar-chag tshangs-dbyangs yid-pa’r phreng Shimga, 1973, p. 577, and Dpon-slob Bstan-dzin Ram-dag, Gyung-drong bon-gyi bstan-pa’i byung-khung nyung-bsdus, and Three Sources for a History of Bon, Bonpo Monastic Centre, Delhi, 1974, p. 620. Also see Nam-mkha’i Nor-bu, Gzi-yi phreng-ba, p. 45.

2. These communities are:
   A) The five communities called tsya-ser-tsha-inga
   B) The nine communities called tsho-tsha-dgu
   C) The six communities called byung-sde tsha-drug

3. Based on the information collected from Me-mgon-po of Bsod-nams gling Tibetan Settlement, Camp No. 4, Ladakh.

4. No written record is available about the history of these ancient ruler families known as the Seven dbang-pos of Ru-thog. However, it is learnt that following the conquest of Guge by Ladakh in 1656, one named Ang-pa Phun-thogs Dbang-rgyal of Ru-thog send a petition to the then Dalai Lama and as a result, the dbang-po ancestors won back the Ru-thog region which they ruled again. Appointment of another Ru-thog dbang-po took place in 1675. (See Vth Dalai Lama, Du-ku lu’i gos-bzang, vol. ka, f. 322a, and 345b, vol. kha, f. 97a and 267a. Also see Bsod-nams Tshe-brtan Yo-se, Ladhags rgyal-rabs ’chi-med ger-mdzod, p. 29-30 and Luciano Petech, The Kingdom of Ladakh, p. 46).


6. According to Gna’-rabs bod-kyi chang-sa’i lam-srol, written by Bar-shi Phun-thogs Dbang-rgyal (1914-1983), the custom of marriage in Central Tibet has 32 chapters and Mnga’-ris gro-thod gyu-yi phreng-bu has 106 chapters. Also, Gro-tshang sa-cha’i bag-ston chos-ga me-log tshom-bu, a gnya’-glu book of Gro-tshang region of Amo, has six sub-chapters. As no gnya’-glu books from the Kham region are so far available in India, nothing accurate can be said in this respect.

7. Tso is a boundary mark of piled stones erected in front of the bride’s home. Traditionally maintains that there are eight such tso, each having a different name. The names given to these tso differ slightly from region to region: for detailed information see the following sources:

a) For tho names in the Spu-hreng region of Mnga-ris, see S.C. Das, “Marriage Customs of Tibet”, Journal of the Asiatic Society Bengal, 1883, LXII, Part III, No. I II

b) G. Tucci, Tibetan Folk Songs from Gyantse and Western Tibet, 1966, p. 115-119. See Bod-chen po’i stod-khams mnga’-ris bkhor-gsum gyi sa-yi me-rtsa gangs-dkar ti-si thor gnas-pa’i su-rug gsum-k’yi lam tshur-rug gsum dkyil du ’bod-pa’i sa-snas kyi gna’-srol bag-ma bsu-gtong skabs-kyi glu-rgyas thar-thor shig-bzhugs (hereafter this text is referred to as Sum-khyil bag-ma bsu-gtong), p. 5. This is an unpublished manuscript from the library of Mr. Tashi Tsering.
c) For line serial and the names of the *tho* according to the custom of Hor Gung-rgyud region, see Gna'-bo'i lugs-bzang ya-rgbis dga'-ston gyi dus mnga-'ris byang-'brog hor-pa 'lho lnga'i bag-ston skabs sa yul-srol gua-chang 'gro-lugs (hereafter this text is referred to as *Hor-thso lnga'i bag-ston*), p. 3-4. This is also an unpublished text from the library of Mr. Tashi Tsering.

d) For line serial and the names of the *tho* according to the custom of the Ru-thog region, see p. 4 of this article.

e) For line serial and the names of the *tho* according to Ladakh, see La-dwags bag-ston in Lo-'khor dus-deb, 1977, p. 92, La-dwags kyi yul-glu, compiled by La-dwags bkra-shis Rab-rgyas, 1970, p. 34 and 36; and A.H. Franke, A Lower Ladakhi Version of the Kesar Saga, Bibliotheca Indica, 1543.168. RASB 1905, p. 460.

f) It is learnt that an article by G. Roerich titled "The Ceremony of Breaking the Stone" has appeared in the Journal of Urusvati (II, p. 25), but I did not have an opportunity to see it. Thus, on which region's custom of *tho* tradition he has written is not known.

8. Generally, no matter what kind of work Tibetans undertake, they first obtain predictions through divinations, horoscopes, and so on. In particular, this is considered very important when a marriage proposal is to be decided upon. Furthermore, in Central Tibet, not only is obtaining predictions through divination and horoscopes etc., considered important, but some even go a step further, drawings lots in front of the Buddha image in the Jokhang in Lhasa (*Rdo-rin Pandita rin-thar*, Sichuan Publishing House, 1987, p. 1094). For further information, see Lobdang Tseltrim Gyatsho alias A-gu Lha-mo tshul-khrims (1889-1958), *Maha-chin'i rris-rig rten-grel thos-bdus 'dod-gu Lo-ba'i dpag-bsam ljon-shing*, Tibetan Medical Centre, Dharamsala, p.7-2, Minling Lochen Dharmashri, (1654-1717), *Byung-rris man-nag zla-ba'i 'od-zer*, Lhasa Medical College, 1927, p. 43-6 and *Gstug-lag*, Journal of Tibetan Astro-Medical Institute, Dharamsala, 1992, p. 80. Also see Rnya-rgod Nam-mtha' seng-be, *Bai-dkar bag-riss las lo-gres sde-pa tshul sogs re'u mig bsud-pa gzal-byed me-long*, Collected works, vol. 2, p. 481-499.


10. In Central Tibet, the wine for asking the bride's hand (slog-chang) is served fifteen days before the actual ceremony. Once slogs-chang is accepted, the marriage proposal becomes confirmed and unterminable (Gna'-rgbis bod-kyi chang-sa'i lam-srol, p. 4). Thus Namtha'i Norbu Rinpoche says in his A *Journey into the Culture of Tibetan Nomads*, "Once the marriage proposal is agreed upon, the girl should not be given to others. In case where the girl is given to others, it is treated as a serious legal case called Bag-stong in some nomad areas." (p. 190:6).

11. The Tibetan word for head-dress is *thod*. Statements such as "the priest wears a *thod* on his head" or "the priest with white *thod*" are found in *Glo-phran* (p. 426). It is a type of head-dress worn by ancient Tibetan kings or priests during the marriage ceremonies and enthronement.


13. *Dog-tha* is a class of spirits called *dgra-tha*. Also, this name applies to a class of spirits called *gyen* and the king of the naga serpents. *Bon-gyi-gchi bstan-pa'i 'byung-khang* says "dog-tha bon-po etc., twelve wise men appointed Gya'-khris bstan-po the first king of Tibet." (p. 18) Also see G.Tucci, Tibetan Folk Songs from Gyanise and Western Tibet, p.65.


15. The rite to secure gyang (lucky charm) is considered a very important ritual. It is performed when one sets out to do good business. In order to stop the gyang of the family from following the daughter, this rite is performed during the marriage ceremony. However, the bridegroom's family also performs it during the marriage ceremony. However, the bridegroom's family also performs the same rite of securing gyang as soon as the bride reaches their home. It is believed that this rite will allow the
gyang to follow her. Gyang is considered to be something that can bring wealth and prosperity. For further information, see Samten Karmay, A General Introduction to the History and Doctrine of Bon, Tokyo, 1976, p. 209. Also see Gling-dkar rta-rgyug rtogs-brjod las styes-mchog Ge-sar nor-bu dgra’-dal gyi rnam-thar snyan-pa’i ba-dan ngyo-mtshar chag-bdn phyes-ste nor-bu’i me-long (hereafter this text is referred to as Gling-dkar rta rgyud), p. 11:5 and Namkha’i Norbu, Sgrung lde’u bon gsum-gyi gtam EMA HO (hereafter referred to as Sgrung lde’u bon gsum), LTWA, Dharamsala, 1991, p. 158-61 and 176-77.

16. This custom is followed in Ru-thog also. These three receptions are named the first, the second and the third, or the reception at the distant, the middle and at the door. For these receptions, the bridegroom’s family has to arrange tents, kitchen equipment, red rice, rice, gro-’og phye-mar, tea, chang and other edible things. Also, see Rdo-ring rnam-thar, vol. 2, p. 1104, and Nga’rabs bod-kyi chang-sa’i lam srel.


19. During the marriage ceremony in almost all regions in eastern Tibet, the priest, known as the priest of the bride, performs the rite of the os-khrus (milk bath) for both the bride and the bridegroom. It is performed either in the bridegroom’s house when the bride arrives or in the bride’s house when the bridegroom comes there and stays in their tea room. This rite is technically known as tshan-khrus. After having done thus, either the bridegroom or the bride is given a new name. With this new name the couple is introduced to the family patron deity (see Nam-mkha’i Nor-bu, Sgrung lde’u bon gsum, p. 243-244).

20. As for the lha-dogs ritual, a white thread made from wool called dmug-thog is tied on the bridegroom’s head and a red thread called the gyang-thag is tied on the bride’s. Holding an arrow called phyag-mdas’, the bridegroom makes offerings to the five protector deities of wine and sacrificial cakes (gor ma). Holding a spindle, the bride makes offerings of curds and phye-mar. The priest (also known as Divine Bonpo) gives a piece of gold called bla-gser to the bridegroom and a turquoise called bla-gyu to the bride. The bridegroom and the bride take their seats on a white felt mattress on which a swastika is drawn with rice-grains. The priest or the Divine Bonpo then sits near the bride and the bridegroom and performs the ritual. (For more information about lha-dogs and ming-sring dpal-dgos, see Bag ma lha’-dogs dang ming-sring dpal-dgos dang lha’-phes by Skar ma Chang-med (unpublished manuscript written in dbu-med, p. 6. Also see Ming-sring dpal-gdod dang lha’-dogs beas lhungs dge legs-phel, Gto-Phran, Delhi, 1973, p. 417-454, 447 and Samten Karmay, A General Introduction of the History and Doctrine of Bon, Tokyo, 1986, p. 208). Also see Nam-mkha’i Nor-bu, Sgrung lde’u bon gsum, LTWA, Dharamsala, 1991, p. 180-181).

21. Gyang-rise is a special chang cup. During the marriage ceremony just before chang is served to the guests, this cup is decorated on the brim with five small pieces of butter called ya ga, and in its middle is placed a small white flag fastened on to a grass stick. Then this cup is filled with chang and passed to every guest to drink to the bottom. The song sung during this occasion is called the song in praise of gyang-rise (see Minga’ris kyi gnyis’glu gro shod gyu yi phreng ba’i dzes bya ba, Ngari, Tibet, 1991, p. 120).

22. In the Ru-thog regions, thirteen different auspicious songs are sung during the important occasions. These songs are called the Thirteen Auspicious Songs. No detailed information is available but the author is in the process of collecting it.

23. It is learnt that these songs were also sung in a similar manner to that of the major songs, but I have not had the opportunity to investigate this.
24. “For the fee for the mother’s milk, mother’s apron and the mother’s services, one gives a sum of 100 dngul-strang. Also, one gives some remuneration in order to assist with the expenditures incurred for the food, medicines, and the government tax duties” (see Gna'-rabs bod-ki chang-sa’i lam-srol, p. 4). The text further says, “In addition to a complete outfit, the girl according to tradition gives her mother a sum of 5 to 10 rdo-tshad, a scarf and a good quality apron for the milk fee (nu-rin)” (Ibid. p. 5). Rdo-ring rtam-thar says, “[the girl] gives her mother a sum of 50 dngul-strang and a scarf for the milk fee.” (vol. II, p. 1098, Sichuan Publishing House, 1987).

Furthermore, Rgyal-po srong-bstan sgam-po’i khrungs-rabs dang rgya-mo’i ’dzangs yig says, “This [ring] bedecked with Lapis lazuli is given as fee for the mother’s milk to Princess Lha-cig’s mother” (p. 39.4). Also Gling-dkar rta-rgyag says, “A gold coin and scarf is given as Mo-yon” (p.320). An article about the marriage ceremony in the Rgyal-rtse region written by Zla-ba Tshe-rin, “Rgyal-rtse khul-gyi gnyen-sgrigs skor dang de’i mdzad-sgo’i go-rim brjod-pa”. Krung-go’i bod-ki zhes-rig, vol. 3, 1990 says “During the slong-chang ceremony one gives one’s mother’s milk fee amounting to the sum of 20-40 dngul-strang. Also, one gives a scarf and a woollen cloth to every family member” (p.134).

25. Generally, when a marriage testimony is deemed necessary, it is written and stamped by both the families as well as the witnesses. For more information, see Zhwa Sgab-pa Dbang-phug Bde-Idan (1908-1988), Bod-ki srid-don rgyal-rabs, vol. I, p. 59. Also see Bka’-drung Nor-nang Dbang-dus Tshe-rin, Gzhung-zhab la nye-bar mkho-ba bla-dpon rim-byon gyi lo-rgyus gong-ma’i khri-lo yig-bskor rtam-bzhag sogs kyi deb-thar long-ba’i dmigs bu (a marriage testimony written in 1888). 1981, p. 206-212, and Bar-zhi Phun-tshogs Dbang-rgyal (1914-1983), Gna’-rabs bod-ki chang-sa’i lam-srol, p. 6.