

**Tibetan Wedding Rituals in Gling rgya Village
in Reb gong, A mdo**



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Note: I have used the standard Wylie transliteration system for the Tibetan terms that appear in this thesis, and Chinese *pinyin* system for the Chinese terms. The Tibetan terms appearing in the text are written according to the standard Tibetan written systems. However, in order to maintain the original, some utterances are phonetically spelled according to the local dialect. There is a space after each Tibetan syllable, whereas no space is set between Chinese syllables.

Illustration: Plate 1: Wedding Proceedings



1. Guests at traditional weddings.



2. The new couple welcoming the guests at a modern wedding.



3. The new couple who have been offered khatas and silk at a modern wedding.



4. Welcoming the guests at a traditional wedding.



5. Women from the bride's family teasing the groom at a traditional wedding.



6. Women from the bride's family distributing the gifts from the groom's family.



7. Offering stuffed dumplings to the female group who welcome the bride.



8. The new couple offering khata to their parents.



9. The new couple offering liquor to the guests.



10. Performers at a modern wedding.



11. The gifts offered by the groom's family to the women from the bride's side.

Plate 2: Food Decorations



1. Food decorations at a traditional wedding.



2. Food decorations at a traditional wedding.



3. Sog sog and sNum btsos breads at a traditional wedding.



4. Mar rGyan decoration.



5. Apple decoration.



6. Stuffed dumpling decoration.



7. Decorations of Sog sog and sNum btsos breads displayed at a traditional wedding.





8. Tibetan bread: Gor thud given as a gift to the groom and the male guests.



9. Tibetan bread: Kha thud given to the bride and female guests.

Plate 3: Wedding Clothes and Jewelry



1. Tibetan robe (Ras lwa).



2. Tibetan robe (Phrug lwa).



3. Tibetan robe made of fur.



4. Tibetan robe made of fur with fox skin at the collar.



5. Otter-skin decoration for Tibetan robes.



6. Tibetan robe with otter-skin decoration.



7. Tibetan summer silk robe.



8. Tibetan fox-skin hat.



9. Tibetan hat (gNa' zhwa) for men.



10. Tibetan hat (gNa' zhwa) for women.



11. Traditional Tibetan shirts.



12. Tibetan women's robe.



13. Tibetan men's robe.



14. Coral necklace.



15. Leather belt for women decorated with silver and coral.



16. Jewelry for women to hang from the belt.



17. Black threads for braiding hair.



18. Hair decoration for women hanging from the back of the head.



19. Women's earring.



20. Women's earrings.



21. Men's ring.

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Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 The Topic

Marriage customs in Tibetan cultural areas of mTsho sngon (*Qinghai*) Province of the People's Republic of China have been changing dramatically in recent decades, due to economic, social and cultural factors. They have also been greatly affected by the introduction of modern education for segments of the population. There is a danger that many of the traditional marriage customs may eventually disappear. The aim of this study is to provide both a systematic description of the wedding ritual as it exists in one village and how it is changing in modern times, and a comparison between traditional and modern weddings.

Studies on wedding rituals in the northwestern provinces of China, where economic and educational development has lagged behind that of the southeastern provinces and cities of China, are still at a rudimentary stage. Furthermore, across the Tibetan plateau, there is a wide variation in marriage customs. So far very little research has been done on wedding rituals in Tibetan communities, and nothing has been published on wedding rituals in Gling rgya Village in A mdo¹. Thus a study on the topic is important.

The wedding ritual takes place on two separate days. The first day is celebrated in the groom's family, while the second day takes place in the bride's family. In my thesis I focus, on the one hand, on the preparations, the wedding costumes, the speeches, the food, the songs, the gifts, and the visits between the households involved and their neighbors, and on the other hand, I concentrate on the changes in the wedding ritual itself before and after 1980. In order to contextualize the wedding ritual and how it has changed, I also describe the broader socio-cultural and economic factors, as well as the impact of local education, which, I believe, may help explain the changes in wedding rituals in Gling rgya in particular, and in the wider Reb gong² area in general.

Moreover, there are certain differences between a Buddhist and a Bon³ wedding in

¹ A mdo is one of the three geographical divisions of Tibet, northeastern Tibet.

² Tibetan term for the local county, Tongren in Chinese.

³ Bon is a pre-Buddhist Tibetan religious practice; it is still practiced in many places in Tibet.

Gling rgya village. I have therefore traced the religious elements in the wedding rituals, as religion plays an important role in marriages between the Bon practitioners and Buddhists in Gling rgya village. Weddings in Gling rgya village are similar to weddings in the wider Reb gong county, and therefore, although there is some local variation, my case study of one village can be considered to be generally representative for the entire area.

1.2 Research Questions

Since my study focuses primarily on the wedding ritual, most of my research questions are related to these rituals and customs as they were in the past and the changes that are occurring with modernity. However, in order to contextualize the rituals and understand the changes, I questioned my informants about socio-cultural and economic factors that influence the way wedding rituals have been performed and are performed today.

Formal education in the area underwent significant changes in the period between 1980 and 2000, and as I see it, the local education system is still in a process of change. Thus, it will be useful to explore education in different social contexts through the experiences of my informants. I discuss the changes in the local education system in more detail in Chapter Five.

Wedding rituals in Gling rgya are changing over time. Some parts of the ritual are becoming obsolete, and the younger generation do not know how their ancestors celebrated wedding rituals. The villagers seem not to understand that this is an increasing threat to the culture of their community.

1.3 Theory and Methodology

Hardly any research has so far been done on wedding rituals in Reb gong. It is important to collect and systematize empirical data on wedding rituals in local settings, in this case in Gling rgya village, before a larger, more comprehensive analysis can be carried out. I hope that my study will help to form the basis for such a larger regional analysis in the future. Since this study is to a large extent empirical, I have worked as thoroughly and systematically as possible in the village chosen. As for theoretical perspectives, anthropologists and sociologists have studied contemporary wedding rituals in a number of

societies. Anthropological and sociological studies of wedding rituals also open up for analytical views and insights concerning the wider religious, socio-cultural and economic context and impact of wedding rituals. Since I am interested in changes in ritual, theoretical insights and analyses of cultural changes to rituals are relevant to my study. One such study is by Catherine Bell: *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions*⁴. However, instead of applying any grand theories, the main focus of this thesis is detailed description of the rituals themselves, including the wider context as background material to help explain the rituals as they were performed in the past and as they are performed in the present. Since marriage is a contract between a man and a woman and their families, it is also crucial to analyze wedding rituals in a gender perspective.

The data were collected during my fieldwork by means of participant observation, interviews, and gathering visual materials. Participant observation is a useful method for collecting important relevant data. Although wedding rituals in Gling rgya village, with one day's celebration in the groom's house and another day in the bride's house, mostly take place during the Tibetan New Year, which is celebrated from the first to fifteenth day of the first month of the Chinese lunar calendar, they also take place at other times of the year. As a native of the village, I attended many weddings, both traditional and modern, before moving to Norway to study. During my fieldwork, I attended a traditional wedding and a modern wedding in Gling rgya village, and another modern wedding celebrated by inhabitants of a nearby village.

Interview was the most important method of collecting data for my thesis. In order to cover the changes to the wedding ritual over time, as well as different perspectives and interpretations, I interviewed many people of different gender and age groups, and with different educational backgrounds. Regarding the details of the ritual before 1980, both male and female villagers over the age of 60 were the most informative. These interviews were crucial, as they were the key source of information for understanding the rituals in the past more deeply. More informants with more details about wedding rituals after 1980 were available among different age and gender groups. Villagers of different age groups with different educational backgrounds were also interviewed to see how differences in

⁴ Bell Catherine 1997

educational background affect the ritual. Although my interviews of informants with different religious perspectives on wedding rituals were satisfying, my informants seemed reluctant to reveal their true opinions on religiously mixed marriages, in order to protect their reputation.

Gathering visual documentation was also a good approach, especially in looking at the changes in wedding rituals. Before starting work on my thesis, I attended many weddings as a guest both inside and outside of Gling rgya village. Due to my personal interests and skills in photography and filming I took many photos and videos at these weddings. I also took many photos and videos as part of the participant observation during my fieldwork. In addition to the information collected during my fieldwork, as a native of Gling rgya village, my lifelong experience of living in the village served as an important source of knowledge about wedding rituals and their changes over the time.

1.4 Textual Sources

Tibetan marriage is a field of study with a long history. Many academic papers are therefore available, and numerous articles have been published on various websites. Most academic papers and some articles provide detailed and comprehensive descriptions and analytical discussions, and show a deep understanding and extensive knowledge of Tibetan marriage. Thus, these studies deserve great appreciation and respect, and continue to attract a great deal of attention and interest within Tibetan Studies.

English Sources

Anthropological studies on forms of marriage and marriage customs in Tibet include, for example, *The Rise of The Polyandrous House: Marriage, Kinship and Social Mobility in Rural Tsang, Tibet* by Heidi Fjeld, published in 2007; *The Dynamics of Polyandry: Kinship, Domesticity, and Population on the Tibetan Border* by Nancy E Levine, published in 1988; Melvyn Goldstein's *Stratification, Polyandry, and Family Structure in Central Tibet*, published in 1971, and his *Fraternal Polyandry and Fertility in a High Himalayan Valley in Northwest Nepal*, published in 1976; as well as *Household Organization and Marriage in Ladakh Indian Himalaya* by Maria Phylactou, published in 1989. All these studies focus more on types of marriage and household structures than on wedding rituals, and employ cultural value, materialistic and economic perspectives.

Additionally, there are books and articles in English about the speeches, songs, process and context of Tibetan weddings. Skal bzang nor bu and Kevin Stuart wrote an article in 1996 entitled *The Rdo Sbis Tibetan Wedding Ceremonies*; Blo rtan rdo rje and Kevin Stuart published a book in 2008 entitled *Life and Marriage in Skya rgya Tibetan Village*; and Tshe dbang rdo rje and Kevin Stuart published a book in 2010 on *Tibetan Weddings in Ne'u na Village*. These three sources contain detailed and systematic descriptions of weddings in three different Tibetan villages in A mdo, and cover the wedding preparations, the stages of courtship, the engagement, and the roles of the matchmaker and the maternal uncle. They mainly focus on the banquets held on the wedding day. However, the last two books do not discuss wedding celebrations for matrilineal marriages. Since these sources do not relate directly to the location I have studied, I have only used them for comparative purposes.

Tibetan Sources

The most detailed studies that I am aware of are So Sprng Thar's 1996 study on wedding customs in the Gro tshang area of Amdo, which neglected the process of engagement and matrilineal marriages; Blo bzang 'jam dpal's 2003 study on wedding customs in central Tibet, and Tshe brtan rgyal's general 2010 study on weddings in A mdo as a whole. Additionally, there are books of wedding speeches and collections of songs, of which the most common include Chab 'gag rdo rje tshe ring's collection of various festivity speeches (2006); bKa' ma mkha' 'bum and Tshe rgyal's collection of A mdo wedding speeches (2010); and rTa 'grin rgyal and Tshe mo skyid's collection of A mdo folksongs (2010). These books are large collections which include various speeches and songs from different parts of A mdo, but the process and context of making the speeches and performing the songs are not addressed in these collections. These books therefore serve as instruments of cultural preservation rather than as material for academic study. Tibetan sources do not generally provide information about how and where materials were collected, and who provided the information. The information given is thus too general to be of use in an academic study.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

My research was done according to *The Guidelines for Research Ethics in the*

Social Sciences, Law and Humanities, especially chapter B, *Respect for Individuals*. Since I am a native of my place of research, there were no problems of misunderstanding or disregarding cultural norms. In order to ensure that my research did not compromise the safety, dignity, and privacy of my informants and also to protect their physical and social welfare, I respected their rights by avoiding topics that might go beyond what they felt comfortable discussing or be outwith cultural norms, and explained the value and the purpose of my research to my informants as well as possible. Additionally, anonymity has been applied according to my informants' wishes.

1.6 Background to Gling rgya Village

Gling rgya Village is located approximately 27 kilometers northeast of Rong bo Town, the capital town of Reb gong County, rMa lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, approximately 165 kilometers Southeast of Zi ling (*Xining*), the capital city of mTsho sngon (*Qinghai*) Province, the People's Republic of China. (See figure1 for map⁵)



⁵ Figure 1: Map of China showing mTsho sngon (*Qinghai*) Province and Gling rgya village (the black dot).

The majority of the population of rMa lho is Tibetan, and the rest consists of Chinese, Muslims, and Mongour (*Tu*). There are also Mongols who are residents of rMa lho Mongolian Autonomous County, one of the four counties of rMa lho Prefecture.

In Gling rgya there are currently more than 420 households and a population of 2500 residents, all of whom speak the Amdo Tibetan dialect. Gling rgya Village consists of seven small groups of houses (Sa-so-ma, Ru-gong-ma, Ru-zhol-ma, Ya-ru, Ma-ru-ma-‘go, Ma-ru-ya-‘go, and Ja-mo-thang). These groups are divided into “upper” and “lower” which refers to the terrain of the village. The upper village is located in the eastern part where the Sa-so-ma, Ru-gong-ma, and Ru-zhol-ma groups live. The lower village is located in the western part where the other four groups live. Each group is divided into three to four clans⁶, and amongst these clans there are also Sha nye families⁷. All the residents are Tibetan Buddhists (with the exception of the Sa-so-ma who are Bon practitioners) but they are adherents of different sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Many are devotees of the rNying-ma sect⁸; while some others follow the dGe lugs pa sect⁹.

Almost all the villagers are peasants. Wheat, barley and rape-seed are the major crops grown. Nearly 70 families earn most of their income from animal husbandry by selling sheep, sheepskin and wool. Some adults conduct business in the local town or other cities, such as Zi ling or Lha sa. Most of the villagers can speak a little of the local Chinese dialect.

Each group has a small temple, with the exception of the Ma-ru-ya-go and Ma-ru-ma-go groups, who share the same temple, as do the Ru-gong-ma, and Ru-zhol-ma groups. Religious rituals are held in the temples on auspicious days. Gling rgya village has two main mountain gods who have their own shrines, A-mi-la-ri and A-mi-mag-ba. There is a monastery named Sa-dkar-shar at the base of a mountain, which is 10 kilometers from the village. The monastery belongs to the dGe-lug sect of Tibetan Buddhism. In the monastery

⁶ Clan is Tsho ba in Tibetan. A clan consists of twelve to twenty-five households. Clans are responsible for assisting the families involved during such occasions as wedding ceremonies and funerals.

⁷ Sha nye are groups of families, usually consisting of four to seven families, who originated from the same household. Families in the same Sha nye have the main responsibility for assisting each other on occasions such as weddings, funerals etc.

⁸ The rNying ma is the oldest sect of Tibetan Buddhism, founded in the 11th century. It is also known as the Red Sect. The word means ancient or old in Tibetan.

⁹ The dGe Lug sect is the most famous Buddhist sect in Tibetan history and is also known as the Yellow Hat Sect. It was founded by Tsongkhapa in 1409.

there are two lamas and about 13 monks, all of whom come from Gling rgya.

The villagers live in flat-roofed houses constructed from adobe bricks and wood decorated with carvings of animals and flowers. Each household consists of several wooden rooms with a large courtyard in the center. There is a large room with a stove where people cook during the winter and which also serves as a dining room, and a small hut which serves the same purposes during the summer. There is a special room for guests to sleep in at night. Every household has a small room where statues and paintings of deities, and religious books are placed and worshiped. Several small bowls of water are put on the altar as an offering to the deities before the family has breakfast. A butter-lamp is generally lit in this sacred room in the evening. Certain flowers and fruits are generally put in this room as offerings. Additionally, every family makes a bSang¹⁰ offering to the local mountain deities every morning.

Villagers seldom wear traditional Tibetan robes today, as they are inconvenient for work; instead, they wear western-style casual clothes in everyday life. The older people wear robes most of the time. On certain festivals, such as the New Year celebrations, all residents wear traditional Tibetan robes with the exception of a few of the younger villagers. Both the men's and the women's robes are made of the same materials, but the style is completely different. The women's robes are longer than the men's.

Gling rgya village is a patriarchal community. Women do the housework: cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of the children. They collect fuel from distant places and bring it back to their homes. Men are responsible for providing income by trading or going out to get work, such as constructing roads or buildings. Women weed and harvest crops. Plowing the fields is considered to be arduous work, and only for men, but both sexes water the fields. Women do not slaughter animals. Villagers of both genders help other families with building houses and holding weddings.

Gling rgya village has an elementary school. There are about 15 teachers, most of whom come from Gling rgya village, and some from other villages in Reb gong county. Children start school when they are six or seven years old. After they graduate from this school, most attend middle schools in town; a few attend another two middle schools

¹⁰ bSang is a burnt offering of wheat flour and conifer branches made to local mountain deities.

located in the countryside. The A mdo dialect of Tibetan is the language of instruction used in those schools. There are now about 150 people from the village who have graduated from college or university and have been given teaching and other public sector jobs by the local government; their salaries have become the main source of income for their families.

1.7 Forms of Marriage in Tibet

Here I would like to give a concise introduction to the three main forms of marriage in Tibetan society: monogamous marriage, polygyny, and polyandry.

Polyandry is the marriage of one woman and more than one man. Nancy Levine claims that this form of marriage is most prevalent in western regions of Tibet, and less so in central Tibet. It is rarely found in the far east or northeast of Tibet, due to Chinese influences. Chinese marriage law, which prohibits Tibetan plural marriage, has also helped to reduce the number of polyandrous marriages. Polyandry was more common among the rich and landowners than among the poor and landless, and more common in agricultural areas than in nomadic areas.¹¹ As a custom, marriage requires expensive dowries in some regions of Tibet, and poor families who have several sons cannot afford to take a wife for each of them, so the sons share one wife instead. Polyandry was also practiced among landowners for financial reasons. Brothers staying in the same house and sharing one wife are all agriculturally productive and can make more of a contribution to the family's financial development. Polyandry was always a way to avoid dividing land and separating families by building new houses for each son. It also controlled the growth of village populations.¹²

Polygyny is the marriage of one man and two or more women. This form of marriage was largely confined to nobles and to rich families who were financially capable of supporting more wives, and who wanted to increase the extent of their kinship and network, as well as demonstrating their financial power and social status. Although polygyny has traditionally been a part of Tibetan culture, it is not commonly practiced in contemporary Tibet. It occurs even less frequently than polyandry. Due to financial

¹¹ Levine 1988: 158

¹² Fjeld 2007: 119

progress and educational development, as well as the influence of modernization, polygyny in Tibet has not only vanished in cities and towns, but is also vanishing in rural areas. It is, however, still practiced to some extent in some parts of western and eastern Tibet.

Monogamy is the marriage of one man and one woman. It has traditionally been the most common marital form in Tibetan society.¹³ In northeastern Tibet plural marriages are very rare. Tshe brtan rgyal writes that among the three marital forms in Tibet, monogamy is the only one practiced in agricultural and nomadic areas in A mdo.¹⁴ In such a marriage, it is very likely that families in which there is more than one son will be divided into smaller households when each son marries monogamously. Property such as farmland is also divided. All social groups, including the poor, the rich, landowners, and nobles follow the same marriage system: monogamy. The availability of modern education and the improvement of the financial situation in Tibetan areas have increased the influence of outside cultures within Tibet, and this has contributed to the decline in popularity of traditional plural forms of marriage. The fact that Chinese marriage law prohibits Tibetan plural marriages has also contributed to this trend. The strengthening of monogamous marriage in contemporary Tibetan society has resulted in an increase in the number of romantic marriages, which people now value more than before.

1.8 Introduction to Marriage Customs in Gling rgya Village

About 82.1% of marriages in Gling rgya village are patrilocal (with the woman marrying out into her husband’s family) whilst 17.9% are matrilocal (with the man marrying out into his wife’s family). (See figure 2)

Village groups Terms	Ru gong ma	Ru zhol ma	Ya ru	Ma mgo	Ya mgo	mJa’ mo thang	Sa so ma	Total
Marriages	110	78	68	72	68	72	95	563
Matrilocal marriages	21	13	13	12	22	9	11	101
	19%	16.7%	19.1%	16.7%	32.4%	12.5%	11.6%	17.9%

¹³ Fjeld 2007:100

¹⁴ Tshe brtan rgyal 2010: 31

Patrilocal marriages	89	65	55	60	46	63	84	462
	81%	83.3%	80.9%	83.3%	69.6%	87.5%	88.4%	82.1%

Figure 2: The statistics show the percentages of matrilineal and patrilocal marriages in each village group in Gling rgya.

In a patrilocal marriage, the man's family holds the first wedding ritual (Tib. Bag ston)¹⁵ and pays the bride price to the woman's family. After three to five days, the woman's family celebrates the second wedding ritual (Tib. Mag ston).¹⁶ In this form of marriage, the woman moves into her husband's household after the wedding and lives there for the rest of her life. Her position in her new family is much lower than the position she had when she lived with her own parents. She is responsible for most of the housework and she does not have any decision-making rights. In order to be considered a good wife, she needs to always work hard and show respect to the members of her husband's family. The bride can be scolded by her mother-in-law when she does something wrong, and her father-in-law does not get involved in this argument, because housework is the responsibility of women in Gling rgya village. In the past, the strictness of brides' mothers-in-law with regard to housework has been the cause of several divorces. The wife's position changes when her husband's parents get old and she becomes the most powerful woman in the family. She then becomes a mother-in-law herself when her own sons get married.

If a family has two sons, only one of them moves in with his parents after he gets married. The family build a new house for the other son and his wife and divide their property (mainly farmland). It is common for the elder son to move out into the new house, and for the younger son to live in the original house, although it does sometimes happen that the younger son moves out. Families with three or more sons do not usually find wives to marry into the family for each son, because the family's property cannot be divided into too many parts. Thus, they send one son to the village monastery or let him marry out.

Matrilocal marriages are practiced between families who have only daughters and those who have only sons. In such cases the roles and the order of the rituals are reversed.

¹⁵ Bag ston is the wedding celebration for the bride, held at the groom's house.

¹⁶ Mag ston is the wedding celebration for the groom, held at the bride's house.

The terms Mag ston and Bag ston are also used in this situation. Mag ston is held first, and Bag ston is celebrated afterwards. After the wedding, the groom moves into his wife's household. His position in his new family is low, but higher than the position of a bride who moves into her husband's family, because in Gling rgya village the families are patriarchal.

Chapter Two - Wedding Preparations

Whilst the wedding itself takes place on two separate days (one day in each family), the preparations, which include spouse selection, engagement, the selection of wedding dates and guests, begin much earlier. They are essential parts of the wedding ritual; thus, the focus of this chapter is to describe the pre-wedding activities. On the one hand, it serves as a contextual framework for the wedding itself, while on the other, it helps to paint a complete picture of the ritual. Moreover, most marriages in Gling rgya village are patrilocal, which means that the men's families play an active role in spouse selection and matchmaking, while the women's families play a passive role. The description in this chapter therefore focuses on patrilocal marriages. Matrilocal marriages are also addressed though.

2.1 Spouse Selection

Before presenting the process of spouse selection, it is important to mention that the form of marriage practiced in Gling rgya village is monogamy, and there have not been any occurrences of polygyny and polyandry in Gling rgya community either before or after 1980.

Generally, as in other parts of Tibet, marriages in Gling rgya village can be divided into arranged marriages and romantic marriages. In arranged marriages, the spouse is selected by the parents of either the bride or the groom. Family members and relatives discuss the selection of a desirable partner for the young person together, but the final decision is made by the parents. In the case of romantic marriages, the couple make the decision to get married. However, parents also play an important role in romantic marriages, as their sons and daughters usually consult them about their choice of partner. Both of these two types of marriage share the same wedding rituals.

Spouse selection in Tibetan society is undertaken according to the belief that some families are impure (those who have bSe drai¹⁷ or worship The'u rang¹⁸), religion and family deity, morality, kinship, and wealth.¹⁹ Thus, in Gling rgya village, parents traditionally first find out whether the chosen man or woman comes from a family that is believed to be pure (Rus gtsang²⁰). If the parents do not know much about a particular family, they consult other people who know more. Purity is considered to be the most important criterion in spouse selection. Men and women from families which are believed to be pure do not usually select a spouse from a family considered to be impure. If one of the spouses comes from a bSe drai or The'u rang family, it is believed that their children will also be bSe drai or The'u rang. People from families who are believed to be impure are the least attractive marriage partners, and people from such families mostly build marital relationships with others of the same background or with inhabitants of other villages who are not familiar with their background.

Secondly, parents consider whether both families have the same religious beliefs and family deities. There are both Buddhist and Bon practitioners in Gling rgya village, but Bon is practiced by only one of the seven groups²¹ in the village. People do not usually choose spouses of a different religion, as they believe this may bring misfortune during their marital life. Parental objections to a potential spouse based on religious differences are not made public, as this might give the impression of religious discrimination, creating an unpleasant atmosphere between the two religious groups.

Generally, religious discrimination in marriage practice is not apparent, and there have been many occurrences of Buddhist and Bon mixed marriages in Gling-rgya village. But when one looks behind the curtain, it does in fact exist. The research I did during my fieldwork shows that 32.6% of the marriages in the Sa so ma group took place within their

¹⁷ bSe drai is a repulsive smell which is believed to never fade, and is passed from generation to generation. Some families are believed to naturally have such a smell.

¹⁸ A The'u rang is believed to be a demon, but The'u rang families do not consider it to be so. They believe that the The'u rang is able to protect the family if it is worshiped and also has a malevolent ability to bring inauspicious events such as illness and disasters to other people. People who do not worship The'u rang do not usually deal with or make friends with those who do.

¹⁹ Tshen brtan rgyal 2010: 31

²⁰ Families who are believed neither to have bSe drai nor to worship The'u rang.

²¹ See "Background to Gling rgya Village" in Chapter One.

own group or with inhabitants of other nearby Bon villages. Comparing with the fact that Sa so ma group is only one seventh of Gling rgya village, this percentage is high. On average, 8.7% of marriages in the remaining groups are interreligious. (See figure 3)

Village groups Terms	Buddhist						Bon	Total
	Ru gong ma	Ru zhol ma	Ya ru	Ma mgo	Ya mgo	Mja'mo thang	Sa so ma	
Marriages	110	78	68	72	68	72	95	563
Marriages within the same religious group	101	68	61	67	65	65	31	458
	91.8%	87.2%	89.7%	93%	95.6%	90.3%	32.6%	81.3%
Interreligious marriages	9	10	7	5	3	7	64	105
	8.2%	12.8%	10.3%	7%	4.4%	9.7%	67.4%	18.7%

Figure 3: The statistics show the percentages of the marriages within the same religious group and interreligious marriages in each village group in Gling rgya.

In addition, my informant A stated that his family refused the marriage of his daughter to a Bon practitioner from the Sa so ma group. He admitted that his decision was based on religious differences, but this was kept secret. Later, the truth of his decision was revealed and he was remonstrated and shown disrespect by the Sa so ma group. Furthermore, according to him, other Buddhist families have also refused to allow their children to marry Bon practitioners.²² On the other hand, my informant B, a Tibetan language teacher and Bon practitioner from another village who is married to a woman from the Sa so ma group, and whose son married a Buddhist woman from the Ru zhol ma group during my fieldwork, said that he does not see religion as having any effect on spouse selection.²³ Moreover, according to my research, interreligious marriages in Gling rgya village in 2000 were at 13%, whereas the percentage increased to 18.7% in 2011. (See figure 4) It is my impression that the number of interreligious marriages in Gling rgya village is increasing due to outside influence, modern education, and the fact that the

²² Interview with informant A.

²³ Interview with informant B.

villagers are less religious than they used to be.

Terms	Year		2000		2011	
Marriages within the same religious group			429	87%	458	81.3%
Interreligious marriages			64	13%	105	18.7%

Figure 4: The statistics show the percentages of marriages within the same religious group and interreligious marriages in 2000 and in 2011.

In Tibet, every household has a protector deity worshiped as the private deity of the family. The particular deity worshiped depends on which Buddhist tradition the family practices. Most Tibetan families worship the same family deities because they follow the same Buddhist traditions. The female deity, dPal ldan lha mo, is the chief guardian-goddess of Tibetan Buddhism, and she is the chief protector of the dGe lugs pa school.²⁴ Certain deeply religious families value family deities highly in terms of marriage and are reluctant to marry their children to people who worship different family deities. However, in Gling rgya village the concept of family deities does not affect marriage in a significant way, as most of the families are followers of the dGe lugs pa school, and therefore share the same family deities.

Family reputation plays an important role in spouse selection; it directly affects a son's or daughter's marriage. Priority is given to families whose members are known to be moral. Although Gling rgya village is divided into seven groups, they are geographically adjacent and interact daily. Children from morally admirable and respectable families are more often selected as a spouse. If parents are well known for benevolence and honesty, their children are also believed to share the same qualities, and so people look for spouses from such families. Widows, widowers, and the divorced are not the first choice in spouse selection in Gling rgya village.

As in the rest of Tibet, the inhabitants of Gling rgya village don't practice endogamy, i.e. marriages between close relatives such as parallel or cross cousins, or siblings, as it is believed that such marriages may produce physically or mentally handicapped babies. According to Rin chen sgrol ma, marriages between close relatives are

²⁴ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975:23

not practiced in rGya bo village in Reb gong,²⁵ for the same reason. Tshe brtan gyal also states that parents do not support endogamy in A mdo because of a belief that marriages between closely related couples could result in babies born with tails.²⁶ Endogamy is a shameful practice in the culture of Gling rgya village. People express contempt for such marriages, and unpleasant or negative rumors would be widespread if such a marriage were to take place in the village.

Although Gling rgya villagers generally do not practice marriage between different ethnic groups, two such marriages are to be found in the village. One Chinese carpenter married a Tibetan woman after he had lived in the village for a long time. Also, a young village man working in Beijing married a Chinese woman.

A new feature of spouse selection has been on the rise in Gling rgya village since the 1980s amongst people working in the public sector. Due to the post-1980 educational development of the area, the number of villagers working in the public sector has increased. Men working in the public sector tended to select spouses who were farmers, in order to have a wife who would be willing to take care of the housework. Their employment situation meant a secure income from the local government. This was seen as important by women's families when considering a marriage proposal, and it was therefore relatively easy for men working in the public sector to find a spouse. Women working in the public sector never married farmers. Today, both male and female villagers employed by the local government tend almost exclusively to choose spouses who also work in the public sector. My fieldwork data shows that in Gling rgya village there are 103 married men and 19 married women working in the public sector. 45 of the 103 married men are over 40 years old, and they married farmers. 97 percent of the rest chose wives (inside or outside of the village) working in the public sector, while none of the 19 married women selected farmers as spouses. There are only 3 women who are over 40 years old, and they married men from other villages.

Marriages based on the above customs dominate in Gling rgya village, although there are some marriages that break with the traditional customs of spouse selection.

²⁵ Rin chen sgrol ma 2006: 616

²⁶ Tshe brtan rgyal 2010: 32

2.2 Matchmaking

When a son reaches the marriageable age (usually between seventeen and twenty-three) his parents begin the search for a suitable wife. Firstly, they choose a woman whose family background and financial situation are similar to their own, and gather as much information as possible about the woman and her family. If the son's parents are satisfied with the woman, they try to convince their son, by providing as much information about her as they can. While the son's opinion is valued in the process, he doesn't usually object to what his parents have decided. If he did so, he would lose respect in the village.

After the son approves the potential wife, the parents find matchmakers, usually two persuasive elderly men from families in the same *Sha nye*. The matchmakers pay an informal visit to the woman's home and indirectly hint at the decision made by the man's parents. According to custom, the woman's family never express enthusiasm for the potential match during this informal visit, even if they are willing to approve of the marriage. They pretend not to expect the matchmakers to pay a formal visit. The matchmakers also know that this is just a tradition, and therefore select a day for a formal visit with or without the permission or approval of the woman's family. The woman's family is also informed of the date.

Meanwhile, the woman's close family discuss the daughter's marriage with other relatives and gather information about the man and his family. At the same time, the man's family prepare engagement gifts, including a *khata*,²⁷ a large piece of silk or cloth (the size of a traditional Tibetan robe), about seven to ten bottles of alcohol fastened with wool (the amount is not fixed), and several bricks of tea.²⁸

Early in the morning of the chosen day, the matchmakers pay a formal visit to the woman's parents with the engagement gifts. The woman's family also get ready for their arrival, and serve them breakfast whether they intend to accept the proposal or not. After a casual conversation, the matchmakers explain the purpose of the visit. After placing the

²⁷ A *khata* (*Kha btags*) is made of cotton or silk and colored white, yellow or blue. It looks like a long scarf and has auspicious symbols or mantras inscribed on it. It represents the sincerity of one's offering; it is also used as a sign of one's love or respect for another.

²⁸ See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of engagement gifts.

gifts in front of them, they give a speech²⁹ about the reason for their arrival. They describe the positive qualities of the man and his family, and explain away his negative qualities, hoping that the woman's family will agree to the marriage. The woman's father also gives a formal or an informal speech in praise of his daughter. Agreement is not reached easily and the discussion is long. When they finally come to a decision and accept the proposal, the woman's family invite one male member from each of the families in their Sha nye to open one or two of the bottles of alcohol the matchmakers have brought with them. Traditionally, the woman's family do not open the bottles on their own. If they did, it would represent their contempt for the other families in their Sha nye. A small portion of the alcohol is offered to family and local mountain deities in a small bowl. Afterwards, they take a sip of the alcohol which signifies their acceptance of the proposal.

Finally, the matchmakers return with the good news to the man's waiting family. A small ritual is held in the woman's home to celebrate the engagement. The woman's family invite the other families in their part of the village to drink the engagement liquor. The village tradition is that only elderly men attend the ritual and those who do not drink leave early. Women do not attend because they do not drink alcohol. The elderly men praise the success of the proposal. A simple meal is served for lunch by the woman's family along with the alcohol.

Proposals are not always successful though. Generally, if the woman's family refuse the proposal, this is due to the purity and ancestry of the man's family, their religion or family deity, their morality, their wealth, or the woman not agreeing to the proposal. Women, though, usually tend to follow their parents' decisions. The family does not reveal the real reason for rejecting the proposal. Instead they find excuses, saying that their daughter is too young, that the family still need her to assist with housework in the coming years, that they have only one daughter and don't want her to marry out, or that she is already in love with someone else. In such cases, the matchmakers have no choice but to ask the parents to give the proposal further consideration, and indicate their next visit by attempting to leave the engagement gifts. If the woman's family agree to let them leave the gifts, this is a sign that the family will agree next time. If the woman's family do not let the

²⁹ See Chapter Four, Speech One.

matchmakers leave the gifts, there is not much hope for success on their next attempt. The matchmakers, though, pay several more visits to try to convince the family to accept the proposal. They stop if they are not successful after three visits.

In the case of romantic love the engagement process is slightly different. First, the man lets his parents know whom he wishes to choose as his wife and tries to convince them to agree to the marriage. His parents give the matter serious consideration and discuss it with their son. If the parents support the son's decision, the process of the proposal and engagement is the same as presented above. However, if the woman's family turns down the proposal several times, the man and the woman secretly arrange an escape and select an appropriate day. On the selected day, he tells his parents what his plan for the night is. He goes to the woman's home at midnight with two of his friends. As planned, the woman is ready to leave secretly with him, dressed in new traditional clothes. They leave a khata on her pillow as a sign that she has been taken as his wife. Tshe brtan rgyal also states "In nomadic areas in A mdo, when a woman wants to marry a man and her parents are in strong disagreement, the only way is to escape at midnight to the man's home as his wife, and leave a white piece of wool in her bed to indicate her escape. The white wool is replaced by a khata in modern times"³⁰. The man's family gets up at the same time, and waits with food they have prepared for the bride's arrival in their home.

The next morning, the man's family send the matchmakers again, who follow the steps mentioned above. The woman's parents usually agree to the engagement after their daughter's escape. The woman should be sent back within two or three days, whether the proposal has been accepted or not, in order that her parents can discuss with her her feelings for her lover and the reasons for her escape. As a result, they usually reconsider their opposition to the marriage. Sometimes the woman has to escape from home two or three times before her parents agree. In cases where a man is marrying out into the woman's family, the positions of the two families in the process of matchmaking are reversed. The woman's family is active and sends matchmakers to the man's family. However, a man does not escape to a woman's family if his parents disagree with the proposal.

³⁰ Tshe brtan rgyal 2010: 34

From the day of the engagement, the man usually visits his prospective wife at night and sleeps with her. The man and the woman may not have affairs with others after their engagement. If one of them discovers that the other has had an affair with someone else, there will be an argument and the engagement will probably be canceled.

2.3 Selection of Wedding Dates

In Tibetan culture, the selection of wedding dates is considered to be an important part of the wedding ritual. In Gling rgya village, as in most of A mdo, the Chinese lunar calendar is applied instead of the Tibetan calendar. There are a few days, such as the 8th, 15th, and 30th of every month, which are believed to be auspicious, and most ceremonies take place on these days. Certain Buddhist astrological schools in large monasteries around Tibet publish calendars, which give astrological information about each day. Every month, there are days for offerings to mountain deities, days for making donations to charities, days for celebrations, etc. Since ordinary people are unable to analyze days astrologically, they refer to published calendars to find out whether a certain day is suitable for particular activities.

Similarly, wedding dates are selected based on the astrological calendars. Weddings are arranged on the days described in the calendars as days of celebration. Whilst weddings are held throughout the year, the local New Year (from 1st to 18th of the first lunar month) is a popular time, as combining the celebrations helps to reduce expenses. Moreover, Gling rgya village is in an agricultural area and thus the villagers work long days during the summer, and are free during the winter, so winter, rather than summer weddings are the norm.

Following the engagement, the two families discuss and decide on the wedding dates based on the astrological calendars, and inform each other of the number of guests that will be coming, usually between thirteen and twenty people. If the woman's family needs the daughter's help with housework for a period of time, the families can agree to postpone the wedding until the woman's family is ready to send the daughter off. However, wedding rituals are not celebrated if a family member has died during the year. In Gling rgya village, mourning takes place over an entire year, and no celebrations are held during the period of mourning.

2.4 The Preparations for the Patrilocal Wedding Ritual

2.4.1 The Bride's Family's Preparations for Bag ston

When a woman is marrying out into her husband's family, she is sent in her best clothes and jewelry. Her family is responsible for making four different traditional Tibetan robes (Ras lwa,³¹ Phrug lwa,³² Tshar lwa,³³ and sPu tshar³⁴), a Tibetan shirt made of patterned silk, a decorative piece of otter-skin (approximately three meters in length and twelve to twenty centimeters in width, fastened at the edge of the robes, which can be taken off one robe and attached to another)³⁵ and a fox-skin hat³⁶ for the bride. They also purchase a gold ring, gold earrings, and a coral necklace for her. Poorer families, who cannot afford these costly ornaments, borrow from the richer families with whom they have an intimate relationship.

On the day before Bag ston, the woman's family announces who is to be in the guest group.³⁷ The women in the family make bread (Kha thud³⁸) from wheat flour. This is a gift for the bride from her family and is taken to the man's family when she is sent off the next day. The size and appearance of the bread are very important; it needs to be large and have a good shape and color. If the man marries out into his wife's family, a different kind of bread, Gor thud³⁹, is given instead. Kha thud and Gor thud are of different sizes and shapes, and are only popular in the agricultural areas of Reb gong. Kha thud is only used for weddings, whilst Gor thud is used for all celebrations. Making these kinds of bread involves a long process. A small amount of fuel (dry grass, sticks and dung) is placed on the ground, covered with small clumps of earth collected from the fields and

³¹ A robe made of thin cloth in different colors worn in summer. See Illustrations, Plate 3, picture 1.

³² A red-brown robe for summer use, it is thicker and more expensive than a Ras lwa. See Illustrations, Plate 3, picture 2.

³³ A robe made of lambskin and covered with a Ras lwa, the most expensive type of robe. See Illustrations, Plate 3, picture 3 and 4.

³⁴ A robe made of white material which is furry inside. See Illustrations, Plate 3, picture 13.

³⁵ See Illustrations, Plate 3, picture 5 and 6.

³⁶ See Illustrations, Plate 3, picture 8.

³⁷ The people who accompany the bride or the groom into the other's family on the wedding days.

³⁸ A very large, flat Tibetan bread, wide in the middle but narrower at each end. It is approximately 1.2 meters in length and 0.7 meters at its widest part. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 9.

³⁹ A large, round, flat Tibetan bread; most commonly approximately 0.5 meters in diameter. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 8.

then lit. When the clumps of earth are burnt, the women crush them into powder and place them on the ground. The wheat flour dough is flattened into the correct shape and placed on the hot, crushed clumps of earth. The dough is then covered with pieces of paper and another layer of the burnt earth. After approximately twenty minutes, when the top layer of burnt earth is removed, the bread is ready.

In the afternoon, the bride wears a simple, traditional Tibetan dress and prepares to get her hair braided. The family invites a married woman (from their clan), whose parents are still alive, to comb their daughter's hair and braid it with a fixture of thread⁴⁰ at the end of the plait. Women whose parents are dead, who are divorced, unmarried, or widowed cannot be invited to braid the bride's hair.

Later in the afternoon, the bride waits for the visitors to arrive. Anyone in the village, including children, adults, and older men and women may come to visit. They all come to see the bride and present gifts of apples, oranges, and candies. They do not usually give money. The bride does not stretch out her hands to receive what she is given by the visitors. She stands at one side of the room with her mother and sisters. Most children and adults do not stay long, but her close friends do. The older people have a talk with her about the importance of good behavior and manners in her new home. They instruct her about showing respect for her parents-in-law and never having arguments with her husband and tell her to keep working hard.

While listening to these instructions, she cries a lot, with great sadness caused by the thought of being isolated from her parents and siblings, and the house in which she has grown up. Her friends comfort her with words like: "Don't be sad, there is no need to cry. Every woman has to get through this event. This is the way of life". Sometimes her friends cry together with her because of a deep understanding of how sad she feels at this moment, but they never cry loudly. If the bride did not cry it could be interpreted by the visitors as a sign that she does not care about her family and create an unpleasant atmosphere, as well as being a source of gossip in the village.

According to my informants D and F, almost every woman cries on this day, sometimes for hours. The tears come not because of the possible gossip in the village, but

⁴⁰ See Illustrations, Plate 3, picture 17.

because of the sad thoughts of being sent away from home and starting new life, in a new family. The life of a daughter is very different from the life of a daughter-in-law. A daughter does not need to care about proper behavior or manners in the family, whilst a daughter-in-law has to be very careful⁴¹. Informant D also added that there are some differences between women working in the public sector and other women. Women who work in the public sector do not usually live with their husbands' families, as they mostly work in towns. They do not therefore experience the pressure of living together with the husband's family, and do not feel as sad as the women from farming families do.⁴²

In the evening, the family prepare stuffed dumplings, which are served to the women from families in the same clan who come to see the bride off the next morning. The family make the traditional clothes ready to be worn the next morning.

2.4.2 The Groom's Family's Preparations for Bag ston

The groom's family and their Sha nye families are all involved in the preparations for Bag ston, but the members of the Sha nye families only offer practical assistance and are not financially responsible for the wedding. The bride price is only paid in cash in Gling rgya village. The amount varies from family to family. During the 1980s and 1990s, it was between 800CNY and 1500CNY, but it has been increasing since 2000. This is a large amount, which most families start saving for four or five months earlier. Poorer families who cannot afford the bride price have to borrow money from richer families. If the bride works in the public sector, the bride price is usually between 6000CNY and 8000CNY. Her salary goes to her husband's family, which is why the bride price is so high.

The other preparations in the groom's family start about five days prior to Bag ston. The elderly male family members do the shopping in Rong bo town, which is the nearest commercial center. Two pieces of cloth (each the size of a traditional Tibetan robe), meat (mutton and beef), vegetables, apples, liquor and other beverages, cigarettes, candies, sunflower seeds, peanuts, and white raisins are the main items to be purchased. The amount purchased depends on the financial situation of the family. Rich families

⁴¹ Interview with informants D and F.

⁴² Interview with informant D.

sometimes buy a great deal, to show off their power and wealth during the wedding.

Two days before Bag ston, relatives and a member of each of the Sha nye families come to help with the preparations. The women are responsible for making the bread. The breads for the guests are much smaller than the one for the bride. One bread is made for each guest, but they differ in shape. Kha thud are made for the female guests and Gor thud for the male guests. Some extra breads (both Kha thud and Gor thud) are made for additional use, and are eaten by the Sha nye families and other villagers for lunch or dinner on the wedding day. The bread should look nice and fresh. Another two kinds of bread made for weddings are sNum btsos⁴³ and Sog sog.⁴⁴ These are used to decorate the tables. The men are responsible for cutting the mutton, beef and vegetables.

On the day before Bag ston, the women clean the room in which the guests are served and make stuffed dumplings to be used as decorations on the tables. Sha nye families bring plates and bowls, as there is a huge assembly of villagers at lunch the next day. Those families who have cows bring milk. In the afternoon, young adults go to borrow Tibetan-style tables and white woolen carpets from Sha nye families, if the bride's family does not have enough.

When the tables and carpets are properly arranged in a row in the dining hall, the men start decorating the tables with different food. Phye mar⁴⁵ and Gro 'bras⁴⁶ are placed on the first table in the row. There are two or three plates of each kind of food, depending on the length of the row. The food is piled as high as possible on the plates.⁴⁷ One plate of meat with a 'Tshang ra⁴⁸ on top is placed next to the Gro 'bras, and other plates are arranged in a pleasing way, although there are no specific rules. The remaining plates are filled with sNum btsos breads, stuffed dumplings,⁴⁹ and apples.⁵⁰ These foods are purely

⁴³ A bread boiled in oil. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 3.

⁴⁴ A bread made from thin threads of dough coiled together, boiled in oil. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 7.

⁴⁵ A wooden bowl filled with barley flour made into pointed butter flowers on its surface, with a flat, narrow, pointed piece of wood decorated with butter flowers placed on top. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 4.

⁴⁶ A Tibetan food made by mixing rice and Tibetan sweet potatoes together with sugar and butter.

⁴⁷ I heard an anecdote that at one wedding, the food decorations were so high, that the guests sitting on opposite sides of the table could not see each other.

⁴⁸ The back part of a sheep carcass with its tail.

⁴⁹ See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 6.

⁵⁰ See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 5.

decorative and are not meant to be eaten by the guests. Raisins, sunflower seeds, and peanuts placed on the tables are for the guests to eat. Bottles of liquor, non-alcoholic drinks and several packs of cigarettes are also placed on the tables for the guests. Sometimes plastic flowers together with peafowl feathers in beautiful vases are also placed on the tables. A complete table arrangement is called a sDer kha.⁵¹

The guest group usually stay at the wedding for four to five hours. In the middle of the wedding, two of the groom's Sha nye families invite the guests into their homes for a simple ritual (the same in both Bag ston and Mag ston). One month before the wedding, the groom's family ask the two Sha nye families to hold this ritual on the wedding day. Sha nye families do not refuse this request, as the man's family is also supposed to hold such rituals in return when there are weddings in the Sha nye families. Thus, the two Sha nye families prepare in advance. They do not prepare any gifts or bread, only a simple row of sDer kha in their dining halls, and other necessities such as meat, vegetables, and milk for serving the guests at the ritual.

Upon the completion of all the preparations, the man's family announces what time the Sha nye families should return to the groom's family the next morning. The relatives and helpers from the Sha nye families return home. One can stay with the family for dinner, but this is not common.

2.4.3 The Preparations for Mag ston

Mag ston is usually celebrated three to five days after Bag ston. On the day before Mag ston, the groom's family prepare to escort the groom to the bride's family the next morning. The process of preparation for Mag ston by the groom's family is mostly the same as for Bag ston by the bride's family. The man's family also make a large bread; it is the same size and shape as the one made at the woman's house, but it is a gift for the bride, not for the groom. However, one difference is that the man's family prepare gifts for the women from the bride's side. As in most Tibetan areas, a custom of "pulling the groom's ears" is practiced in Gling rgya village. On Mag ston, the women from the bride's side try to pull the groom's ears. The groom's family, therefore, prepare gifts for the women from the bride's family to persuade them not to pull the groom's ears. The gifts include a khata,

⁵¹ See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 1 and 2.

two to four packs of candies, three or four boxes of non-alcoholic drinks (one of the bottles fastened with white wool), and a sum of cash from 200CNY to 500CNY. No special clothes are prepared for the groom, unless the man is marrying into the woman's family.

The bride's family's preparations for Mag ston are also the same as the man's family's preparations for Bag ston. The woman's family, though, does not pay a "groom price" since their daughter is the one who is marrying out.

2.5 The Preparations for the Matrilocal Wedding Ritual

In marriages where a man is marrying out into his wife's family, the positions of the two families involved are reversed in terms of the engagement and wedding preparations described in this chapter. Traditionally, a "groom price" is much lower than a bride price, because villagers believe that a man marrying out will have authority and power in his wife's family in the future, whilst it is believed that a woman marrying out will do the housework in her husband's family. Additionally, in order to demonstrate his masculinity, a man marrying out does not express his sadness like women do.

2.6 Guests' Relation to the Bride and the Groom

According to tradition, every member of the family of the person marrying out, including the married-out siblings, is included among the guests of the A zhang⁵² family, who accompany the son or daughter who is marrying out to the gNyen⁵³ family. Furthermore, the A zhang family's guests include a representative from each family of the patrilineal uncles and aunts of the person marrying out, and another representative from the original home of the mother (this person is called Ma zhang⁵⁴). In cases where the father married into the mother's family, a representative from each family of the matrilineal uncles and aunts of the person marrying out, as well as another representative from the father's original home, are included amongst the guests. Moreover, one representative of each of the Sha nye families is invited. According to 'Brug mo skyid, in sTag rig village in the east of mTsho sngon province, the guests of the A zhang family include only men, with

⁵² When a son or a daughter is marrying out, his or her family is A zhang.

⁵³ When a person is marrying out, his wife's or her husband's family is gNyen.

⁵⁴ In marriages where a son or a daughter is marrying out, A zhang is the father. Ma zhang is, though, not the mother, but the representative from the mother's original home.

the exception of the bride and her companion.⁵⁵

Similarly, the guests of gNyen family who accompany the groom or the bride to the other family are almost the same as detailed above. There is, though, no Ma zhang in this group of guests. Moreover, the families involved expect the representatives from the other families to be male. Additionally, if there are any very old people in the family, they generally prefer to stay at home.

Chapter Three - Wedding Rituals

Besides the traditional wedding rituals (Bag ston and Mag ston), each of which is generally celebrated for an entire day, a new type of wedding is becoming popular in Gling rgya village, especially amongst young people working in the public sector in the nearby town. These weddings are celebrated with colleagues and friends in a large restaurant in the town. Moreover, the weddings of widows, widowers and divorced people differ slightly from traditional weddings. Whilst they also last two days, the celebrations are on a much smaller scale, and only close family members are invited. In order to provide a comprehensive overview of every aspect of wedding rituals in Gling rgya village, this chapter describes the details of these three different types of wedding ritual (traditional, modern, and remarriage) and the various customs involved.

3.1 Traditional Wedding Rituals

As patrilocal marriage is most common in Gling rgya village, I describe Bag ston and Mag ston principally in relation to this kind of marriage. However, I also briefly describe the wedding ceremonies for matrilocal marriages at the end of this section. Both of these weddings share similar ritual procedures, and so only the differences between them are addressed in detail.

3.1.1 Bag ston Ritual

The A zhang group sets off for the groom's family

On the morning of the Bag ston ritual, the members of the bride's family get up around five o'clock and a male member of the family makes bSang offerings to the local

⁵⁵ 'Brug mo skyid 2010: 192

mountain deities. Besides being accompanied by her family's guests, the bride is escorted to the groom's family by a group of women from households belonging to her clan. Two children or adults go to call on every clan household to invite them to escort the bride. Traditionally, a female representative from each of the clan families comes, whilst the men do not come. In the meantime, the bride's family's guests arrive, dressed in traditional clothes.

Meanwhile, the women in the bride's family steam the stuffed dumplings made the night before, and make milk tea. When the female clan representatives arrive, they usually do not sit down, but stand in a corner of the main room of the house. They are served two or three stuffed dumplings, while the male guests sit down and are served milk tea. A large and sumptuous breakfast is made for the bride, since she traditionally does not eat anything during the wedding ritual in the groom's family.

All the male guests dress in traditional Tibetan robes trimmed with otter skin, and with fox fur at the collar, and wear fox-fur hats and boots. The women wear a different type of robe, which is also trimmed with otter skin, but there is no fox fur at the collar. Both men and women wear fox-fur hats, but the women wear them in slightly different way to the men. Women wear the hat with the brim at the back, whilst men wear them with the brim to the right. The bride wears the same type of hat and robe as the other female guests do. In addition, she wears various kinds of jewelry including gold rings and earrings, and coral necklaces.

When everything is ready, a man who is good at chanting Buddhist scriptures, usually the father of the bride or an elderly man from one of the Sha nye families, does the chanting (Tib. g.Yang 'bod).⁵⁶ According to informant H, the ritual of g.Yang 'bod is popular in Tibetan society and is believed to bring good luck and prosperity through praying to certain deities. The scriptures of g.Yang 'bod vary depending on which deities are being addressed. It is believed that the luck and prosperity of the bride's family will follow the bride to the groom's family, unless the ritual is held to stop this happening. This ritual is not only practiced at weddings but also on other occasions, for example, when a family constantly encounters misfortune, in the belief that it will bring more prosperity and

⁵⁶ A ritual consisting of chanting to summon the forces of prosperity and good fortune.

good luck.⁵⁷

In Gling rgya village, a scripture dedicated to Tārā⁵⁸ is used during g.Yang ‘bod, and it takes about fifteen minutes to complete the ritual. Tshe brtan rgyal confirms that the Tārā scripture is chanted for most g.Yang ‘bod rituals in A mdo.⁵⁹ However, in some villages the g.Yang ‘bod ritual performed at weddings does not only involve the chanting of scriptures, but also has certain additional features. For example, in rGya bo village in Reb gong, after the chanting, two married women, holding Phye mar and a bowl of tea, sing a particular song while walking with the bride three times around the central pillar in the living room.⁶⁰ Typically, in nomadic areas of A mdo, the bride’s mother repeats several times in a slightly raised voice: “Daughter, please take happiness with you and leave prosperity for your mother”. It is also believed that the luck and prosperity of the family follow the guests to the groom’s family unless someone stays in the house. The bride’s father, therefore, does not accompany the guests to the groom’s family.⁶¹

After completing the g.Yang ‘bod ritual, the guests and the female representatives of the clan households set off for the groom’s family’s house. The guests walk to the groom’s family, which takes about thirty minutes at most. In some regions of Tibet, the bride is sent to the groom’s house in different ways. For example, in central Tibet, on the morning of the wedding day, the bride is sent to the groom’s family on a pregnant horse or on a mare with a colt or foal.⁶² It is customary for the male guests to walk at the front whilst the women walk at the back. One of the adult female clan representatives carries the bread (Tib. Kha tud) made for the bride on her back, tied with a long, new, red silk string. The bread must not be broken on the way to the groom’s family, and so the woman carrying the bread must be very careful.

As in most other regions of Tibet, it is a tradition for the guest group to set off before dawn. Encountering people with empty containers on the way from the bride’s

⁵⁷ Interview with informant H.

⁵⁸ Tārā is a Tibetan Buddhist goddess who saves beings from the sufferings of worldly existence. See Chapter Four, Speech Two for the scripture.

⁵⁹ Tshe brtan rgyal 2010: 64

⁶⁰ Rin chen sgrol ma 2006: 623

⁶¹ Tshe brtan rgya 2010: 59

⁶² Blo bzang ‘jam dpal 2003:20

home to the groom's home is believed to be a sign of bad luck for the bride. After dawn, there is a greater possibility of encountering people with empty containers as villagers go to fetch water and collect fuel early in the morning. Villagers usually try to avoid encountering a group of people accompanying a bride due to the belief that their luck and prosperity will go with the bride. Instead, encountering people who are delivering a corpse to the cemetery is seen as a positive sign, as it is believed that one's misfortunes follow the dead person to the grave.

Welcoming the Bride

The groom's family get up at the same time as the bride's family on the wedding day. First they make bSang offerings to the mountain deities. Afterwards, the mother lights a fire in the stove. In the meantime, helpers from Sha nye families and other relatives arrive. All the women in the groom's family help to make stuffed dumplings and milk tea for the guests who will be arriving. Afterwards, several young women chosen at random from the groom's side, accompanied by young children, go to meet the bride's group, taking gifts provided by the groom's family for the female clan representatives escorting the bride. These gifts include a large piece of meat (one quarter of a sheep carcass) and three to five bottles of liquor. It is a tradition in the village that men do not go to meet the bride's group. Instead, they prepare bowls of liquor with three small pieces of butter on the rim, and wait for the A zhang group at the door of groom's family's house. According to 'Brug mo skyid, this is different to the custom in sTag rig village (in the east of mTsho sngon province) where three groups of men from the groom's side go to meet the bride, and each group welcomes her at different locations, women not being involved in this activity.⁶³ Most of the people from the groom's side are dressed in simple traditional clothes during the ritual, as they have a lot of work to do. However, some of the young adults dress in their usual modern western clothes.

The women do not wait for the A zhang group in any special place. Where the two groups meet depends on the distances involved and is usually about half-way between the two families' homes. As soon as the A zhang group reaches this place, two women from the welcoming group greet the A zhang group with loud voices, while trying to "receive"

⁶³ 'Brug mo skyid 2010: 192

the bride. When the escorting group insists on escorting the bride to the door of the groom's family home, the welcoming group immediately offers the gifts to the escorting group, while trying to persuade them to leave the bride with them. In response, the escorting group hits the meat with a small stick saying: "The meat sounds like skinny bones when you hit it. It seems that this sheep has not eaten anything for the last three months". This means that the meat is not good or fat enough.

Finally, the A zhang group persuades the escorting group to accept the gifts and the woman who is carrying the large bread hands it over to a woman from the groom's side. All the women from the bride's family who have accompanied the guests return to their own homes, but one or two of them voluntarily return to the bride's family to do housework until the guests return. The A zhang group moves towards the groom's family home accompanied by the new escorting group. A young woman from the new escorting group goes on ahead to inform the groom's family that the A zhang group is approaching.

When the guests arrive, the men from the groom's side are waiting at the door holding the bowls of liquor, and the two groups greet each other. At the same time, firecrackers are set off. Three men from the groom's side stand in a line holding the bowls of liquor. Every adult male in the A zhang group dips his right ring finger into the liquor and flicks it upward with his right thumb and right ring finger. This gesture is repeated three times for each bowl (Tib. mchod kha).⁶⁴ They never drink the liquor; it is only used for making offerings to the mountain deities. Next, the A zhang group enter the hallway of the groom's household. According to Blo bzang 'jam dpal, in central Tibet it is customary to hang five differently colored pieces of fabric on the door to welcome the bride.⁶⁵ Such a custom is practiced neither in Gling rgya village, nor in the other villages in Reb gong. The tradition in Gling rgya village is that the groom is not important on Bag ston. It is embarrassing for the groom to express his happiness at his marriage, so he does not get involved in welcoming the bride and the A zhang group. Instead, he stays inside one of the rooms in the house and does not come out.

In the middle of the enclosed courtyard a new sheep-wool carpet is laid, and the

⁶⁴ A custom often practiced in Tibet before eating or drinking. It symbolizes showing respect to heaven, earth, and local deities.

⁶⁵ Blo bzang 'jam dpal 2003:20

groom's father stands next to the carpet holding a Tibetan scripture. The bride stands upright on the carpet, removes her hat, and prostrates⁶⁶ three times in the direction of the family shrine. After this, she puts her palms together at heart-level and bends her body forward slightly. Then, the father of the groom touches her head with the scripture. This gesture has a double meaning. On the one hand it serves as a vow by the groom's family to accept the bride as a genuine member of the family, and on the other, it symbolizes the bride's oath to stay in the new family. The scripture is the witness and the ritual serves as a contract between the groom's family and the bride. Although both Buddhist and Bon groups in Gling rgya mostly share the same customs of wedding preparation and ritual, the scripture used when the bride is prostrating is different. Each group uses their own scripture. Whilst this ritual is taking place, the bride's bread is usually placed in one of the rooms in the house. After this ceremony, the guests enter the living room, which is prepared for them with woolen carpets and tables with food decorations (Tib. sDer kha).

The Feast

The A zhang group take their places on one side of the tables with their backs against the wall. The other side of the tables is free and is used by the servers. The guests sit in order of age and gender. The oldest man sits at the head of the table row, followed by the other men in descending order of age. Next to the last person in the men's row, usually a young boy, the women, including the bride, take their places as the men do. The groom customarily also wears traditional clothes during this ritual, but he is not involved in any of the activities of serving and helping: he does not even come into the living room. According to Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart, in Skya rgya village in gCan tsha (a county neighboring Reb gong), on the wedding day the groom looks for an opportunity to have the bride walk under his feet. When the bride goes out of the courtyard, he hides on the roof of the gate, and waits for the bride to walk underneath. This is believed to ensure his control over the bride.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ This is done by standing up straight, putting the palms together and holding the hands at heart-level, then raising the hands up and touching the crown of the head and the mouth before returning the hands to heart-level. Then one bends at the waist to the floor, placing the hands on the ground in front of one and touching the floor with the knees. Finally, the ground is touched with the head. As soon as the head touches the ground, one rises up and returns the hands to the same position in front of the chest.

⁶⁷ Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart 2008: 171

It is usually the young adults from the groom's side who serve the guests. The oldest man is served first. This kind of table arrangement reveals, on the one hand, that Gling rgya village, in common with most other Tibetan areas, is a patriarchal community where men have more power and authority in society than women, and on the other hand, that elders are accorded more respect than younger people. According to Tshe dbang rdo rje, the same kind of table arrangement is also the norm in Ne'u na village in the southwest of mTsho sngon.⁶⁸ Additionally, in sTag rig village in the east of mTsho sngon, all the male guests sit in the sitting room, and the bride and her companion, the only two women amongst the guests, are invited into a separate room.⁶⁹ In Gling rgya village, the guests are not separated into different rooms according to gender, but it would be abnormal if the guests sat in random order.

Table manners are very important during weddings. Men sit cross-legged on the white woolen carpet, whereas the women sit on small stools. Guests sit upright and do not talk loudly. It is not easy to get out from the row. If someone needs to go out, then all the guests sitting next to him or her need to stand up. When guests need to go to toilet, therefore, they usually wait until they are at the homes of the two Sha nye families for the rituals performed there.

The guests are first served milk tea in bowls with small pieces of butter in them, and stuffed dumplings on plates. Chipped bowls are never used, as this would be a sign of disrespect towards the guests. It is customary for the servers, as well as anyone else who walks into the living room, to always ask the guests to eat more. Traditionally, the servers serve the male guests liquor and try to get them drunk, whilst the guests restrain themselves because they do not want to embarrass themselves by getting drunk. The male guests and the servers, therefore, are engaged in an ongoing playful battle over the liquor.

The gestures used by the servers are also crucial in showing politeness to the guests. Teapots or liquor bottles are always held in the left hand. When pouring tea or liquor, the servers need to stretch their right hand towards the guest with palm up, and the guests hold their bowls with both hands. Traditionally, the guests do not eat as much as

⁶⁸ Tshe dbang rdo rje 2010:51

⁶⁹ 'Brug mo skyid 2010:194

they want. They only eat about four dumplings. The bride is also served food and but she does not eat or drink anything. After a while, when the guests have had the opportunity for some casual conversation, food such as meat and other dishes are served. The guests can eat anything on the table, but traditionally they do not eat the food decorations. No one would stop them if they did, but it would be seen as bizarre behavior and gossip would spread through the village as a consequence. According to my informant A, in some villages (such as Zho 'ong dpyis, a nearby village) the guests also can eat the food decorations.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, one or more of the men from the groom's side with a talent for public speaking make the traditional wedding speeches⁷¹, and one or more men from the A zhang group make speeches⁷² in return. The speeches are only given by men, and usually by the elderly ones. The groom's side sing Tibetan folk songs⁷³ to celebrate the wedding and to express their wishes of happiness for the couple in the future. The groom's family invite singers from other clans if there are not many singers in their own clan. Sometimes people from both sides challenge each other to a singing competition. It is a tradition in the village that if a death occurs in a clan, the members of that clan are not allowed to sing traditional songs until the next year. People do not therefore sing folk songs at wedding rituals if there has been a death in the clan.

Afterwards, two of the groom's family's neighbors invite the guests for a meal. After a short break at the door of groom's household, the guests visit the two Sha nye families. Milk tea, stuffed dumplings, and noodles are the main food for the guests, and meat is not usually served unless the family is very rich. It is customary for the servers, helpers, and children from Sha nye families to follow the guests to each of the two households. They are also served noodles, but they usually eat in the enclosed courtyard. Since the guests are served food in three different households, they eat only one bowl of noodles in each of them, and no one asks for a second bowl. The rituals at these two Sha nye families are good opportunities for the servers to tempt the male guests to drink more

⁷⁰ Interview with informant A

⁷¹ See Chapter Four, Speech Three and Four.

⁷² See Chapter Four, Speech Five.

⁷³ See Chapter Four, Song One, Two, and Three.

liquor. Their reasoning can be, for example: “You did not drink any liquor in this household, if you do not drink three cups or bowls, the family will not be happy.” The guests don’t spend much time with the two Sha nye families. After the guests return to the groom’s home, they are again served milk tea and meat, followed by a bowl of noodles for each guest as the final dish.

After the meal, the gifts are offered, beginning with the bride price, paid in cash to the bride’s family. The money is wrapped in a khata and handed over to the bride’s father. Traditionally, the whole of the bride price is not accepted, and one or two hundred CNY are given back to the groom’s family. Each guest is given a gift of a large bread, together with two pieces of meat, a fist-sized mixture of tsampa,⁷⁴ and two to five CNY. The three most important guests, i.e. the bride’s parents and the representative from the home of her mother (Tib. Ma zhang), are each given a brick of tea and a piece of cloth (the size of a Tibetan robe) in addition. The Ma zhang is also given a different piece of meat (Tib. ‘tshang ra). The type of bread given varies according to gender. Male guests are offered Gor thud, while female guests are offered Kha thud. If any of the invited guests are not able attend the wedding due to illness, old age, or long distance, the groom’s family send them their share of the gifts. Finally, both sides sing traditional songs of farewell⁷⁵. It is a tradition that the meat given to the members of the bride’s own family is collected together, and shared amongst the women who have married into the groom’s village group⁷⁶ from the bride’s village group. When the marriage takes place within the same village group, then the meat is given to the women who have married within the village group.

The guests leave around 10 a.m. As they are leaving, the male servers stand in the corridor and wait for the guests to pass through. They wait with bottles of liquor in their left hands and bowls filled with wine in their right hands. As the guests pass the door with their gifts, each server offers three bowls of liquor to each adult male guest. They make the mChod kha gesture and then drink the liquor. If a guest refuses to drink, he will be forced

⁷⁴ One of the staple Tibetan foods; barley flour, butter, and sugar are mixed together with a small amount of water.

⁷⁵ See Chapter Four, Song Five.

⁷⁶ This refers to the seven groups in Gling rgya village outlined in Chapter One.

to drink or stopped in the corridor until he accepts the drink. This is called Sgo chang.⁷⁷ The groom's side then sees off the guests at the door by offering some bottles of liquor fastened with sheep wool, to drink on the way (Tib. Lam chang). The bride stays at her husband's home, but she spends most of the day with her relatives. Her relatives invite her for meals at their homes one after the other, and there she can enjoy good food and have a more relaxing time.

Celebration with the Village

The wedding ritual is celebrated with the village at around noon. Therefore, after the guests leave, the groom's family, together with the helpers from Sha nye families, prepare to invite the village to the wedding. Only the groom's village group is invited though, the other six groups are not invited. At lunchtime, the male villagers come to the groom's house. Traditionally, women do not come, but the women from the clan families are an exception. All the villagers are served milk tea, bread and noodles by the female helpers. In contrast to the guests from the bride's family, the villagers have as many bowls of noodles as they want. Following the lunch, sunflower seeds, peanuts, liquor, and cigarettes are served. Folk songs⁷⁸ are also very popular at this point. The male villagers leave in the late afternoon. In the meantime, every household in the groom's village group brings the congratulatory gifts of a Kha thud, together with one small round bread with a hole in the center, bricks of tea and a small amount of money, which varies from family to family. In addition, some families from the other village groups, usually those who have closer relationships with the groom's family, also bring gifts. All the gifts are for the bride. It is always women in Gling rgya village who deliver the gifts, and they do not stay to eat, but leave right after delivering the gifts. Someone from the groom's family records in a notebook what the villagers bring as gifts. The groom's family will consult this record later when giving a gift to a family whose name has been recorded, and the value of the gifts usually matches.

In the evening, the groom's family also invite every member of the families in their clan and all their relatives to dinner. They eat the same food as the male villagers had for

⁷⁷ The liquor offered to the guests in the corridor.

⁷⁸ See Chapter Four, Song One, Two, Three, and Four.

lunch. The bride and the groom sit in a separate room, where they are served a special meal consisting of fruit, meat, beverages, candies, milk tea, and noodles. This is the first time that the couple openly spend time together. For the next three to five days, until the wedding celebration at the bride's family house, the bride stays at the groom's home. She is treated very well and does not need to do any housework.

3.1.2 The Mag ston Ritual

Mag ston is the wedding ritual held for the groom. It takes place in the bride's family's home, three to five days after the Bag ston. As the customs for the Bag ston and Mag ston rituals are very similar for the most part, only the differences between them are described in detail in this section. This ritual is not practiced in most of the nearby villages of Gling rgya. Instead, the custom in these villages is that the groom and some of his uncles visit the bride's family in the late afternoon before the day of the Bag ston ritual, and have a celebration in the evening. They return the next morning with A zhang group.

In the early morning of the Mag ston ritual, the bride visits her own family with the guest group of her new family members, i.e. the groom and the groom's family (Tib. gNyen tshang). The guests are escorted by women from the groom's clan families and welcomed by women from the bride's side. However, as the groom is not marrying into the bride's family, the groom's family do not perform the g.Yangs 'bod ritual like the bride's family did. Moreover, the groom does not prostrate on arriving at the bride's family's house. When the guests are invited into the living room, the table arrangements and manners, songs and speeches, as well as serving of food and drink are parallel to those of the Bag ston ritual. Neither the bride nor the groom eat anything. The gifts for the guests are also the same, with the exception of the gift for Ma zhang, as there is no Ma zhang among the guests from the groom's family.

The Custom of 'Pulling the Groom's Ears'

Traditionally, after the tea and stuffed dumplings are served to the guests, the young women from the bride's clan, who are waiting in the courtyard, begin teasing the groom through the window.⁷⁹ They say loudly: "Look at yourself, you are as timid as a

⁷⁹ See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 5.

rabbit. Don't be so nervous, we will not cut your ears if you have gifts for us, but it depends on the amount." The women appear to be angry, but no matter what they say, the groom does not answer. When the women see the groom's embarrassed expression, they intentionally continue teasing him loudly. Finally, the groom's family offer part of the gifts prepared earlier (packs of candies, boxes of non-alcoholic drinks, with one of the bottles fastened with white wool), together with a khata, to a man from the bride's family who acts as the mediator between the teasing group and the guests. However, the women throw the khata back to the guests through the window and continue to tease the groom by saying that what they have been given is not adequate. Meanwhile, the bride's family serve the 'teasers' some stuffed dumplings.⁸⁰

The women usually believe that the more embarrassed the groom gets, the more gifts they can acquire, and also that they have the right to get as much as they can. Generally, they can blurt out anything they want, without hiding anything unpleasant or considering the groom's feelings. This custom is not considered rude, although topics related to sex are considered to be taboo. If the women do not stop their teasing, the groom's family have to offer them more gifts, but even the additional gifts may not stop the teasing. The mediator pretends to help the groom's family by trying to make the women stop their teasing. His role is to suggest to the groom's family that the teasers will not stop unless more gifts are offered. When the groom's family offer more gifts, for example 100 CNY, the mediator goes to the women and says: "Another 100 CNY, you should be happy and satisfied now." At the same time, he secretly encourages the women to tease more for more gifts. The mediator would risk getting his ears pulled by the women if he did not support them. When the women are finally satisfied, they stop teasing and share what they have obtained with all the women and girls who are present.⁸¹

The women from the bride's family tease even more if the groom is from another village. During one of the weddings I observed in the summer of 2011, the groom was from a nearby village, and the women started teasing him as soon as the guests were served tea. After teasing him for some time, a gift of 300CNY, four boxes of non-alcoholic drinks,

⁸⁰ See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 7.

⁸¹ See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 6.

and two packs of candies were offered,⁸² but the teasers continued by saying they had not been offered a khata which was a sign of disrespect. The groom's side did not have a khata and used one from the bride's family, but the teasers said that they wanted a khata from the groom's side and not from their own side. They added that the khata is widespread all over Tibet, including the groom's village. After 'playing' back and forth many times, the teasers finally stopped when they were offered another 200 CNY.

In cases where the teasers are not satisfied, they wait in the courtyard to pull the groom's ears when the guests walk out to visit the two Sha nye families of the bride. They do so as soon as the groom leaves the living room. Some women wait in the doorway so that the groom cannot run away. They do not care how loudly the groom shouts in pain. They are not supposed to scratch the groom's face or grasp his hair intentionally. The groom is usually allowed to 'beat' the girls with the sleeve of his traditional Tibetan robe, in order to try to get rid of them, but he can never get angry. Sometimes the groom puts butter on his ears, hoping that the girls' hands will slip. If the groom is so strong that the girls and young women cannot pull his ears, the men of the bride's side hold him, pretending to help him escape, and the women pull his ears as hard as they can, until he ultimately succeeds in escaping. The teasers also pull the ears of the other adult guests in the same way.

Every young man in Gling rgya village feels nervous when his wedding day is approaching. He should not boast in public before the wedding day that he is too tall for the girls to reach his ears, or say that the girls are not strong enough to cause him pain, even if they pull his ears with all their strength. If any of the girls or women on the bride's side hears him say such things, they will pull his ears even more violently on the wedding day. Finally, the guests leave after being offered gifts, and the bride and groom stay at the bride's family's house.

Celebration with the Village

After the guests leave, the men from the bride's village group attend the lunch wedding celebration, paralleling the one during Bag ston. While the male villagers are enjoying the wedding celebration, the bride and groom are served lunch in a separate room,

⁸² See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 11.

usually the one in which they spend the following night. A young man from the bride's clan accompanies the new couple, while serving them. In the meantime, every family in the bride's village group, as well as friends and relatives from the other six village groups, bring gifts. The gifts are for the bride and they are the same as in the Bag ston ritual. The celebration ends with dinner with the families of the bride's clan.

The groom leaves the next morning, whereas the bride stays with her own family. After several days, her family chooses an auspicious day on which she returns to her husband's family. The bride does not do any housework for the first few days, and she visits her parents and siblings once every three or four days. As time goes by, she gradually becomes a real member of her new family and becomes increasingly involved in doing housework. At the same time, she visits her parents and siblings less and less. Her parents invite her when they wish to share a good meal with her.

3.1.3 Matrilocal Marriage

The wedding rituals, Bag ston and Mag ston, in a matrilocal marriage are celebrated in mostly the same way as in a patrilocal marriage, but the order of the rituals is reversed. In this type of marriage, Mag ston is held first, and there is no bride price. It is replaced by a "groom price", which is traditionally much lower than a bride price, and is paid to the groom's family by the bride's family. Moreover, in matrilocal marriages, the custom of pulling the groom's ears is not performed. Since the groom is the one who is marrying out into his wife's family, the bread gifts brought by the villagers in the Bag ston and Mag ston rituals in a matrilocal marriage are different from the gifts in a patrilocal marriage. The bread gifts are all Gor thud, and they are given to the groom.

3.2 Wedding Rituals for Remarriage

Weddings for widows, widowers, and the divorced are celebrated in a different way to traditional weddings in Gling rgya village. Since such couples have already had their wedding celebrations for their first marriage, the rituals for remarriages are not performed in as elaborate a way as those for a first marriage.

Wedding rituals for remarriages are performed only by the couple's families, and the Sha nye families are not involved. It is not customary for the women from Sha nye

families to come and see off or welcome the bride or the groom. It is only the couple's family members who escort or welcome the bride or the groom to each other's families, and manage all of the necessities for the wedding. Poorer families who cannot afford elaborate wedding ceremonies also celebrate weddings in this way. According to my informant J, he got married in 1997 when he was 15 years old. His wedding was only celebrated by his and his wife's families as his family was so poor that they could not afford a celebration with the village.⁸³ In remarriage rituals, the clothes worn at the wedding and the gifts given to the guests are the same as in first marriage rituals, but songs and wedding speeches are not usually popular. Additionally, the bride price and the "groom price" are much smaller in comparison to a first marriage, and the custom of pulling the groom's ears is not practiced in remarriage celebrations. Moreover, there is no wedding celebration with the villagers. Generally, the village groups do not bring the congratulatory gifts, only relatives do. If it is the first marriage for one of the couple, then the rituals are normally celebrated in a more elaborate way. Some rich families celebrate a remarriage in as elaborate a way as a first marriage, but this is not common. If the remarrying bride or groom works in the public sector, then they not only celebrate with a small traditional wedding ritual as mentioned above, but also have a modern wedding celebration.

3.3 Modern Wedding Rituals

The modern wedding ritual, which is popular in the Reb gong area, is celebrated in restaurants in the local town among colleagues and friends, with family members and relatives also attending. This custom, which began in Gling rgya village in the late 1990s, is not limited to young people, but is also practiced by couples who work in the public sector. Most such couples celebrate their wedding both in the village and in the town. To cut down on expenses and avoid too much labor, some couples replace traditional wedding rituals with modern wedding celebrations, but this is not approved of in the village. My informant K expressed his disapproval of the fact that traditional wedding rituals in the village are being replaced by modern wedding rituals.⁸⁴ A modern wedding ritual is a celebration without any expense: the income from a modern wedding always exceeds the

⁸³ Interview with informant J.

⁸⁴ Interview with informant K.

expenses. My research during my fieldwork shows that the income from modern weddings, after covering all the expenses, is generally between about 2500CNY and 4000CNY. People therefore joke that this is a good way to earn some money. According to my informant B, modern wedding rituals are a result of the fact that more young local Tibetans work in the public sector, and are financially better off. The popularity of modern wedding rituals is certainly evidence of influence from local Chinese wedding customs, but it is understandable that new couples celebrate their weddings with their colleagues and friends.⁸⁵

3.3.1 Preparation

As for traditional wedding rituals, the date for modern wedding rituals is selected according to the published calendars of Buddhist astrological schools.⁸⁶ After selecting the date, the new couple first decide on the number of people they will invite to the wedding, and then contact a large restaurant in the local town approximately two weeks before the wedding day. The reservation is made after negotiating a price for the food. A round table with ten seats usually cost around 350CNY in the 1990s, but now costs about 700 CNY. Generally, about thirteen tables are reserved at such a wedding, and one or two spare tables are always requested just in case. Invitations are very important in this type of wedding ritual. Printed wedding invitations are available from shops, but they are all in Chinese style. In the invitations there are spaces where the names of the couple, restaurant location, time and date can be filled in. Next, the new couple start delivering invitations to their colleagues and friends. If a friend is forgotten and does not receive an invitation, he or she will be unhappy and complain about it later. Therefore, the couple need to be very careful when preparing the guest list and ensure that every colleague and friend is invited. Generally, most of the people who are invited attend the wedding. If someone really cannot attend then he or she nevertheless ensures that their gift is received by the couple, usually by sending it with someone who is attending the wedding.

On the day before the wedding, the new couple, together with some close friends and relatives, purchase candies, drinks, liquor, wine, cigarettes, and firecrackers, and

⁸⁵ Interview with informant B.

⁸⁶ See chapter two for more details.

deliver them to the restaurant. In addition, the friends and relatives are assigned different tasks for the wedding celebration the next day. For example, two or three people might be in charge of welcoming the guests and arranging the seats for them, and another two might take responsibility for collecting the gifts from the guests. Some will take pictures and film from the beginning to the end of the wedding, and one will act as the host. As with the traditional wedding ritual, in a modern wedding ritual the A zhang family is the most important. The gNyen tshang family therefore arranges two or three cars to transport the A zhang group from the village to the town. Cars can be rented or borrowed from friends.

Although the wedding ritual itself starts at noon, the couple's friends and relatives gather at the restaurant around ten in the morning, and prepare to perform their tasks. They ask the waiters and waitresses at the restaurant to arrange each table with two plates of candies, two packs of cigarettes, two bottles of liquor, two of wine, and two of non-alcoholic drinks. Usually, as an expression of their wish that couple will be wealthy, a Tibetan painting of the deity of wealth is hung on back wall of the platform.

Meanwhile, the two families prepare to attend the wedding dressed in new traditional clothes. The bride also wears coral necklaces, and gold rings and earrings, and has her make-up done as beautifully as possible, usually at a beauty parlor. The new couple go to the restaurant a little earlier than the other members of the families, a young sister or a young female relative accompanying the bride. At the restaurant, the new couple, together with the bride's companion, stand at the door and get ready to welcome the guests.⁸⁷ All the guests wait at door of the restaurant for the A zhang and gNyen tshang families to arrive.

3.3.2 The Feast

The firecrackers are set off upon the arrival of the couple's families, and the guests all enter the restaurant, greeting the couple at the door. Some people offer the couple khatas round their necks, whilst some prefer to offer their khatas inside the restaurant. The seating for the guests needs to be well-organized. The male members of the two families are usually seated at the tables nearest to the platform. The rest of the guests can sit wherever they like, but the helpers need to make sure that every table is fully seated with

⁸⁷ See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 2.

ten people.

Meanwhile, the two people who collect the gifts sit at a desk just inside the door, and the guests give them the gifts. The gifts are usually in cash but relatives may also offer a piece of silk or Tibetan bread. Most guests gave around 50CNY in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, but recently this has increased to about 100CNY. Close friends and relatives give much more. The size of the gift varies depending on how close a relationship the guest has to the couple. Generally, groups of colleagues or friends of the couple who are attending the wedding together place their gifts in the same envelope before their arrival at the wedding, along with a list of names and the amount of money each person has given. They give the envelope to the gift collectors, who record each guest's name and their gift. As with the traditional wedding ritual, the new couple consults this record later, when making a gift to those whose names have been listed, and the value of the gifts usually matches.

When all the tables are properly arranged, the couple also take their seats together with the male members of their families, and the restaurant starts serving the food. There are about ten different dishes for each table, but all are Chinese. Not a single traditional Tibetan dish is served. Although traditional wedding rituals differ from village to village, modern wedding rituals are the same throughout the Reb gong area, and indeed throughout A mdo. When the guests have started eating, the host announces the beginning of the wedding celebration through a microphone by greeting the guests. He introduces each activity in elegant and poetic Tibetan.⁸⁸ First, the couple offer khatas to their parents.⁸⁹ This is considered a way of showing their respect for and gratitude to their parents. The bride and the groom are offered khatas first by their families, then by their friends and colleagues.⁹⁰ While this is happening, soft Tibetan music is played through speakers. Speeches are not common at modern weddings, but during my fieldwork, I did observe a modern wedding ritual in which a wedding speech⁹¹ was made by a young man.

Finally, the host starts the entertainment by introducing the singers one by one.

⁸⁸ See Chapter Four, Speech Six.

⁸⁹ See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 8.

⁹⁰ See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 3.

⁹¹ See Chapter Four, Speech Seven.

Traditional folk songs are more popular than modern songs at weddings, and so the first song is always a folk song. Relatives, colleagues, and friends who can sing are invited onto the platform to perform. They are offered a khata as thanks. There are always some who do not dare to sing in front of a big audience, so the host needs to be very good at persuading and encouraging such singers. Any of the guests are very welcome to sing Tibetan folk songs or modern songs, but Chinese songs are usually not sung at weddings. Some families invite well-known local singers from both their own village and other villages to contribute to the entertainment.

After some time, the host announces that the new couple would like to offer liquor to the guests. The bride holds a round plate on which six small cups of liquor are placed, and the groom takes a liquor bottle fastened with a khata.⁹² They go round each table and offer liquor to all the guests to show their gratitude for their attending the celebration. They start with the tables where the men from the A zhang and gNyen tshang families are seated, then move on to the adjacent tables, one by one. The groom stands next to the bride ready to refill the cups while she offers the liquor to the guests. Each guest makes the mChod kha gesture before drinking the liquor, and those who do not drink, usually women, replace the liquor with a non-alcoholic drink. A friend is always with the groom holding an extra bottle. This friend plays an important role at the moment when the liquor is offered. When the groom's liquor bottle is empty, the friend hands over his bottle to the groom and goes to fetch a new bottle. Most guests offer liquor to the groom in return, but if he accepted all the liquor offered to him, he would not make it to the last table. Therefore, in order to avoid offending the guests, his friend drinks on his behalf most of the time. When he cannot drink anymore, he goes to ask another friend to replace him.

When most of the guests have left, after about 4 pm, the leftover food is packed up and taken home by relatives. The two friends who have collected the gifts pay the bill from the money they have received. The new couple's close friends and young relatives stay behind and continue drinking. They leave very late in the afternoon. If the couple own an apartment in the town, they go to the apartment and continue the celebration until midnight. No matter whether the new couple return to the village or stay in the town, they

⁹² See Illustrations, Plate 1, picture 9.

spend the night together.

The next day, the two gift collectors calculate the expenses of the wedding and give the remaining money to the couple. Generally, the total expenses of a modern wedding ritual are more than 10000CNY, but the income from the gifts collected usually exceeds these expenses. The new couple can therefore actually earn some money from their wedding celebration.

Chapter Four - Wedding Speeches and Songs

Speeches and songs are crucial in all forms of religious or secular events in the Tibetan social context and they are considered to symbolize Tibetan culture and identity. Anton-Luca has stated that singing and oral performance is a significant part of Tibetan life and culture in A mdo.⁹³ Speeches and songs, therefore, are of great importance in Tibetan wedding rituals, as well as the various stages of the matchmaking process. The content of these speeches and songs is invariably connected to religion. The speeches and songs vary between different regions and dialects, different sections of the population and different social occasions. However, they all share common characteristic elements, such as praising the local religion, deities, and land. Traditional songs⁹⁴ and wedding speeches⁹⁵ from A mdo, as well as speeches given on other social occasions⁹⁶ throughout the Tibetan cultural area are currently in the initial phase of being preserved and collected. The present chapter contains examples of the most widespread kinds of speeches given and songs performed during matchmaking and wedding rituals in Gling rgya village. I have first transliterated the speeches and songs into Wylie and then translated them into English.

4.1 Wedding Speeches

Wedding speeches are usually lengthy and they always begin by praising the local deities and the local scenery, and then going on to praise the two families, the A zhang group, the bride and the groom, and finally the liquor and the food served at the wedding ritual. The sentences are short and easily understandable with particular rhythms which

⁹³ Anton-Luca 2002: 174

⁹⁴ rTa 'grin rgyal, tshe mo skyid 2010

⁹⁵ bKa' ma mkha 'bum, tshe rgyal 2010

⁹⁶ bKa' ma mkha 'bum, tshe rgyal 2010

help the speaker to speak fluently throughout the whole speech, and most usually have the equal number of syllables.

Speech One⁹⁷

This speech is given by one of the two matchmakers at the woman's home on the day of the engagement. The speech on one hand explains the goal of the matchmakers' visit to the woman's family and what gifts they have for the engagement, and on the other praises the gifts with Tibetan proverbs and expresses the man's family's insistence that the woman's family approve the engagement.

1

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Ya de ring gi nyi ma bzang po | 1) Yes, today is an auspicious day. |
| 2) skar ma bzang po | 2) The stars are good. |
| 3) bkra shis pa'i nyi ma | 3) A day of felicity. |
| 4) phun sum tshogs pa'i nyin bzang skar
bzang 'di la | 4) On this favorable day of abundance, |
| 5) sprin dkar po thod la bzung nas | 5) Holding the white clouds above our heads |
| 6) sa nag po 'dom la bcad nas gnyen tshang
gi sgo rtsa lam rtsa yong na | 6) We arrived at gNyen tshang ⁹⁸ 's door
measuring the black earth with our steps, |
| 7) khyed kyi gnyen tshang gis mig stong
gang gi bsu ma byas no | 7) And were welcomed by the thousand
eyes of your gNyen tshang. |
| 8) nged gnyis ka'i gnyen tshang gi gser gyi
ya them mgo 'khur nas | 8) Both of us carrying the golden lintel of
gNyen tshang on our heads, |
| 9) dngul gyi mar bzhag rdog pas mnan nas | 9) We crossed the silver threshold. |
| 10) dung gi rgya sgo dpung pas phye nas | 10) Opening the conch gate with our
shoulders, |
| 11) khyed kyi lha khyim g.yang khyim la
yong na | 11) (We) came to your sacred and
prosperous home. |
| 12) ja bskol pa gdan btang pa dang sne len
byas bar bka' drin lha ru che | 12) Yes, (we) appreciate the reception
where tea was served and carpets laid |

⁹⁷ Recorded from informant E during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

⁹⁸ The family with whom the matchmakers build the marriage relationship, here it refers to the girl's family.

2

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) nga lta bu zhig gi bshad mi shes
rung | 1) Though someone like me cannot give good
speeches, |
| 2) 'jig rten chos nyid kyi ltar tshig
gcig gi kha brda re bshad dgos | 2) A few words shall be said in accordance with
the traditions of the mundane world. |
| 3) chos 'jig rten dpe lugs | 3) And the spiritual and secular norms, |
| 4) bkra shis smon lam gyi thog ma | 4) Beginning with auspicious wishes. |
| 5) bod dbu nag gi dar lugs | 5) The origin of the black-headed Tibetans. |
| 6) ston mo'i 'gro lugs ltar | 6) According to festive customs, |
| 7) me tog chung rung mchod rdzas
yin | 7) Although the flower is small, it is a religious
offering. |
| 8) gur gum nyung rung bum rdzas
yin | 8) There is not much saffron, but it is one of the
vase-substances. |
| 9) kha btags chung rung lha rdzas
yin | 9) The scarf is small, but it is a divine symbol. |

3

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) lha rdzas dkar po 'di | 1) This white silk scarf, |
| 2) stod rgya gar yul la khyer na | 2) If brought to the land of India, |
| 3) pha bla ma bzang po'i mjal dar nyan | 3) Is good for meeting the kind guru. |
| 4) smad rgya nag yul la khyer na | 4) If taken to China, |
| 5) dpon chen po'i khriims dar nyan | 5) It is the scarf of judicature for high
officials. |
| 6) bod kha ba can gyi yul la khyer na | 6) If bought to the land of snows (Tibet), |
| 7) ma bzang bu mo'i gnyen slong byed nyan
dgos | 7) It is for asking for the hand of the good
mother's daughter in marriage. |
| 8) bdud rtsi bsil ma 'di | 8) This cool nectar, |
| 9) stod rgya gar yul gyi 'bras chang dkar po
yin | 9) Is the white rice wine of India. |

- | | |
|---|--|
| 10) smad rgya nag yul gyi rgun chang smug po yin | 10) It is the dark brown grape wine of China. |
| 11) pur rgyal bod kyī nas chang kham pa yin pa 'di | 11) It is the brownish barley wine of Tibet, |
| 12) 'bru sna'i dwangs bcud dang rtsi sna'i yang bcud | 12) The pure essence of various grains and the quintessence of nectar assortments, |
| 13) sman sna'i snying bcud | 13) The extracts of different medicines, |
| 14) lha bla ma'i mchod chang | 14) The amṛita of divine masters, |
| 15) dgra lha'i dpa' chang | 15) The wine of brave war-deities, |
| 16) dpa' bo'i skyem chang | 16) The thirst-quenching wine of brave heroes, |
| 17) bkra shis pa'i bkra chang dang don 'grub pa'i 'grub chang | 17) The wine of auspiciousness and achievement. |
| 18) yon tan lnga dang ldan pa'i bdud brtsi bsil ma 'di de ring bdag zhang bar gi gnyen ngo len byed nyan dgos | 18) May this cool nectar, endowed with five qualities, be a means of consolidating our kinship relationship today. |

4

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) gnyen slong rten du mang bo zhig med kyang | 1) Though there is not much to be given for the betrothal, |
| 2) stod lha yul khams kyī lha rdzas yod | 2) There is the silk scarf of the celestial realm, |
| 3) 'og klu yul khams kyī chang rdzas yod | 3) Wine ingredients from the nether realm of the Nāga, |
| 4) 'jig rten bod kyī rgyu rdzas yod | 4) Riches from the land of Tibet. |
| 5) 'dir khyer nas yong na bshad na mi shod ni med | 5) There is nothing one cannot describe if they are brought here. |
| 6) 'phrog na mi lon ni med | 6) There is nothing one cannot obtain if one robs. |
| 7) slong na mi ster ni med | 7) There is nothing one cannot get if one requests. |

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|---|--|
| 8) nged gnyis kas mda' 'phang na brag
la zug mo 'dod yod | 8) We came with the hope that the arrow will
pierce the rock. |
| 9) gtam dpe la | 9) As the saying goes, |
| 10) rgya tshong ba rgyab la 'khur rgyu
yod ni zhig | 10) A Chinese trader has things to carry on his
back, |
| 11) jag rta 'ded sngon na 'ded kyi yod | 11) A horse rustler has horses to chase in front
of him, |
| 12) khyed kyi tsho ba dang sha nye
rnams pas chang kha phye nas mchod
kha zhig 'phen rgyu sku mkhyen gsung
mkhyen lags | 12) I beg your Sha nye members and brothers
to open the bottles and enjoy the drinks. |

Speech Two⁹⁹

This speech is the scriptural text of a g.Yang 'bod ritual practiced at the bride's family early in the morning of the Bag ston ritual. The text is chanted to protect the prosperity of the family and summon the prosperous benevolence of Tārā for the bride. There is an abbreviated version and a full version of the text¹⁰⁰. The following is the abbreviated version.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) kye rgyal ba kun gyi 'phrin las
rnams | 1-2) O! Venerable Tārā, embodying the enlightened
activities of all the Buddhas, |
| 2) gcig bsdus bla ma rje btsun ma | |
| 3) gus pa chen pos gsol ba 'debs | 3) I supplicate the venerable one with great humility, |
| 4) byin rlabs dngos grub stsal du gsol | 4) For the bestowment of blessings and
accomplishments. |
| 5) dbu rgyan 'od kyi phreng ba yis | 5) By means of the glittering rays of your diadem, |
| 6) steng phyogs lha yi g.yang khug cig | 6) May we be endowed with the good fortune of the
celestial beings. |
| 7) glog dang 'dra ba'i spyan gnyis kyi | 7) By the power of your two lightning-like eyes, |
| 8) bar gyi mi yi g.yang khug cig | 8) May we be endowed with the good fortune of the |

⁹⁹ Recorded from Informant H during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Tshe brtan rgya 2010: 64

- human world.
- 9) g.yas bskums g.yon brkyangs zhabs gnyis kyis 9) By the power of your folded right foot and outstretched left one,
- 10) 'og phyogs klu yi g.yang khug cig 10) May we be endowed with the good fortune of the nether realm of the Nāga.
- 11) mchog sbyin skyabs sbyin phyag rgya yis 11) By the power of your gesture of supreme generosity and bestowment of protection,
- 12) mchog thun dngos grub g.yang khug cig 12) May we be granted the good fortune of ordinary and extraordinary abundance.
- 13) rin po che yi rgyan mang gis 13) By means of your ornaments of precious jewels,
- 14) 'dod dgu'i longs spyod g.yang khug cig 14) May we be bestowed with wish-fulfilling good fortune and abundance.
- 15) lha rdzas dar gyi na bza' yis 15) By means of your divine robe of silk scarves ,
- 16) tshul khirms dag pa'i g.yang khug cig 16) May we be granted the blessing of pure ethical discipline.
- 17) rigs bdag tshe dpag med mgon gyis 17) By the spiritual father, the lord of longevity, Tshe dpag med, the bestower of protection,
- 18) 'chi med tshe yi g.yang khug cig 18) May the blessing of longevity be conferred upon us.
- 19) nyer gcig lha mo'i tshogs rnams kyis 19) By the assembly of the 21 goddesses,
- 20) 'phrin las sna tshogs g.yang khug cig 20) May we be blessed with the good fortune of numerous enlightened activities.

Speech Three¹⁰¹

This speech is given by someone from the groom's side at the Bag ston ritual. The speech apologizing for the speaker's lack of skill in giving speeches, making offerings to different deities, and praising the auspicious wedding day and the A zhang group.

¹⁰¹ Recorded from Informant E during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

1

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|---|--|
| 1) da de ring ngas ston mo tshig ga gsum bshad na | 1) Well, if I say a few words about the wedding today, |
| 2) khyed gral mgo lo lon bsam shes tshos | 2) May the wise elders at the front of the row |
| 3) nga'i tshig la bka' bkyon re ma gnang | 3) Not disapprove of my words. |
| 4) gral sked kyi gsar bu kha bde tshos | 4) May the eloquent youths in the middle of the row, |
| 5) nga'i tshig la dag ther re ma phud | 5) Not correct my words. |
| 6) gral rnga'i bu mo mgo yag ma tshos | 6) May the pretty girls at the end of the row, |
| 7) nga'i tshig la he he re ma zer | 7) Not laugh at my words. |
| 8) da de ring nyi ma skar ma bzang gi | 8) Today is a day of astrological auspiciousness, |
| 9) phun sum tshogs pa'i nyi ma | 9) A day of plentitude, |
| 10) bde skyid 'dzoms pa'i nyi ma | 10) A day of peace and happiness, |
| 11) bkra shis don grub kyi nyi ma | 11) A day of promise and accomplishment. |

2

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) de ring gnyen skar bzang por gnyen bzung na | 1) Let us establish matrimonial relations on this great wedding day. |
| 2) 'jig rten bod kyi gtam dpe la | 2) As the Tibetan saying goes, |
| 3) gtam gyi mgo ma ku re yin | 3) Jokes precede speeches, |
| 4) gtam ku re ma byas rtsed srol med | 4) There is no custom of entertainment without jokes. |
| 5) zas kyi mgo ma mchod pa yin | 5) Offerings precede the eating of food, |
| 6) zas mchod pa med na za srol med | 6) Food is not eaten without making offerings. |
| 7) ngas tshig nyung bsdus shig gis mchod pa zhig byed na | 7) I will make offerings in a few words, |
| 8) mchod bla ma yid dam mchod | 8) Offerings to the lamas and the tutelary deities, |
| 9) sangs rgyas byang sems mchod | 9) Offerings to the compassionate Buddha, |
| 10) dpa' bo mkha' 'gro mchod | 10) Offerings to the heroic sky goddesses, |

- | | |
|---|---|
| 11) chos skyong srung ma mchod | 11) Offerings to the guardians of the Dharma, |
| 12) yul lha gzhi bdag mchod | 12) Offerings to the local guardians and spirits, |
| 13) 'dir tshogs pha khu rnams kyi pho lha mchod | 13) Offerings to the paternal guardians of the men assembled, |
| 14) 'dir tshogs ma sru rnams kyi zas lha mchod | 14) Offerings to the victual gods of the women assembled. |

3

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) da de ring bdag zhang bzang gnyis kyis gnyen bzung | 1) Now, today we embrace a marital relationship with the bride's family, |
| 2) da nangs nam langs kyi dang po nyi shar gyi rtse mo | 2) This morning when the sun appeared from the mountain summit at the break of dawn, |
| 3) a zhang tshang gis rin thang can gyi gos gon | 3) The bride's family, attired in valuable dresses, |
| 4) rin po ches phra brgyan | 4) Bedecked with precious jewelry, |
| 5) don yag tshang gi sgo khar phebs | 5) Came to the door of this prosperous family. |
| 6) chos bzang tshang gi sgo rtsa nas | 6) From the door of this pious family, |
| 7) gnyen tshang tshang gi bu rabs tsha rgyud kyis | 7) The successive generations of the groom's family, |
| 8) mig mthong gang gis bsu ma byas | 8) Welcomed the guests when they came into view. |
| 9) a zhang tshang zer ba ni | 9) As for the A zhang family, |
| 10) g.yas gral g.yas la bzhugs na | 10) When those on the right side sit there, |
| 11) g.yas gral nyi ma shar 'dra | 11) The right row looks like the rising sun. |
| 12) g.yon gral g.yon la bzhugs na | 12) When those on the left side sit there, |
| 13) g.yon gral zla ba tshes 'dra | 13) The left row is akin to the waxing moon. |
| 14) dkyil gral dkyil la bzhugs na | 14) When those in the middle sit there, |
| 15) dkyil gral skar chen shar 'dra | 15) The middle row scintillates like the glittering stars. |
| 16) a zhang tshang 'di ma bstod dgung la mnyam mer yod | 16) The A zhang group soars in the heavens without having been praised. |

- 17) bstod na dgung gi mtho lhag red zer 17) They will soar even higher if they are praised.

Speech Four¹⁰²

The groom's side give this speech an the Bag ston ritual. The speech praises the day, ornaments and clothing, songs, speeches, food, and service.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) da de ring gi ston mo 'dir bstod pa zhid
byas na | 1) If I praise today's wedding celebration, |
| 2) nyi ma bzang bo | 2) The day is auspicious. |
| 3) skar ma bzang bo | 3) The stars are favorable. |
| 4) rtags dang rten 'brel 'grig gi nyi ma | 4) It is the day of good signs and circumstances, |
| 5) pha a khus bdud rtsi 'thung gi nyi ma | 5) The day when the paternal uncles drink nectar, |
| 6) sman bu mos g.yu byur 'dogs pa'i nyi ma | 6) The day when the women wear coral and turquoise ornaments, |
| 7) zas dkar dmar gyi sder kha bshams pa'i
nyi ma | 7) The day when platefuls of meat and curds are displayed, |
| 8) skyes pho mo 'gron la 'dus pa'i nyi m | 8) The day when men and women are invited to a feast, |
| 9) zhang bzang tsha mo bsu ba'i nyi ma | 9) The day of receiving the niece of good lineage. |
| 10) a zhang tshang gral sgrig dus | 10) The sitting arrangement of the A zhang household is: |
| 11) g.yas gral nyi ma shar 'dra | 11) The right row looks like the rising sun, |
| 12) g.yon gral zla ba tshes 'dra | 12) The left row resembles the waxing moon, |
| 13) dkyil gral stag mo 'gying 'dra | 13) The middle row is akin to a crouching tigress. |
| 14) gon pa'i gos yag | 14) Their costumes are splendid. |
| 15) bzhugs pa'i stabs mdzes | 15) The manner of sitting is impressive. |
| 16) bshad pa'i gdam bzang | 16) The speeches are meaningful. |
| 17) blangs pa'i glu snyan | 17) The songs are melodious. |
| 18) gnyen tshang gi bsu srol la bltas na | 18) (I) observe how the groom's family welcomes the guests. |
| 19) bsu ba'i nyams bzang | 19) The decorum of their reception is dignified. |
| 20) gus ba'i srol legs | 20) They show great respect. |
| 21) zas la bcud che | 21) The food is delicious. |

¹⁰² Recorded from Informant E during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

- 22) ja la ro ldan
 23) rten 'brel ngang gis 'grig
 24) phan tshun 'dun ma 'grub

- 22) The tea is flavorful.
 23) Good fortune flows naturally.
 24) The mutual wishes (of the families) are fulfilled.

Speech Five¹⁰³

This speech is given by a man from the A zhang group at the Bag ston ritual. It entrusts the bride to the groom's family by summarizing the bride's inexperience because of her young age, how the groom's family should treat her in the future, and how the bride should behave in her new family.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) da ngas bu mo bcol dam zhig byed na | 1) Now (I) entrust the bride to the groom's family. |
| 2) bu mo 'di da rung lo na chung | 2) The bride is still a young girl. |
| 3) skyid kyi tshad ma rig | 3) She has not seen much happiness, |
| 4) sdug gi khres po ma khur | 4) But she has not borne the burdens of hardship. |
| 5) lag na las ka med | 5) She has not learned how to work. |
| 6) kha len tshig brtsi mi shes | 6) She is not used to the rules of politeness. |
| 7) deng phyin chad a ne yis | 7) From today her mother-in-law (must) |
| 8) ma rig sa nas ston dgos | 8) Dispel her ignorance. |
| 9) ma go sa nas shod dgos | 9) If she does not hear, tell her. |
| 10) ma shes sa nas slobd dgos | 10) If she does not know, teach her. |
| 11) bu mo rang gis kyang | 11) The bride (must) |
| 12) mthun pa'i sems bzung | 12) Treasure a sense of harmonious friendliness, |
| 13) 'jam pa'i ngag smos | 13) Speak with a soothing and respectful voice, |
| 14) gom pa yang len dang | 14) Walk with brisk steps. |
| 15) lag pa myur mo byos | 15) Do not leave your hands idle. |
| 16) sgos su rgan rgon gnyis la | 16) Especially for your parents-in-law, |
| 17) rlon pa tshos pa | 17) Cook whatever is raw, |
| 18) 'khyag pa dron mo | 18) Warm whatever is cold. |
| 19) ja lag yas dang | 19) Serving tea with one hand, |
| 20) stan lag yas bya rgyu gal che | 20) And getting rugs to sit on with the other is important. |

¹⁰³ Recorded from Informant E during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

Speech Six¹⁰⁴

This is an example of the introductory speeches given by ceremonial hosts at modern wedding celebrations. The speech presents the different steps of the wedding in order. Any one with a good level of Tibetan language can write such speeches. According to my informant G, opening speeches for modern weddings do not follow any specific rules, but are written with poetic and metaphorical words, and proverbs. He wrote this speech¹⁰⁵ himself.¹⁰⁶

1) mdza' mthun gser gyi skud pa 1) Welcome to the guests gathered
gcig tu sbrel zhing. 'dzum dkar yid kyi me here who are bound together by the golden
tog phyogs su 'grem pa'i 'dir bzhugs kyi thread of friendliness, hailing from all
sku 'gron rnams pa. khyed rnams pa'i sku quarters with great smiles.
khams bzang.

2) de ring gnam la bkra shis pa 2) Today the heavens are
gnam 'khor lo rtsibs brgyad kyi rtsibs ma embellished with the eight-spoked wheel of
'od lam se. sa la bkra shis pa sa pad ma immense light, the earth is bedecked with
'dab brgyad kyi 'dab ma sngo ldem me. the eight-petaled green lotus, and this land is
gnas la bkra shis pa gnas skyid po dge legs suffused with good fortune and blessings. In
kyi byin chags se. mdor na phun tshogs dge short, this place is surrounded by signs of
ba'i mtshan ma phyogs dang mtshams su virtue and abundance and on this auspicious
bzhad pa'i nyi bzang skar bzang gi dus 'dir. day we commence the wedding celebration
bdag cag gzhis 'gron kun gyi gces pa'i mig. of Mr. Bumpa Gyal and Miss Tashi Lhamo
mdza' ba'i bshes. mthun pa'i grogs bzang who are as dear to us, relatives and friends,
bo sku zhabs 'bum pa rgyal lags dang. bu as our own eyes.
mo bkra shis lha mo gnyis kyi bkra shis ba'i
gnyen ston gyi mdzad sgo da lta dngos su
mgo brtsams pa yin.

¹⁰⁴ Recorded at a participant observation of a modern wedding during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

¹⁰⁵ i.e. Speech Six.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with informant G.

3) de na thog mar ngas 'di nas. 'dir bzhugs sku 'gron yongs kyi tshab byas te. khong khyo shug gnyis kyi ma 'ongs bar. kha las snyan grags/tshe bsod dbang thang. btsan phyug 'phan dar. bu rabs tsha rgyud la sogs pa dbyar gyi mtsho mo bzhin rgyas la. yar ngo'i zla ba bzhin 'phel te. dga' skyid kyi 'tsho ba'i dpal la ci dgar longs su spyod pa'i bkra shis smon 'dun zhus pa yin.

4) su la'ang rang gi pha ma yod nges red. pha ma dag gis. smag la sgron pa'i mar me bzhin khyed kyi mdun lam gsal bar byas shing. dgung gi nyi ma bzhin khyed kyi sems la drol khol bstud mar sbyin myong bas. pha ma'i bka' drin ni ri bo las lci zhing mtsho mo las zab ste. don la de ring gi bde skyid yod tshad kyang rang gi pha ma las byung ba red ang. sku 'gron rnams pa, gsham nas de ring gi gsar du sgrig pa'i bza' zla gnyis kyis so so'i pha ma dag la drin ngo drin du shes ba'i kha btags 'bul rgyu red.

5) kha btags dkar pos nga yi yid sems mtshon. kha btags dkar por bkra shis phywa g. yang 'khor. kha btags dkar pos skyid kyi lam sna 'dren. khyed kyis mtsho ba kha bro bkra shis shog. sku 'gron rnams pa. gsham nas de ring gsar du sgrig pa'i khyo shug gnyis la. 'dir bzhugs pha ma

3) Now, on behalf of all the guests, I wish the couple fame, longevity, power, wealth and successive generations, like the expansion of the ocean in summer and the waxing moon. I wish them happiness, unbounded enjoyment, and limitless wealth.

4) Everyone has parents who show you the path of your future like lamps in the darkness. Like the sun, they have given you their love and warmth, heavier than mountains and deeper than the ocean. Since they are the source of the couple's happiness and well-being, the happy couple will present khatas to their respective parents.

5) The white scarf represents the heart, symbolizing the acquisition of good fortune and the path of happiness. Now the parents, siblings, relatives and friends of the bride and the groom will present the couple with scarves of congratulation.

spun mched dang sha nye spun grogs sogs
 kyis bkra shis rten 'brel gyi kha btags sgron
 rgyu red.

<p>6) glu ngag ni khyed la phul ba'i legs skyes kyi dwangs ma yin. mdzum mdangs ni khyed la phul ba'i bkra shis kyi smon 'dun gyi yin. sku 'gron rnam pa. gsham nas ming du grags pa'i glu ba rin chen don 'grub kyis. de ring gi bkra shis ba'i gnyen ston 'di'i thog ma'i glu sgo 'byed rgyu red.</p>	<p>6) Songs are the purest of the gifts offered to you, smiles are the most felicitous gifts offered to you. Dear guests, the famous singer, Rinchen Dhondrub will sing the opening song of the wedding ceremony today.</p>
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Speech Seven¹⁰⁷

This speech is given at modern weddings by someone with standard Tibetan pronunciation. The speech praises the local landscape and summarizes the wedding atmosphere, and ends with good wishes for the groom's and the bride's families. According to my informant I, he wrote this speech himself based on traditional wedding speeches. In his experience, speeches are not very popular at modern weddings.¹⁰⁸

1

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| <p>1) de ring gi nyi ma bzang bo
 2) bkra shis pa'i nyi ma
 3) don 'grub gi nyi ma
 4) phun sum tshogs pa'i nyi ma
 5) bde legs 'byung ba'i dus tshod
 6) lho 'dzam bu gling gi byang phyogs
 7) bod kha ba can gyi yul ljongs
 8) ri rtse brgyad gnyen gyi lha mdun</p> | <p>1) It is a good day today:
 2) The day of auspiciousness,
 3) The day of achievements,
 4) The day of abundance,
 5) The time of virtuous goodness.
 6) In the north of the southern Jambu continent,
 7) Is the snow-decked abode of the Tibetans.
 8) In front of the deity of the eight-peaked mountain,</p> |
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¹⁰⁷ Recorded at a participant observation of a modern wedding during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with informant I.

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| 9) shar rma rgyal sbom ra'i khor yug | 9) Is the domain of rMa rgyal sbom ra ¹⁰⁹ . |
| 10) se ku bya khyung gi 'dab rol | 10) In the neighborhood of Mount Bya khyung, |
| 11) reb gong rig pa 'byung ba'i grong
khyer | 11) Is Reb gong, the town of knowledge, |
| 12) mdo sngags bstan pa'i gzhi ma | 12) The foundation of the sutras and mantras of the
Dharma, |
| 13) lung rtogs gi lo 'dab rgyas sa | 13) The realm where Buddhist exposition and study
blossom, |
| 14) bslab gsum gyi lo yag 'khrungs sa | 14) The place where the teachings flourish, |
| 15) gro nas sran gsum 'khrungs sa | 15) The place where wheat, barley, and beans are
grown, |
| 16) btsan po gi dpa' skad sgrog sa | 16) The place where the rulers talk bravely, |
| 17) gnyom chung gi mtha' nas skyong
sa | 17) The place where the humble are looked after, |
| 18) lnga zung gi rig gnas dar sa | 18) And the place where the Tibetan sciences have
originated. |
| 19) mtshan snyan grags gling la grags
sa 'di yul reb gong rig pa 'byung ba'
grong khyer 'di red | 19) It is Reb gong, the place of knowledge, whose
renown is widespread throughout the world. |

2

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| 1) da yul reb gong skyid kyi lha khyim g.yang
khyim 'di nas | 1) Now, from this paradisiacal place in Reb
gong, |
| 2) ngas lha rdzas dkar po thod la btegs nas | 2) I raise the celestial scarf above my head, |
| 3) tshig gsum bdud rtsi'i char rgyun re phab
na | 3) And (I) will invoke the elixir rain of words. |
| 4) gnam 'khor lo rtsibs brgyad gdugs phib kyi
mnga' 'og | 4) Underneath the sway of the parasol of the
eight-spoked celestial wheel, |
| 5) sa pad ma 'dab brgyad gdan steng gi dkyil
tshad 'di nas | 5) From the central maṇḍala of the eight-
petalled lotus carpet, |

¹⁰⁹ Name of a mountain in the east of mGo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, mTsho sngon Province, A mdo.

- 6) seng dkar mo 'dra ba'i a khu tsho gong nas 6) The white-lion-like elders sit in the front,
bzhugs te
- 7) stag dar ma 'dra ba'i na zla tsho sked nas 7) The tiger-like youths sit in the middle,
sgrig nas
- 8) dgung skar tshogs 'dra ba'i ma sru tsho 8) The star-like females sit in the back,
mtha' nas bkra na
- 9) gangs la nyi ma shar 'dra zhig yin 9) Resembling sunlit crystal mountains,
- 10) nags la stag seng 'gying 'dra zhig yin 10) Looking like crouching tigers and lions in
the forest,
- 11) spang la me tog bzhad 'dra zhig yin pa 'di 11) They are flowers blooming in the meadow.
- 12) skyid ki 'dzoms gsum zhig 'dzoms yod do 12) They symbolize the combination of the
three modes of happiness.

3

- 1) da ngas gnyen gyi byung rim mdor 1) Now, if I say something about the origin of this
bsdus zhig bshad na marriage,
- 2) ri rgyud ded nas dpa' mkhar brtsigs 2) (We) built castles for warriors by negotiating the
mountain ranges,
- 3) chu rgyud ded nas zam pa 'phang 3) (We) built bridges by following the rivers,
- 4) mi rgyud ded nas nye bo bcos pa 'di 4) (We) built marital relations by observing family
lineages.
- 5) bod kha ba can gyi 'gro stangs zhig yin 5) These are the traditions of Tibet.
- 6) da mi mthun mthun pa byas pa 'di gzu 6) Negotiating disagreements is a way of making
yi bshad lugs shig yin peace,
- 7) mthun pa tshig gis bcad pa 'di srid pa'i 7) Words engender agreements, as the saying goes.
'gro lugs shig yin
- 8) sha chang zas gsum drangs ba 'di mgron 8) Serving meat, liquor and food is a manner of
gi bsu lugs shig yin welcoming guests.
- 9) glu len gar rtsed byas pa 'di rtags dang 9) Entertaining the guests with song and dance is
ston mo'i 'gro lugs shig red zer rgyu can the traditional way of celebration.
zhig red la

4

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| 1) da thob dka' ba 'di mi lus rin po che yin | 1) The precious human body is difficult to obtain, ¹¹⁰ |
| 2) 'dzom dka' ba 'di phyogs bzhi'i mgron po yin | 2) It is difficult to gather guests from the four directions, |
| 3) bshad dka' ba 'di sngon chad kyi gna' gtam yin | 3) It is difficult to make old-fashioned speeches. |
| 4) shes dka' ba 'di gang la gang mthun gyi gtam yin | 4) It is hard to make the appropriate speech for the right occasion. |
| 5) de ring khrom pa 'jigs che rung | 5) Although the crowd is large today, |
| 6) gtam mgrin pa'i nang nas thon dka' rung | 6) It is hard to make people give speeches, |
| 7) lce dar ma'i mdud pa grol dka' rung | 7) Because it is hard to untie the knot of their tongue; |
| 8) gna' mi bod kyi kha dpe ltar | 8) As the old Tibetan adage goes, |
| 9) zas mchod kha med na za srol med nas zer gi | 9) Food is not eaten without making offerings, |
| 10) gos gong ba med na gon srol med nas zer gi | 10) Clothes are not worn without collars, |
| 11) gtam ku re med na bshad srol med | 11) Speeches are not made without jokes. |
| 12) rtags dang rten 'brel gzhi ma byas nas | 12) Based on good signs and favorable omens, |
| 13) bdag zhang bzang gnyis kar phywa g.yang re bos na | 13) I make good wishes for both our families. ¹¹¹ |
| 14) da de ring nam langs gi mgo ma nyi shar gyi rtse mo | 14) The sunlit mountain summit heralds the dawn. |
| 15) gnyen ston gi yo lang 'di nas bzung | 15) The wedding celebration began at that time. |

¹¹⁰ Tibetan Buddhists believe that the rebirth in a human body is extremely difficult, and thus the human body is considered to be precious.

¹¹¹ This refers to the families of the bride and groom.

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| 16) khyed khyim gsar 'di nyi 'od gi dro yin | 16) This new family will be warmer than the sunlight, |
| 17) mdza' brtse 'di rgya mtsho gi zab yin | |
| 18) song sa nas don 'grub ba | 17) Their love will be deeper than the ocean. |
| | 18) May you enjoy good fortune wherever you go, |
| 19) bsdad sa nas tshe ring ba | 19) Live long wherever you live, |
| 20) kha las dge nas rlung rta dar ba | 20) Enjoy success and good luck. |
| 21) sa kha thams cad rgyu yis bkang ba | 21) May the ground be filled with wealth, |
| 22) sa 'og thams cad gter gi bkang ba | 22) May the nether realm be filled with treasures. |
| 23) mdor na ci bsam 'dod don thams cad yid bzhin du 'grub pa'i bkra shis kha g.yang re bos pa yin | 23) In short, may you accomplish whatever you wish. |

4.2 Wedding songs

As the Tibetan proverb goes: “There is a river in every valley, and there is a custom in every village”. There are different customs in different regions. In Gling rgya village, as in the rest of the Reb gong area, there are no special wedding songs, but instead, folksongs and Gar rtsed¹¹² are popularly sung at weddings. These songs are widespread in most parts of A mdo, and different from the ones sung in Central Tibet and Khams. Folksongs and Gar rtsed employ metaphors, and are performed in loud voices without any musical instruments while the singer moves about slowly. The singers characteristically cup either their left or right ear with the palm of their hand, and generally hold out a cup, a bottle of liquor, or a khata while singing.¹¹³ According to my informant C, although the meaning of some folksongs is related to weddings, they cannot be treated as wedding songs since these folksongs are performed at other celebrations as well.¹¹⁴ In central Tibet, in contrast, there are specific songs and dances performed at different stages of wedding rituals.¹¹⁵ Blo

¹¹² A type of Tibetan song performed by two or more singers while dancing in a circle.

¹¹³ Anton-Luca 2002: 186

¹¹⁴ Interview with informant C.

¹¹⁵ Lobsang Ph. Lhalungpa 1969: 7

bzang 'jam dpal has collected songs which are performed at weddings in central Tibet.¹¹⁶

Song One¹¹⁷

dgung a sngon tshang gi ston mo red
nga 'brug chung ston mor bos ni red
'brug de ring mi grags nam re grags

It is the feast of the blue sky.
I, the young dragon, have been invited,
When should I thunder if not today?

rdza khra yag tshang gi ston mo red
nga 'brong phrug ston mor bos ni red
'brong de ring mi ngur nam re ngur

It is the feast of the mottled rocky
mountains.
I, the young wild yak, have been invited,
When should I grunt if not today?

khyim g.yang khyim tshang gi ston mo red
nga glu ba ston mor bos ni red
glu de ring mi len nam re len

It is the feast of the well-endowed home.
I, the young singer, have been invited,
When should I sing if not today?

Song Two¹¹⁸

'brug sing sing dgung sngon gnam nas
grags
char bsil ma 'bab pa'i rten 'brel red

The thundering dragons of the blue heaven
announce the auspicious arrival of cool
rainfalls.

bya sing sing rgya rdzong nags nas grags
zla bzhi ba tshes pa'i rten 'brel red

The melodious birds sing in the thick forest,
heralding the arrival of the spring season.

glu sing sing khrom pa'i gral nas grags
nang khrom pa skyid pa'i rten 'brel red

Beautiful songs are sung in the crowd,
revealing its happiness.

¹¹⁶ Blo bzang 'jam dpal 2003: 72

¹¹⁷ Recorded from informant C during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

¹¹⁸ Recorded from informant C during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

nga rtsed kyin rtsed kyin khrom la 'gro
khrom na zla rtsed na nga yang rtsed

I will go to the crowd while playing,
I will play if my peers play.

Song Five: Farewell Song¹²¹

ngas bkra shis 'jog na bkra shis 'jog
ngas bkra shis dgung sngon gnam la 'jog
dgung nyi zla gnyis la bkra shis 'jog

Farewell and farewell
I bid farewell to the blue sky,
And farewell to the sun and the moon.

ngas bkra shis 'jog na bkra shis 'jog
ngas bkra shis dog mo sa la 'jog
rtswa rtsi shing 'dzoms pa'i bkra shis 'jog

Farewell and farewell
I bid farewell to the narrow land,
And wish for the abundance of flora.

ngas bkra shis 'jog na bkra shis 'jog
ngas bkra shis 'dir tshogs khrom par 'jog
khrom na zla skyid pa'i bkra shis 'jog

Farewell and farewell
I bid farewell to the gathering of the crowd,
And wish happiness for my peers in the
crowd.

Chapter Five. Wedding Rituals in Transition

Tibetan culture has changed dramatically in the six decades since 1950. Various policies of the Chinese government, such as the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, and the Economic Reform in 1980, had a huge effect on the daily lives of people in Tibet. Significant changes in the material circumstances of households in Gling rgya village and the surrounding villages in Reb gong took place in the 1980s. Due to the improvement in their material circumstances, and the educational and economic development of the village households, the way that the villagers celebrate weddings has been changing in terms of food, clothes and jewelry, gifts, and ritual customs. The present chapter first describes such changes by comparing wedding rituals before and after 1980, and then focuses on the key factors which have caused these changes: the educational and the economic development

¹²¹ Recorded from informant C during my fieldwork in the summer of 2011.

of the village.

5.1 Food

Gling rgya village depends mostly on agriculture, including animal husbandry. The traditional food in the village are therefore products from livestock, as well as wheat and barley flour. These were traditionally the main foods served in abundance (with homemade barley liquor) at weddings. Before 1950, weddings in Gling rgya village were generally celebrated elaborately even though there were not as many different kinds of food as today. The food decorations on the tables consisted of plates of Phye mar, Gro 'bras, meats, sNum btsos bread, stuffed dumplings, and bottles of liquor, and the main foods served for the guests were milk tea, boiled mutton and beef, stuffed dumplings, and wheat-flour noodles. However, over the period from the late 1960s to 1980, family properties and farmland were taken by the village community. All the villagers had to work together as a whole, and not many villagers had private household property such as farmland or cattle. The village's food production was distributed according to the number of laborers in each family. The food thus distributed was not enough to prevent starvation. Thus, weddings during this period were simple; only noodles, stuffed dumplings, and tea were served. According to my informant M, there were hardly any weddings in Gling rgya village at the beginning of the 1960s.¹²²

The Economic Reform in 1978¹²³ reached Tibetan areas in 1980¹²⁴, and Gling rgya village in 1981, with the implementation of the new policy of division of farmland. Following the reform policy, villagers started working on their own farms and lived better lives. The food served at weddings has changed dramatically from the beginning of the 1980s to the present day. During the 1980s and 1990s, the village was still at a new stage of material improvement, and the food served at most weddings was traditional and similar to that of pre-1950 weddings. Most families were not rich enough to be able to afford boiled meat for weddings. However, both the quality and the quantity of the food served at weddings have improved as time has passed. From 2000 to the present day, the range of different kinds of food at weddings has been increasing. Various meats fried with

¹²² Interview with informant M.

¹²³ Fischer 2005: 16

¹²⁴ Goldstein 1994: 96

vegetables and well-made cold dishes bought from the town have been served along with traditional food, including boiled meat, which is considered to be the best traditional food. Moreover, fruit, dried grapes, sunflower seeds, and various sweets are new items which have been served at weddings since 2000.

In addition, since 1980, the traditional homemade barley liquor has been replaced by Chinese liquors bought from the local town, and Chinese cigarettes are now also provided at weddings. The quality of the liquor and the cigarettes has changed dramatically, and they are considered to be an indication of the family's financial standing. Cheap liquor (around five CNY per bottle) and cigarettes (around two CNY per pack of 20) were common in the 1980s. More expensive liquor and cigarettes were provided as the financial situation of the village households improved. Liquor costing about 15CNY and cigarettes about five CNY per pack were common in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. In recent years, even more expensive liquor (around 45CNY per bottle) and cigarettes (10 to 15CNY per pack of 20) have become common.

The food at modern weddings is all Chinese food. This has been the case since the advent of the modern wedding tradition in the late 1990s. The price for one table of ten was around 350CNY in the late 1990s, but it has recently doubled. The liquor and cigarettes at modern weddings are generally more expensive and of better quality than those at traditional weddings. Liquor costing around 25CNY per bottle and cigarettes costing five CNY per pack were common at modern weddings in the late 1990s. At recent modern weddings, the liquor and cigarettes have been around four times as expensive as those of the late 1990s.

5.2 Clothes and Jewelry

Tibetans live on a high, cold plateau surrounded by snow-covered mountains, and Tibetan clothes reflect the unique features of Tibet's environment and culture. The style of Tibetan clothes often depends on the region and the wearer's economic status. The traditional Tibetan clothes popular in cold nomadic areas are made of fur and covered with silk or other thin materials, whilst in agricultural areas clothes made of woollen fabrics are widespread in summer, and fur robes in winter. A Tibetan robe is loose-fitting, wide at the waist, and is made with long sleeves for men and short sleeves for women. Virtually every

Tibetan wears such a robe, which is also pocket-less. It has no buttons, but is fastened at the waist with a belt. Men wear robes with the hem hanging below the knees, whilst women's robes reach to the ankles.

Traditional robes were commonly used in daily life before the 1950s. Since then, because of the Chinese influence, western-style clothes have been introduced to all parts of Tibet, and Tibetans have gradually got used to the changes in clothing. The result of this is that nowadays only some older people wear traditional robes on a daily basis. In Gling rgya, since the 1960s, the number of villagers wearing robes every day has been falling. Robes are generally only used on special occasions such as the New Year, at weddings, and other social festivities.

In Gling rgya village, as in almost every region of Tibet, weddings are considered to be an important social event which should be celebrated in accordance with traditional customs. All the guests at weddings therefore wear robes, as do most of the people who come to help. Fox-skin hats and robes made of animal skins are worn at winter weddings, and woolen robes and gNa' zhwa¹²⁵ at summer weddings. gNa' zhwa are used throughout the year. The lower hem and the sleeves of both summer and winter robes were traditionally trimmed with otter skin, tiger skin, or leopard skin, and the collar with fox skin. Otter skins were used in agricultural areas whereas tiger and leopard skins were only used in nomadic areas. Such wild animal skins were so expensive that some families could not afford them. The size of the fur trims was of great importance, as it reflected the financial power of the family. In ancient times, honored heroes wore tiger skins and cowards were forced to wear fox skins as punishment. This tradition developed over time and was later reflected in the fur trims of traditional robes.¹²⁶

In Gling rgya village, summer robes are decorated only with otter skins. Winter robes are made of fur, with the fur simply covered by a layer of thin material. They are trimmed with fox skin at the collar, but not otter skins. For winter festivities, villagers wear fur robes covered by summer robes with otter skin decorations. Animal skin decorations for robes were used in Gling rgya village before the 1950s. Later, during the Cultural

¹²⁵ A Tibetan hat with brims both at both the front and the back. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 9 and 10.

¹²⁶ Nags po skal bzang 2010: 10

Revolution, such decorations disappeared, but since 1980, this kind of traditional clothing reemerged and became popular. During the 1980s, summers robes made of thin woolen materials, which were also worn over fur robes in winter, were the most popular in Gling rgya village, but in the 1990s the most popular material for summer robes became silk. Since 2000, woolen fabrics have regained their popularity. Also, Phrug lwa, which used to be popular before the 1950s, have come back into fashion in Gling rgya village. The tradition of wearing clothing trimmed with wild animal skins in Tibet was stopped in 2008 in order to protect wild animals. These decorations, which were once most popular and expensive, have recently become socially unacceptable in Tibetan culture. At modern weddings, celebrated in the local town with friends and colleagues, all the guests generally wear casual western-style clothes, except for the members of the couple's families, who wear traditional robes.

The most common types of Tibetan jewelry (necklaces, rings, earrings, bSko ru¹²⁷, belts¹²⁸, and bZho long¹²⁹) are made of gold, silver, coral, and copper, among which coral and gold are the most expensive, and silver the most common. There are also a few other types of jewelry made of precious stones, which are rare in Tibetan society. Most Tibetan jewelry developed from ancient tools and everyday items.¹³⁰ Jewelry is usually worn on special social occasions and most of it is for women. Tibetan men do not often wear jewelry, except for gold or silver finger rings. At weddings in Gling rgya village, only the bride wears gold, silver and coral jewelry. After the Chinese reforms of 1980, the most common types of jewelry worn at weddings in Gling rgya village have been gold rings¹³¹ (1500CNY) and earrings¹³² (2000CNY). Coral necklaces¹³³ are valued most highly in the village, but not many families own them. A medium-sized authentic coral necklace costs around 40,000CNY and most families cannot afford such expensive jewelry. Coral, bSko

¹²⁷ Tibetan jewelry for women, made of silver and coral, which hangs from the back of the head from tiny pigtails of hair. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 18.

¹²⁸ A leather belt decorated with silver and coral, used to fasten robes at the waist. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 15.

¹²⁹ Silver jewelry developed from a tool used to hold the wooden container used for milking female yaks. See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 16.

¹³⁰ Nags po skal bzang 2010: 10

¹³¹ See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 21.

¹³² See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 19 and 20.

¹³³ See Illustrations, Plate 2, picture 14.

ru, belts, and bZho long were very popular and used widely during all festivities in Gling rgya village before 1950, but all these items were confiscated during the Cultural Revolution and no jewelry was worn at weddings during that period. Since 1980, a few pieces of jewelry such as gold rings and earrings have been reappearing and being used at weddings, but bSko ru, belts, and bZhong long are no longer part of Gling rgya's culture. Women who work in the public sector purchase gold necklaces instead of coral necklaces.

5.3 Gifts, Bride Price, and Groom price

Although the traditional categories of gifts (Khatas, silk, cloth, liquor, tea bricks, breads, meat, candies, and non-alcoholic drinks) at weddings and for matchmaking have remained constant, the quantity and quality of gifts have been changing dramatically since 1980.

During the period of the Cultural Revolution, gifts for matchmaking were offered in very small amounts. Khatas were not allowed to be used for any social events as religious symbols were considered to be against the Revolution, and the liquor was homemade. Only three to five bottles were given for the matchmaking gift. Silk and cloth gifts were rare at that time, or were small. After Economic Reform which reached Gling rgya village in 1981, Chinese liquor bought in the local town began to be used at weddings in Gling rgya village instead of homemade barley liquor. Additionally, all the gifts increased in quantity and quality. During the 1980s, matchmaking gifts included five to seven bottles of liquor (each costing around five CNY) and a piece of silk or cloth which cost around fifteen CNY. As the financial conditions of the village improved, the amount of liquor given has increased to around twenty bottles (each costing twenty-five CNY) and silk or cloth worth around 100CNY.

Similarly, before 1980, the bread gift, given together with two pieces of meat, a fist-sized mixture of tsampa, and one CNY, for each guest at weddings was small, and the size of breads has become bigger and bigger (see Chapter Two for details) since the farmland division among households in 1981. The cash given with the bread has also increased to two CNY in the 1990s, five CNY at the beginning of 2000, and ten CNY in recent years. Additionally, the gifts for the groom's ears on Mag ston included one pack of candies, around five bottles of non-alcoholic drinks, and around 50CNY during the 1980s,

but during the Cultural Revolution there were no such gifts at most weddings in Gling rgya village, except for some candies. However, the amount of gifts for the groom's ears has been increasing over the years, and in recent years the gifts have included more than thirty bottles of non-alcoholic drinks, about four packs of candies, and three to five hundred CNY in cash. The guests invited to modern weddings attend with a gift of cash. The most common amount given by each guest was 50CNY in the late 1990s and at the beginning of 2000, but in the recent years 100CNY to 150CNY is the average amount.

The bride price is paid only in cash in Gling rgya village and the amount has been increasing. Due to poverty, a bride price was not given for most of the marriages that occurred before 1980, but a bride price of less than 200CNY was common among some rich families. According to my informant K, who married in 1966, her bride price was 150CNY.¹³⁴ However, the average bride price increased to 800CNY in the late 1980s and to 1500CNY during 1990s. After 2000, the average bride price reached 2000CNY and it has been around 2700CNY in recent years. If the bride works in public sector, which means that she has a stable monthly income, the bride price is much higher. It used to be around 6000CNY and it has increased by a further 2000CNY in recent years. In matrilocal marriages, the bride price is replaced by a groom price, which is traditionally much lower than a bride price. Before 1980, a groom price was less than 100CNY and no groom price was offered for most matrilocal marriages. During the two decades after the new policy of Reform in China, the groom price was between 400CNY and 700CNY, According to my informant L, his groom price was 500CNY when got married in 1992.¹³⁵ Nowadays a groom price is around 1800CNY at most.

5.4 Wedding Speeches and Songs

Wedding speeches and songs are an important tradition throughout Tibet. The speeches are in danger of disappearing in contemporary Tibetan culture, while the songs are still widespread. Before 1950, speeches were a necessary part of wedding rituals in Gling rgya village. From the 1950s to 1980, traditional festivities were not allowed, and songs and speeches were not practiced at weddings. Anton-Luca has stated that the

¹³⁴ Interview with informant K.

¹³⁵ Interview with informant L.

Chinese policy, “Smash the Four Olds” (old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits), hit Tibetan rural areas during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and folk culture and non-secular cultural forms became subject to this new policy.¹³⁶ Although traditional wedding customs have re-emerged since 1980, wedding speeches have virtually disappeared. Due to the fact that villagers were unable to access such traditions for almost thirty years, and due to the high death rate among the elderly during The Cultural Revolution, there was a lack of people who were skilled in giving speeches. According to my informant E, he has not heard any speeches being given at traditional wedding rituals in Gling rgya village since the late 1980s, although traditional songs have regained their popularity at celebrations in Gling rgya village.¹³⁷ Nowadays, Tibetan speeches are more widely available in writing, in books written by scholars to preserve Tibetan culture.

5.5 Causes of the Changes

5.5.1 Educational systems

Education has played a crucial role in social transitions in Gling rgya village. For most of the villagers, education is a synonym for literacy. How fluently one can read a section of an article, how poetically one can write an essay, and how high a grade one can get in school examinations are enough evidence for the villagers to judge a person’s level of education. There are two educational institutions available to the villagers. One is the village monastery, although access is restricted to men who have at least a formal primary education. The other is the school established by the government in the late 1950s, where both girls and boys are sent at an average age of seven.

The monastery was the most common place to go to learn to read and write and obtain religious teaching before 1950 and between 1980 and 2000. Buddhist monks, like many other formal religious practitioners, had higher prestige than the laypeople in their society due to their higher level of education. In the past, families who had several boys would send at least one of them to a monastery before or after he had finished his education in the village primary school, whether or not he volunteered for it. This was most prevalent after the reforms of the 1980s. However, according to the villagers, there

¹³⁶ Anton-Luca 2002: 176

¹³⁷ Interview with informant E.

has been a change in the number of boys going into the monkhood and in the number of monks disrobing. Many families send their boys to formal schools rather than monasteries, and the number of young monks has drastically decreased in recent years. This has resulted in an insufficient number of young monks to participate in important religious performances and activities both inside and outside the monasteries. In the last five years, a total of nine monks from the village monastery have disrobed and become lay Buddhists. The decline in the reputation and prestige of monasticism has affected parents' enthusiasm for sending their boys to the monastery to a greater or lesser degree. This change is also an indication of how modern education and technical knowledge are gradually taking the place of the traditional system of education in the monastery. Even in a society like Tibet's, where every element of society and culture is strongly tied to people's belief in Buddhism, modern educational institutions have influenced cultural values and social structures.

Formal education has been available since the 1950s, and consists of primary school, junior middle school and senior middle school or high school, followed by college or university.

As there are no kindergartens available in the village or the surrounding area, almost all students start their formal education at pre-school at an average age of six. The village primary school has had a pre-school class since the early 1990s. After one year of pre-school, there are six years of primary school, where the main subjects are Math, the Chinese language, and the Tibetan language.

After graduating from the primary school, students are required to take an entrance examination for middle school. Middle school has two levels, junior middle school and senior middle school, and each of them takes three years to complete. In the 1980s and 1990s, after finishing junior middle school, many students from rural areas entered a normal school which takes three to four years to complete. These students became primary school teachers after graduation. However, since the late 90s, the majority of students have gone on to senior middle school after finishing junior middle school.

Senior middle school, or high school, is followed by college or university. At college, there are two different kinds of degree: an associate degree, and a bachelor's

degree. An associate degree takes two years, whereas a bachelor's degree requires four years. It used to be the case that every collage or university graduate was assigned a job in the public sector by the local government. This policy was changed in 2001, and graduates are now required to take certain examinations to work in the public sector.

100 percent of the literate young villagers have received a formal education in the local schools. Thus, the state schools are the place for children to learn reading and writing. The primary school in Gling rgya collects data on the children who attend the school, and the numbers are higher than they have ever been.

Unlike children in well-developed areas of China, children in Gling rgya Village do not have access to any formal education before they enter primary school. This is due to the lack of kindergartens. The kindergarten seems to be the very first social institution outside the family that most people in urban areas encounter, but it has never existed in many rural Tibetan communities. In Gling rgya Village, kindergartens are not available, and this form of education is open only to those living in town and cities.

There are three main reasons that parents have no choice but to send their children to pre-school. Firstly, nuclear families are emerging in the village, such that most young parents do not live with their own parents anymore. This results in a lack of other available family members who could take care of children while the parents are at work. Secondly, most of the time the adults are busy working in the fields or in the mountains. This leaves the parents with limited time for their children. Thirdly, during the seasons of spring, summer and winter, which are the non-harvest seasons for farmers, parents leave for jobs outside of the village to earn extra income. Many children are, therefore, left alone at home with their neighbors or relatives for at least two months of the year.

During the decade after the Cultural Revolution, villagers had greater access to local educational institutions, although the quality of the education they received was low. The villagers were not so attracted by formal education, but instead were more engaged in the traditional lifestyle of farming and animal husbandry. Parents therefore preferred their children to stay at home to help with chores and grazing cattle. Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, not many children were sent to school, and even those who did go stopped after primary school or junior middle school. Most of the villagers who are now in their forties

or a little younger are farmers. There are only a few villagers in this age group who have graduated from higher educational institutions, and their lives are considered better, as they work in the public sector instead of working on a farm or in the mountains.

However, villagers' attitudes towards formal education changed positively in the late 1990s, and since then almost all children have been sent to school, and the great majority have graduated from college or university. Parents have recently been putting more effort into their children's schooling and villagers now think that education is the key to a better life. The villagers who work in the public sector after having completed higher education are mostly in their early thirties or younger, and their stable monthly incomes have improved their families' financial circumstances. In Gling rgya village, households in which there are one or two people working in the public sector are richer than those whose members are all farmers, and they have more prestige in the village. In sum, receiving higher education ensures the improvement of the villagers' financial circumstances and brings them experiences outside the village which eventually change village traditions in terms of food, clothing, and celebration of festivities. Those who have received formal higher education have introduced the modern wedding celebration into the village. Education is, therefore, one of the key causes of the changes in wedding rituals in Gling rgya village.

5.5.2 Economy

Most of the changes in wedding customs in Gling rgya village, as well as many other Tibetan villages, occurred due to the economic developments that took place after 1980. Before 1980, Gling rgya village, like any other agricultural area of China, was under the collective community system.¹³⁸ Between 1950 and 1980, not a single household owned farmland or animals. Most of their property was collected by the village community. The villagers neither had any autonomy to decide what to grow nor any right to decide where to sell their products.

At that time in Gling rgya village, there were communities for each of the seven village groups. Each community had their own collective farmland and animals. Several

¹³⁸ A system in which all the villagers work as a collective and the production belongs to the village, not to individuals.

households from each community were assigned to herd the collective animals of the community in the mountain areas, while the rest of the households farmed the fields. Each community developed a daily scoring system to judge and pay for the villagers' labor in the fields or in the herding areas. Every autumn, the communities would distribute a grain ration to each household based on the size of the household. The scores of the laborers in a household decided how much extra grain they could get. In order for a family to obtain a subsistence level of grain, especially when there were several youngsters and elders, every person in the family who was able to work had to participate in the collective labor to earn good scores.

In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, China adopted a new policy of reform and opened itself up to the world. The production system in Gling rgya Village was also reformed. Decollectivization took effect in the village in 1981. The reform policy firstly included the reform of land distribution, educational reform, and the introduction of the two-child policy, and a few years later the reform of livestock distribution.

The collective animals and land of each village group were distributed to each household according its size. Each household signed a contract to take possession of the land and animals. Each year, they were required to give a fixed amount of grain and animals to the state, and could keep the surplus for themselves, regardless of how much they produced. This stimulated the villagers' enthusiasm for increasing their production. Clarke has stated that the distribution of livestock in Tibet led to the personal responsibility that went with ownership, and to better husbanding of the livestock.¹³⁹ Most villagers recall that they produced their largest amounts of grain in the few years after the reforms. They had more than enough to eat for the first time.

In the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the villagers depended only on farming and animal husbandry. Traditionally, women took care of the household chores and men did not generally do much labor much except during the harvest season, which was the main source of income. Male villagers were free during the rest of the year, but they tended to stay in the village. The idea of going outside the village for work to earn an extra income was new at that time. The financial situation of the inhabitants of Gling rgya

¹³⁹ Clarke 1987: 44

village therefore remained difficult during this period. However, in the late 1990s, some villagers, mostly men, gradually started going outside the village, mostly to town or cities, before and after the harvest to earn an extra income. Moreover, since the beginning of the 2000s, both young male and female villagers have been digging for caterpillar fungus for two months in summer, and the money this brings in usually covers the family's annual expenses, sometimes more.

Another emerging phenomenon in Gling rgya is the mechanization of farming. The traditional way of farming has disappeared, and donkeys, mules, and yaks have been replaced by modern equipment. Since 2005, ninety-nine percent of households have been using tractors and other farming machinery to do the farming work, including ploughing, planting, and harvesting. Mechanization has provided the villagers with extra time for other activities. For instance, young men and women can earn an extra income by digging for caterpillar fungus, doing construction work, running a small business in one of the towns, or herding livestock for pastoralists in other areas. Thus, the financial circumstances of village households have been improving. This has led to many changes in their daily lives. In the 1990s, few families owned tractors, which were the main means of transportation between the village and the local town. Now though, every family owns a motorcycle and some families even own cars.

Before 1980, villagers suffered from hunger and they did not own much family property. This limited the traditional way of celebrating weddings, and also led to some traditional wedding customs being neglected. In the 1980s, starting with the new policy of reform, although most village traditions re-emerged, they did not recover fully due to the village's financial situation. From the late 1990s, when villagers started engaging more in earning extra income to supplement farming and herding, the financial situation of the village households improved, and the traditional ways of celebrating festivities such as weddings revived more fully. Additionally, with this economic development, many changes have taken place in terms of food, clothing, and gifts throughout the years, while the tradition of giving speeches at weddings has been disappearing. This is also the result of modernization and outside influences, as the villagers have been living more interactively with the other communities around them.

Conclusion

The main significance of this study has been focused on wedding rituals in Gling rgya, a village in Reb gong, northeast of Tibet, and the changes that have taken place in modern times, as well as a comparison between traditional weddings pre-1980 and post-1980, and modern weddings. In order to geographically and culturally locate this study, the village has been briefly introduced, and as a context, concise introductions have been given to Tibetan marriage forms and marriage in Gling rgya village. Subsequently, different components contextualizing the wedding rituals have been described in detail, mostly concentrated on patrilocal marriages, the dominant form of marriage in Gling rgya village. The local education and economy have also been discussed as causes for the ongoing changes in wedding rituals.

Firstly, the pre-wedding activities, which are essential parts of wedding rituals have been described. These activities serve as a contextual framework for the wedding itself, and help to paint a complete picture of the rituals. The description of pre-wedding activities has included spouse selection, matchmaking, the selection of wedding dates and guests, and preparations for Mag tson and Bag ston rituals. Secondly, the wedding ritual itself has mainly been partitioned into three sections: traditional wedding rituals (the Bag ston ritual celebrated at the groom's family and the Mag ston ritual celebrated at the bride's family); the modern wedding ritual for couples working in the public sector, and the weddings rituals for remarriage. Thirdly, wedding speeches and songs, which are of vast importance in different parts of Tibetan marriage, have been described. Some examples of the most widespread speeches and songs performed during matchmaking and wedding rituals have been transliterated into Tibetan Wylie and translated them into English. Finally, I have described the changes in wedding gifts, clothes, jewelry, food, and speeches by comparing wedding rituals before and after 1980. The educational development and economic growth of the village since 1980, which I believe has directly impacted the way of life in the village, have been discussed as the key factors for the changes.

Tibetan marriage customs have been changing dramatically in recent decades, due to economic, social and cultural factors. Some parts of the ritual are becoming obsolete and

people seem not to understand that this is an increasing threat to the culture of their community. Furthermore, there is a wide variation in marriage customs across the Tibetan plateau, and studies on wedding rituals are still at a rudimentary stage. So far very little research has been done on wedding rituals in Tibetan communities, and no publications on wedding rituals in Gling rgya village are currently available. I therefore feel that a study on this topic, which also provides information about wedding rituals in the larger Reb gong area in general, will be valuable. My case study of one village can be considered to be generally representative for the entire area, and it serves as foundational documentation for similar studies on wedding rituals elsewhere in A mdo. A more thorough analysis covering not only wedding rituals but also marriage and family structures in the area would certainly be interesting and be of great value in the field of Tibetan Studies.

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