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An Introduction to Tibetan *Sa bstod* Speeches in A mdo

The *sa bstod* is a genre of Tibetan oratory praising famous landmarks in a given area including monasteries, holy mountains, and streams. Such speeches are intimately tied up with manipulating precarious economies of fortune. As an introductory study of the genre, this article begins with an examination of Tibetan economies of fortune. Next, it examines *sa bstod* within a continuum of similar genres that discuss place and the environment. Following this, the performance contexts, dynamics, and register of the *sa bstod* genre are described. The article concludes by showing how *sa bstod* shed light on these economies of fortune, and how lay Tibetan's interact with the phenomenological world in relation to folkloric theories of place and place names, as well as the Tibetan folk religious concept of *rten 'brel*.

KEYWORDS: Tibetan—A mdo—speeches—*rten 'brel*—environment—economies of fortune

THE *sa bstod*[1] is a sub-genre—in verse—of Tibetan oratory, traditionally per-formed primarily by lay Tibetans, that praises local and regional landmarks important to the community. Although it shares many formal and poetic features common to other types of Tibetan secular oratory and other genres of oral and written Tibetan literature (STEIN 1972, 252; KOHN 1997, 388–89),[2] it is largely lim-ited by its focus on monasteries, holy mountains, streams, and other sites associ-ated with making a given location not merely mundane space, but a perfect place imbued with auspiciousness. In doing so, the orator is not merely describing a place, but creating auspicious circumstances. This article views *sa bstod* as a gateway to both Tibetan performance conventions and ideas of auspiciousness, geomancy, and religion that are an integral part of a lay Tibetan's lived experience.

Some scholarship specific to the Tibetan context comments on the various liter-ary genres of religious geography (WYLIE 1965; RAMBLE 1995) and sacred space in relation to pilgrimage or other physical religious practices (HUBER 1994; MAKLEY 2003; RAMBLE 2008; EPSTEIN and PENG 1994). Additionally, some local scholars have published entextualized versions of Tibetan speeches (TSHE DBANG RDO RJE et al. eds., 2008); however, there are few detailed studies of the representation of specific local geographic features in Tibetan oral performance traditions, and their interrelationships with folk religious concepts.

This article examines how speeches reveal the relationship that Tibetans have with their "culturally sculpted landscape" (HARRISON 2007), and examines the power of place names "to consolidate and muster so much of what a landscape may be taken to represent in both personal and cultural terms" (BASSO 1996, 76). Indeed, Basso notes that "[t]he outsider must come to grips with the indigenous cultural forms that the landscape is experienced with, the shared symbolic vehicles that give shape to geographical experience and facilitate its communication—its re-creation and re-presentation—in interpersonal settings" (BASSO 1996, 109).

In order to better understand the relationships between *sa bstod*, the environ-ment, and the Tibetan oral tradition, this article begins with a discussion of the constantly shifting concepts of auspiciousness that DA COL (2007) terms "econo-mies of fortune," paying particular attention to the notion of *rten 'brel*—an idea that may be translated by a variety of terms as diverse as "omen" and "dependent origination," and that is profoundly related to both the spoken and written word.

Next, I discuss several genres of the Tibetan oral tradition relating to the environment. I suggest that these genres of oral tradition are in dialogue with each other, and with Tibetan economies of fortune. Following this, I examine the *sa bstod* genre, introducing the performance contexts, dynamics, and register of a single performance from Sprel nag (pronounced Shi nug), a village on the periphery of Reb gong[3] and part of the Tibetan cultural region commonly referred to as A mdo.[4] Finally, through examining the language of *sa bstod* and through viewing generic interrelationships as dialogic, and in conjunction with Tibetan economies of fortune, it is possible to recognize the ways in which *sa bstod* metaphorically index auspiciousness, and actually create the auspicious circumstances described.

The power of speech in tibetan culture: *rten ʻbrel*

Why praise a place? Why perform speeches? Is it more than mere entertainment? What does it mean? How does the audience understand a performance? The answer to these questions lies primarily in the connection to Tibetan economies of fortune, and particularly the verbal nature of the folk religious concept of *rten ʻbrel*. This section briefly introduces the term "economy of fortune," before examining *rten ʻbrel* in more detail. Giovanni da Col defines an economy of fortune as "an economy which *borrows from the future*: it refers not only to a past which determined its accumulation or the present of its deployment but to the future of the consequences that a non-virtuous use may bring in this or the next life" (DA COL 2007, 225; italics in the original). These economies of fortune are thus temporal and are a "contingent perceptual field" that are not and can never be static. SA MTSHO SKYID and ROCHE (2011) and DA COL (2007) show that *rten ʻbrel* works within this complex matrix of overlapping socio-religious concepts. Some of these ideas, like *rten ʻbrel*, are concerned with effects in this life, while others—like *dge ba* ("virtue") and *byin rlabs* ("blessing")—are concerned with the next life and span multiple lifetimes (CLARKE 1990). Like other concepts in this matrix, *rten ʻbrel* can be gained or created, lost or transacted, and is constantly in flux. It is also constantly monitored and manipulated as people prepare to undertake any number of activities.

Alternately translated as "interdependence" (KUNSANG 2003, 1080), "happenstance" (DA COL 2007), "karmic relationship" (TUCCI 1980, 169), "omens" (EKVALL 1964, 269), "material prosperity" (CLARKE 1990), and "fortune" (SA MTSHO SKYID and ROCHE 2011), *rten ʻbrel* refers to the interdependence of all things and is an important aspect of Tibetan economies of fortune. SAMUEL (1993, 447–48) further describes the variety of meanings associated with *rten ʻbrel*, saying:

> The point is the range of additional meanings that *tendrel* [*rten ʻbrel*] has acquired in Tibetan usage. These center around the idea of "omen," especially in the sense of an indication that circumstances are auspicious for a particular action or development. The underlying concept is something like "connections that are not visible on the surface."

The notion of "connections that are not visible on the surface" when tied to that of "omen" gives an indication of how *rten 'brel* may be seen as underlying a number of Tibetan customs and taboos. I suggest that *rten 'brel* is particularly related to both the spoken and written word, and plays an important role in traditional Tibetan speech-making practices, in that it allows the verbalization of auspicious places to actually create auspiciousness in that place (connections that are not visible on the surface), and thereby to combat the inherently capricious environment.

First, there is a connection between *rten 'brel* and the spoken and written word. Any surfaces on which words may be printed—from paper to prayer flags to stones to water—are intrinsically special. Books are kept in high places, and never sat upon, stepped over, or placed under one's feet. Paintings and now also photographs of religious personages are imbued with this quality as well. Stones onto which the six sacred syllables have been carved are placed into piles and then circumambulated and worshiped for their religious power. This is all directly related to *rten 'brel*, through the innate capacity of the word to affect reality by creating positive or negative *rten 'brel*.

In some cases, true words, uttered with a pure heart, are associated with real-world attainment. The cycle of tales describing the previous lives of the Buddha Shakyamuni contain a story in which, as a king, he desires with such a true and pure heart to give as much as possible of himself to the poor that a god decides to test him. The god Brahma descends and, in the form of a blind beggar, asks for the king's eyes, which the king gives him. Ultimately, the king earns his eyes back, in the presence of this God, by uttering an oath in order to show the depth of his sincerity. Indeed, such "sympathetic magic… consists of asserting that a certain wished-for event is taking place, and by the power of the word it is supposed that, if every detail is properly performed, the event does take place" (in Thomas 1933, 189; Frazer 2009).

In addition to the power of the word in general, there is a unique power ascribed to names. Elders and lamas (T: *bla ma*) often have the responsibility of naming newborn children. Later, if a baby cries often or frequently falls ill, her parents may have a lama select a new name (Klu mo tshe ring and Roche 2011). Names also have the power to help people attain good luck, and with the exception of famous or holy personages, should not be spoken after a person's death. In each case, the power of the name is real in the Tibetan world view; for example, G. yung 'brug with Stuart (forthcoming) describe how G. yung 'brug was given a new name as a child in Sichuan's Danba (丹巴) County due to his frequent illnesses. Similarly, students at the Seng lcam 'brug mo Girls' School in Mgo log (Guo luo 果洛) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture are given new names upon entering the school, with the theory that as orphans and children from primarily poor and difficult backgrounds, new names divined by a holy woman from Gser thar (Se da 色达) monastery will help them leave their bad fortune behind. Names may include *tshe ring* or "long life," *sangs rgyas* or "enlightened one," *'jigs med* or "fearless," and *rdo rje* or "vajra." Some people in A mdo then follow these with a single syllable:

for boys, *rgyal* or "victorious or conqueror," or *skyabs* "to take refuge"; for girls, *skyid* or "happiness or delight," or *mtsho* "ocean or sea."

Prayer flags, iconic throughout Tibetan areas, provide visual evidence of this concept of *rten 'brel*. Strung atop high mountain passes, or at particular locations within the landscape, prayer flags with Buddhist scriptures printed upon them adorn the Tibetan landscape. As the wind blows, their prayers and subsequent blessings blow with it and are carried to the ends of the earth (EKVALL 1964, 129). Prayer flags are, for example, raised to create good fortune for an exam or at the site of an accident for the prevention of further misfortune.[5]

In interviews, Sprel nag's most accomplished orator, Tshe ring (male, b. 1976), and other consultants continually and emphatically recognized the connection between the performance of *sa bstod* and *rten 'brel*. An important orator from Zho 'ong byis (Ch. Shuangpeng xi 双棚西), another village on the outer reaches of the Reb gong cultural area, pointed to phrases at the beginning of speeches like *bkra shis ba'i nyi ma* or "auspicious day," and *phun sum tshogs pa'i nyi ma* or "perfect day," as classic examples in which the speaker is not merely praising the day, but actually helping to create its auspiciousness. Tshe ring emphasized that all of the speech genres mentioned above are particularly related to *rten 'brel* and several other concepts that compose Tibetan economies of fortune including *dge ba* or "virtue," *bsod nams* or "merit," and *byin rlabs* or "blessing."

Within the *sa bstod* discussed here, the mantra at the beginning of the speech is a crucial part of ensuring that this "praise" takes on special meaning. By thrice repeating *raM yaM khaM* (Sanskrit mantras associated with purification) and the three seed syllables *oM*, *A*, and *hUM*, Tshe ring literally changes his speech to a register that assumes religious efficaciousness. Somewhat oblique to the exact purpose of these syllables in Tibetan oratory, EKVALL notes that, "*OHm* [sic] and *Hum* are strictly religious in connotation and when joined to common ejaculations, raise them to a level of religious significance" (1964, 116). It appears that an analogous process is at work in the case of Tibetan secular oratory, and particularly in the *sa bstod*.

Rten 'brel's intimate connection with the spoken and written word is important to understanding discussions of the natural world in *sa bstod*. It will ultimately be not just the mantras that help to create auspiciousness in the village. Every word of praise, and each poetic image, is instead part of the larger process of imbuing their Tibetan environment with meaning, as well as actively playing a role in creating auspiciousness in Sprel nag. The power of these metaphors can only be understood through the concept of *rten 'brel*. Or, as Chos 'phel, a monk from Mgar rtse monastery put it:

> *ri zhig gi sgang la song ste bsang phud dung bus, ri de na gnas pa'i ri'i lha dang chu'i lha sogs la bstod pa sogs byas na rang gi bya ba gang zhig bsgrub rgyu yin…*

> For example, if you went to a mountaintop and offered *bsang* and blew a conch shell; if you praised the mountain deities, the water deities, and so on, then all of your activities—whatever they are—will succeed.[6]

Ultimately, I suggest that the management of *rten 'brel*—particularly in the context of the *sa bstod* and other sub-genres of speech—is a performative act in

the sense that the orator is taking "responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" (Bauman 1977, ii; see also Bauman 1986). Creating *rten 'brel bzang* or "good fortune" is a crucial element in understanding the communicative competence necessary in Tibetan oratory. In these performances, orator and numinous and human audiences constantly evaluate this manipulation of *rten 'brel*, sometimes subconsciously. For example, when providing *kha btags*[7] to consultants prior to interviews or performances, they will sometimes call it a *rten 'brel bzang ba'i kha btags*, or "a *kha btags* of good fortune." Alternatively, if the *kha btags* is soiled or damaged, then the recipient and all those in attendance will be offended. Similarly, if a bowl of liquor is offered to a guest, the bowl must not be cracked, lest the guest take offense at what is seen as both a breech of etiquette and an ominous portent.

In the *sa bstod* and other sub-genres of speech, this performative side to *rten 'brel* is, in part, coperformed with the audience, which (as discussed below) has the responsibility of participating in the performance at the end of each section. The audience also participates in the evaluation of *rten 'brel* (most often recognized in the breech of some commonly accepted or assumed proper practice). The auspicious circumstances are importantly created through the use of proper speech and the right words. In the *sa bstod*, this means praising the place in the right way, using the best language and metaphors, and creating the village as a place ideal for the practice of religion and for human habitation. Indeed, elders and orators alike consistently suggested that the style of performance is not what makes a good *sa bstod* and a good orator. Instead, it is the nature and quality of the praise and the praising. When asked about the important qualities for a speaker, Tshe ring said:

> *sa bstod gnas bstod gang zig yin kyang bstod sa'i yul te gnas ri'am yul lha gzhi bdag gang zhig yin kyang de'i khyad chos dang che ba sogs chad lus med par phra zhib phra ba'i sgo nas bshad thub na de ni bshad mkhan dga' zhig la brtsis na chog.*
>
> Whether a *sa bstod* or a *gnas bstod*, if he is able to speak in detail about the special characteristics, greatness, and so on, of the land and its holy mountains or its territorial deities and mountain deities, you can consider him a good speaker.

This is not to suggest that a reading of the keys to a performance is invalid. Rather, it suggests what Tibetans consider important about these performances. Indeed, as this discussion has tried to make clear, the very act of praising can be enough to ensure success in one's undertakings. Specific to the case of *sa bstod*, the object of this praise is the physical geography of a region. The next part of this article examines how a culturally attuned audience might understand several elements of praise in a speech that references the natural world, and attempts to understand them in relation to this concept of *rten 'brel*.

Speaking about place in tibetan culture:
a continuum of genres

Bauman and Briggs suggest that not only are genres connected, but assert that, "a given performance is tied to a number of speech events that precede and succeed it" (1990, 60). This is not only limited to performances within the same genre, but—as Cashman (2008) makes clear in relation to anecdotes on the Northern Irish border—also across a variety of related genres. Drawing upon Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic, Harris-Lopez further suggests that, "folklore genres are in dialogue with, interdependent upon, and ultimately inseparable from each other" (Harris-Lopez 2003, 115). This section introduces several genres and their depictions of the natural world. In doing so, it situates the *sa bstod* among several interrelated genres of speech acts related to the natural world.

The most contextually rigorous of these speech acts is the *bsang mchod*. *Bsang mchod* are prayers that accompany burnt offerings of *bsang* (juniper leaves offered also with barley flour, and sometimes alcohol, *kha btags*, fruits, and other substances). These prayers often praise a variety of deities, most of which fall into the category of the *'jig rten pa'i lha* or "Gods of the everyday world" (Tucci 1980, 164), and who have real-world powers of protection and blessing in this life. In Reb gong, many villages have *bsang mchod* prayers unique to the deities of the village, praising a number of local deities including a combination of *gzhi bdag* and *sa bdag* "earth owners" or *ri lha* "mountain deities."

Since these are prayers, and not just mundane speech acts, the performance of *bsang mchod* is intimately related to the act of offering *bsang*. In the process of collecting these *bsang mchod*, every elder insisted on burning *bsang* while uttering these prayers. In Reb gong, *bsang* is typically offered twice daily, and *bsang mchod* could only be collected in the natural contexts of morning and evening offerings.

Most *bsang mchod* last between three and four minutes, although some consultants offered much longer *bsang mchod* normally reserved for special occasions (the choice between short and long *bsang mchod* seems to rely on a performer's ability and desire, and is not specific to the performance context of the special occasion, but rather to the context of offering *bsang*). *Bsang mchod* are performed in a rapid-fire, staccato fashion, with the performer's voice rising in both pitch and dynamic as he runs out of breath. In most Reb gong villages, including Sprel nag, consultants indicated that *bsang mchod* may only be performed by men.

Only partially fixed in context are *gtam bshad* "speeches." *Gtam bshad* in Reb gong are primarily performed in two different styles; most frequently they are performed in the manner described above. There is, however, an alternative style in which they are sung. I trace three types of *gtam bshad* that frequently make reference to the natural world: *ston bshad* or "wedding or party speeches," *sa bstod* or "praising places," and *sa bshad* or "speaking about places."

Ston bshad are the most frequently practiced and recognizable of the *gtam bshad* genre. In many parts of A mdo, *ston bshad* refers only to wedding speeches; however the word *ston mo* can be used for any party in Reb gong. There are many envi-

ronmental references in such speeches. In addition to metaphors that compare the guests to auspicious animals like tigers, eagles, and so on, *ston bshad* also refer to the place in which the event is being held, locating it within the Tibetan cosmological system. In this way it overlaps with, and frequently includes, the next genre of speech: *sa bstod* and *gnas stod*.

Sa bstod and *gnas bstod* (*gnas* is the honorific of *sa*), with their content specific to particular places, are not limited to any particular context, but were—until recently—most frequently performed at weddings and festivals. Informants have suggested that this has changed radically over the last two decades, as television has made inroads into the Tibetan countryside. Though they are no longer regularly performed, they may be performed on radio shows in which elders call in and perform their favorite performance styles from Tibetan oral tradition. Other performances accompany gatherings of elders who have reached the age for which their labor in the fields or on the grasslands is no longer needed. Furthermore, Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart (2008, 51) describe an oration about place being performed annually at a summer picnic.

The content of *sa bstod* are not general, but must praise a specific place and its inhabitants. The scope of a *sa bstod* may be narrow, as in a village and its lands, or broad enough to include a larger region. The greater Reb gong area, for instance, has a *gnas bstod*. *Sa bstod* and *gnas bstod* are nearly identical, except for the fact that a *sa bstod* primarily praise rivers, mountains, and people, while *gnas bstod* praise a region's "power places" (Huber 1994), including *mchod rten* or "stupas," monasteries, and mountain deities. *Sa bstod* are sometimes inserted into other types of speeches, such as *ston bshad*, to lengthen them.

In speaking of the content of *sa bstod*, it is essential to recognize that "[n]ot only are the special characteristics of grain and tea, alcohol, valleys and their adornments, *sbra* and *gur* [two different kinds of tents], houses and castles, mountains and rivers, and so on, as well as historical origins described clearly, flowers of praise are also scattered" (Tshe dbang rdo rje 2008, 175). This element of praise appears to be the essential component that separates it from the next sub-genre of speeches: *sa bshad* and *gnas bshad*. In some cases, a *sa bstod* may also describe the region's history, in addition to its individual geographic features.

Sa bshad and *gnas bshad* are similar to their *sa bstod* counterparts, except that they do not necessarily include praise of the place. Consultants indicated that this type of speech is most common in pastoral areas, and may act as a sort of verbal map. These speeches are still part of the speech genre, but are distinctly separate in that they may say both good and bad things about the places they describe. Beyond this, the places described in *sa bshad* and *gnas bshad* are similar to *sa bstod* and *gnas bstod* respectively. Wylie (1965, 18) uses the term *gnas bshad* to describe a "guidebook" that "describes more than one pilgrimage place and offers terse directions of how to travel between them." Wylie's discussion, however, appears to be limited to written sources, while speeches and other oral sources appear to refer to slightly different concepts. I have thus far been unable to elicit a *sa bshad* performance.

The genres mentioned all deal directly with specific locations, deities, and places. The remaining two types of speech acts associated with the environment are often, but not always, much less specific in their descriptions of Tibetan geography. The first and longer of these are *dmangs glu* (folk songs) and *la gzhas* (love songs, literally songs from the side of the pass, also written *la ye*). *Dmangs glu* may be performed on a variety of occasions and have almost no restrictions on their performance. *La gzhas*, however, are generally highly restricted to certain contexts, away from relatives of the opposite gender.[8]

Dmangs glu and *la gzhas* employ essentially the same register, meter, and metaphorical language as the speeches described above. Their natural metaphors cover a wide range of topics including flora and fauna of the plateau and significant geographical features. RAMBLE (1995) notices a vertical dimension to the representation of territory and environment in these works, and identifies a poetics in which Tibetan folk songs often express a relationship between certain parts of the mountain and the animals that inhabit them. Nonetheless, he does not discuss precise locations. ANTON-LUCA's (2002) discussion of folk songs and love songs in A mdo also touches on this topic, but does not go into great depth. I have heard, anecdotally, of some regions mentioning specific locations in love songs—Sprel nag villagers told me that a valley known locally as Gza' lung, often considered to be very beautiful, is often mentioned by name in love songs to refer to a beautiful woman. In other areas, prominent mountains are frequently mentioned, as in the following example, in which Rma rgyal spom ra is the name of a famous mountain and deity in Mgo log.

> *Ri mthon po rma rgyal spom ra red*
> *Gangs dkar po sprin dkar 'phyur 'dra red*
> *Seng dkar mo g.yu ral rgyas sa red*
> *Gnas 'gangs chen yin no de don red*
>   The high mountain is Rma rgyal spom ra
> The white snow is like undulating clouds
> The white lioness is the one that grows a turquoise beard,
> It means that that is an important place.
>   (BAN DE TSHE RING and BSOD NAMS TSHE BRTAN 2009, 1)

The final genre in this continuum is the *gtam dpe*, roughly akin to proverbs in Western culture. In many parts of A mdo, good orators, particularly those tasked with conflict mediation, must have an excellent command of *gtam dpe* if they are to be respected (PIRIE 2009). *Gtam dpe* may deal with and describe a range of topics, with biological and environmental imagery playing an important role. For example, *rma bya nags kyi rgyan red/ mgron po khyim gyi rgyan yin* ("The peacock is the ornament of the forest, the guest is the ornament of the house"); *bla ma re re sil tog red, rang gi bla ma me tog red* ("Every lama is a fruit, one's own lama is a flower"); and *lung ba re na chu re/ sa cha re na skad re* ("Every valley has its own rivers and every place has its own dialect"; all from TOURNADRE and ROBIN 2006, 26).[9]

It should be noted that this spectrum, while attempting to privilege emic genre distinctions as much as possible, is admittedly oversimplified and artificial. I have isolated a single, content-based element of the oral tradition, when multiple ele-

ments often run together. For example, within the category of *gtam bshad* there are several sub-genres that do not appear to have much association with the physical environment, and—more specifically—place. At the same time, however, some informants admitted that they sometimes have difficulty only telling a *sa bstod*, as elements of *sa bstod* are often also found in *ston bshad* and other speech genres. Additionally, Reb gong Tibetans rarely make the cross-genre comparisons that I make here. Consultants frequently drew connections between *sa bstod* and *bsang mchod*. However, they never connected *sa bstod* with *dmangs glu* or *gtam dpe*.

The similarities between the *sa bstod* and other sub-genres of speech in terms of poetic devices and content, and the connections consultants readily made between *bsang mchod* invocations and *sa bstod* suggest significant generic dialogue. An examination of the form, structure, and content of *sa bstod* further suggests the dialogue these genres have with the environment and with *rten 'brel*, and shed light on the ways Tibetans invoke this through metaphor.

THE SPREL NAG *SA BSTOD*

Sprel nag is a pastoral village located deep in one of the tributary valleys of the Dgu chu (itself a tributary of the Yellow River). It is a small village that was, until very recently, inaccessible by car. The village is located in Gcan tsha (Ch. Jianzha 尖扎) County and geographically closer to Gcan tsha's county seat than to Rong bo monastery, the heart of the Reb gong area. Nevertheless, Sprel nag is culturally a part of Reb gong, an area that is home to some of Tibet's most famous intellectuals and institutions, including scholar and literary reformer Dge 'dun chos 'phel,[10] a center for the Buddhist *thang ka* painting tradition, home to several well-known monasteries, and the location of a traditional religious festival and ethno-tourist phenomenon known as *klu rol* (SNYING BO RGYAL and RINO 2008; REB GONG PA MKHAR RTSE RGYAL 2009).[11]

Sprel nag lies on the north side of a narrow valley, across from which are ruins of a building said to have belonged to a local king. To this day, the terraced fields across the valley are called *rgyal bo'i zhing kha* or "the king's fields." Villagers live in one-story adobe mud brick houses. The houses are raised as much as ten feet above ground level to compensate for the sharp incline of the hillside on which the village is built. During summer, approximately half of the village's inhabitants live in black tents on the summer pasture, herding sheep and goats. Villagers travel between their pastures, the village, and Gcan tsha and Tong ren county towns by means of cars, three-wheeled trucks, and motorcycles.

Sprel nag villagers regularly go to Rong bo Monastery to worship, and *Rnying ma pa* practitioners are associated with the head *bla ma* of the *Mag gsar sngags khang*, the largest *sngags khang* "tantra hall" in Reb gong, and seat of A lags mag gsar bla ma, one of the most revered *Rnying ma pa* practitioners in all of A mdo. They frequently make trips to the Tong ren county town as a socioeconomic cen-

ter, and though public school students go to school in Gcan tsha county town, those studying *thang ka* painting and other traditional skills study in Reb gong.

Tshe ring (b. 1967) is a native of Sprel nag village, a religious painter, and father of four. He studied painting in Seng ge gshong Monastery, a regionally important site for the study of Tibetan *thang ka* painting techniques in A mdo, and now earns money traveling throughout Qinghai province painting monasteries. He is considered the best orator in Sprel nag village, is keenly interested in Tibetan culture, and is considered very knowledgeable in this field. Although he cannot perform speeches from memory, he was willing to perform a reading of his village *sa bstod*. His handwritten speech is five pages long, and takes three or four minutes to perform, which he did so in the comfort of his adobe-brick home, surrounded by his children, on 15 August 2010.

To begin his performance of the *sa bstod*, Tshe ring first recites the mantra *raM yaM khaM oM A hUM* three times, before beginning with a short prose introduction to the topic of the speech. With a loud and prolonged *ya!* he then breaks into a rapidly cadenced speech. This opening is an important framing mechanism that cues the culturally attuned audience to the beginning of a performance of secular oratory. The orator speaks in a rapid-fire staccato fashion that builds in volume and intensity to the middle of each line, and then rapidly fades with the last three and sometimes four syllables. As he reaches the end of a stanza, he concludes by saying *khyod zer rgyu red*, or "you should say." The syllable *khyod* may last as long as a second and has a rising intonation, and *red* is dragged out as well, but has a falling tone. This phrase is the primary cue for the audience to make its sole vocal contribution to the speech event: a long and hearty *Ye!*

The Sprel nag *sa bstod* relies heavily, though not exclusively, on seven-syllable lines. Seven and eight syllable lines are common to a wide variety of Tibetan oral genres ranging from performances of the *Gesar* epic (Samuel 1996; Helffer 1979) to folk songs (Tshe dbang rdo rje et al, eds., 2008). Lines are further subdivided both grammatically and rhythmically into an initial syllable followed by three sets of two syllables (|●|●●|●●|●●|). The line builds in intensity towards the fifth syllable, after which the last two syllables receive very little emphasis.[12]

The lines are heavily repetitive, allowing for the extensive use of syntactic parallelism in the speech. The subject-object-verb word order of Tibetan makes such parallelism relatively simple, especially as regards the end of the line, in which the sentence's verb "to be" is often dropped, and replaced by a nominalized verb or adjective. The most frequently used nominalizing particle in *sa bstod* is *sa* or "place":

> *che rgan pa'i tshe thag ring sa*
> *lo gzhon pa'i 'dabs lag rgyas sa*
> *sman bu mo'i sha mdangs dkar sa*
> *che rgan par gus bkur yod sa*
> *chung gzhon par byams skyong ldan sa*
> *chos dkar bo'i bstan la gzhol sa*
> *kha mi dal ma Ni sgrog sa*
> *lag mi dal phreng ba 'dren sa*

> *dus rgyun par las 'bras brtsi sa*
> *mi mkhas pa'i blo rig rgyas sa*
> *las dge bcu'i lang tsho rdzogs sa*
> *rta 'do ba'i grig kha bkang sa*
> *lus kha jog lcang lo ldem sa…*

>   the place where the elders live long lives;
> the place where young men spread their wings;
> the place where the girls' skin is white;
> the place where elders are respected;
> the place where elders care lovingly for the young;
> the place where they diligently rely on the white dharma;
> the place where mouths recite *ma Ni* without ceasing;
> The place where hands pull prayer beads without respite;
> the place always accumulating karmic causality;
> the place where the wisdom of sages flourishes;
> the place where the young complete the work of the ten virtues;
> the place where the fine steeds' flanks are powerful;
> the place where their manes droop like willow branches;

In each of these lines, the first three syllables comprise a noun-adjective pair, or a nominalized adjective. The fourth and fifth syllables employ either two syllable nouns or a noun-adjective compound. The sixth syllable is a verb, while the seventh syllable is the nominalizer *sa*. "It is" is implied in each line, even though the verb *red*, "to be" is dropped from the line.

Additionally, the speech employs a number of three and four line phrases that repeat in parallel forms, or what Jackson terms "stanza-to-stanza parallelism" (1996, 369), as seen in the following passage:

> *De nas dbus gtsang chos kyi chol kha*
> *chos mdo sngags rang sgra sgrogs sa*
> *ma sems can bde la bkod sa*
> *bar mdo stod mi yi chol kha*
> *mi skye 'gro'i gshis rgyud 'jam sa*
> *las rgyu 'bras srang la 'jal sa*
> *smad mdo khams rta yi chol kha*
> *rta 'do ba'i bang kha 'gran sa*
> *skyes pho mo'i mig dbang g.yor sa*

>   Then, Dbus gtsang is the land of the dharma;
> The place where tantra and sutra resound spontaneously;
> the place where sentient beings exist happily.
> A mdo is the land of people;
> the place where people are of mild temperament;
> the place where karmic actions are weighed on scales.
> Lower Khams is horse country;
> the place where the fine horses compete in races;
> the place where peoples' consciousness slumbers.

Such parallelism has been documented across several genres of Tibetan poetry, both oral and literary (Sujata 2005, 216; Ramble 1995; Anton-Luca 2002). In this example, the three primary regions of Tibet—Dbus gtsang, A mdo, and Khams—are introduced with their relevant characteristics.

While many poetic devices have been attributed to foreign—primarily Indic—influences, parallelism is generally regarded as an indigenous poetic device due to its presence in folksong and other oral genres (Jackson 1996, 376–77). Within the Tibetan context, Beyer also recognizes that syntactic symmetry is not independent of content. Instead, "syntactic symmetry underlies and reinforces the semantic parallelism of the metaphors expressed in the verse" (Beyer 1992, 238). Thus this parallelism also relies heavily upon the content of the speech, in this case the particle *sa* or "place" is repeated frequently because that is exactly what is being described and praised.

Tshe ring's *sa bstod* begins by introducing the topic: praising Sprel nag village in prose form. Next, with rapid delivery, Tshe ring uses verse to describe the environment in increasingly minute detail, a movement from far to near that is a stylistic feature common to several genres of Tibetan verbal art, including the *Gesar* epic (Yang 2001, 310). At first, Tshe ring describes the greater Tibetan cultural area and its location on the southern continent around Mt. Meru within traditional Tibetan cosmology. He then focuses on the three major Tibetan cultural areas of Tibet: Dbus gtsang, A mdo, and Khams. He next recounts Sprel nag's specific location in relation to the village's protective mountain deities. Finally, he begins to describe Sprel nag as a place where people live virtuously, a village inhabited by all the best people and animals, and where the weather is as it should be.

Metaphorically indexing auspiciousness in the natural world

Creating auspiciousness and manipulating economies of fortune through speech requires praise of the highest order. In *sa bstod*, this praise is necessarily related to creating the village as a place ideal for religious practice and fit for human habitation. Building upon the important connection of speech with *rten ʼbrel*, this section discusses how orators rhetorically turn the spaces around them into auspicious places.[13] This process is two-fold: first, through metaphors in which auspiciousness is indexed through reference to the natural world; and second, through locating Sprel nag village simultaneously in the Tibetan Buddhist cosmological world and the natural world.

Recognizing the ways in which metaphors create auspiciousness through the natural world requires an examination of a few types of natural phenomena referenced in the speech. Through the use of poetic elements common to the genres discussed above, the place-making project of *sa bstod* speeches both familiarizes and praises these locations in the highest order, and thereby creates Sprel nag as an auspicious place fit for human habitation.

Within the metaphors of auspiciousness, references to environment, creatures, and specific locations—in short, references to the most auspicious types of places

of the Tibetan religious and secular worlds—locate the village in a place that is a perfect nexus of virtue. They do so through dialogue with both *rten 'brel* and the extensive body of Tibetan oral traditions that frequently relies on similar poetic devices, as well as lived experience with the specific places being mentioned.

The use of toponyms, I suggest, requires this intertextual reference, and works in a similar fashion to both Foley's (1995, 5) concept of metonymic referentiality and Basso's recognition of the referential and evocative power of toponyms among the Western Apache:

> [B]ecause of their inseparable localities, place-names may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations—associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life…[i]n their compact power to consolidate and muster so much of what a landscape may be taken to represent in both personal and cultural terms, place-names acquire a functional value that easily matches their utility as instruments of reference. (Basso 1996, 76–77)

A culturally competent audience draws on these multiplex associations to understand the speechmaking and the environment around them. Basso echoes Foley's metonymic referentiality when he suggests that, "places… serve as excellent vehicles for recalling useful knowledge" (Basso 1996, 134). Beyond toponyms, the performance itself, and its highly metaphorical language, call for further recognition that "[i]n a performed discourse… only attention to the historical relations between performance texts (their intertextuality) reveals the density of their meaning" (Kapchan 2003, 126). In the Tibetan context, the landscape is infused with meaning that is at once religious and secular, and place names can evoke a similarly large array of referential meanings; however, both toponyms and the language used to describe the location carry highly referential meanings. This section sheds light on the importance of place names and geography in this speech, and the uniquely coded references in it.

The ability of nature metaphors to index auspiciousness within the Tibetan world view is not merely limited to toponyms. Animals, both real and mythical, play an important role in indexing the auspiciousness of the village and its inhabitants, and the highly metonymic power of these animals should not be overlooked. In *sa btsod*, only those animals that reference the most auspicious of concepts are mentioned in order to also associate the locale and its inhabitants with those very qualities for which the animals themselves are revered.

Such associations rely heavily upon the folk poetic register of which these speeches are a part. This register is highly conservative, and does not appear to allow for extensive innovation, but instead derives its strong communicative economy (Foley 1995) from the intertextual connections this creates. Though the *sa bstod*'s content is indeed unique, the imagery that *sa bstod* orators employ refers not only to the speech tradition, but also to other genres of verbal art such as folksongs and incense prayers described above. For instance, references to animals

are often used in *dmangs glu* to describe a place in terms of its altitude (RAMBLE 1995), for its physical characteristics, or in *la gzhas* to describe a lover.

While certain animals are positive omens, some animals may have negative connotations. Indeed, "[a]mong the beasts of prey, brown bears, black bears, lynx, jackals, fox, and badgers are evil omens, whereas tigers, leopards, snow leopards, and wolves are good" (EKVALL 1964, 270). Looking at this brief list, none of the animals considered to be evil omens appear even once in the speech. Conversely, tigers, leopards, and snow leopards are evoked frequently in order to elicit positive images of strength, purity, and auspiciousness. These distinctions are deeply embedded in Tibetan folk culture, carrying over to eating practices, taboos, and traditional notions of the environment that affect everyday life (DPA' RIS BSOD NAMS TSHE RING 2006, 90–97).[14]

In the Sprel nag *sa bstod*, the animals mentioned are only those that Ekvall describes as having positive connotations. In some cases, only the very best parts of those animals are referenced. This metonymically refers the audience to the idea that the place or people being described are not only like the very best of the animals, but are also akin to those parts that reference the best of those animals as well. As an important element of Tibetan imagery, these references continue to appear in literary and oral works throughout the greater Tibetan cultural area. Ekvall notes that animals, birds and tigers among them, are ascribed certain supernatural powers, "thus making them objects of veneration and accessories in the practice of magic" (EKVALL 1964, 39; MORTENSEN 2006). Their presence at certain times may also be evaluated in relation to good or bad *rten 'brel*.

In praising the village's lived space as possessing the most excellent qualities possible, they are emphasizing its suitability as a place for people to live good, holy lives. By praising and emphasizing the holy mountains in the four cardinal directions, and enumerating the place's good qualities, the orator is playing an active role in making it just such a place.

In addition to mentioning places and animals that are associated with auspiciousness, the places are also likened to religious objects and more formal religious practices. The ensuing passage provides an example of how *'phreng ba* (rosaries) and *dkyil 'khor* (mandalas) serve to further associate a given location with auspiciousness.[15]

> sa mdo khams sa yi dkyil 'khor
> ri tsong la ring mo'i lho rgyud
> chu rma chu li ma'i g.yas zur
> gnas byin can phreng ba bstar 'dra 'di
> nga'i pha yul sprel nag sde lung yin no zer rgyu

> The mandala of the earth in A mdo and Khams;
> South of the long Tsong kha mountain range;
> The left side of the bronze *rma chu*;[16]
> This place that looks like a sacred rosary;
> You should say it is my home, Sprel nag village!

Through referencing the mandala, the orator clues the audience into another important element of the speech, the verbal creation of a mandala with Sprel nag village at its center through which the audience can recognize their own village as an ideal place. GRIEVE describes a mandala as "(1) a recognition of the four directions, (2) which are located at the periphery, and (3) a focus on the center" (2004, 492). RAMBLE (2008, 187–88) provides more detail to this discussion, by recognizing the ways in which geography is frequently mandalized in the Tibetan folk tradition:

> Typically the shape of the place is simplified to the quincunx of a mandala; the census of its streams, caves, lakes, and other features is standardized to auspicious numbers—seven, thirteen (in the case of Bonpo sites), 108, and so on; rocks are reported to be composed of previous substances or are attributed with a variety of shapes from the stock of imagery favored by the convention—usually religious instruments and animals; placegods of entirely local significance are pushed to the periphery of the mandala as minor protectors, and major tantric divinities are set at the center.

The following quote from Tshering's *sa bstod* does precisely this, first describing the holy mountains in each direction and metonymically, and then the deities that inhabit them. The four mountains—Bya khyung, the most important mountain deity of Reb gong, to the south, Skyes ri to the north, Brag dkar spun gsum "behind" or in the west, and Gong mo in the east—are important to the people of Sprel nag village as their protector deities, and define the outer boundaries of the village mandala.

> *sde 'di yi che ba rnam gsum bzo zhig brjod rgyu yin na//*
> *ri byin can lha klu rang 'khor*
> *'di shar na a ma Gong mo//*
> *sbra nag po'i khyim gzhis btabs 'dra*
> *stag sha ra'i dgra lha 'khor sa*
> *dbu mog dkar 'khor gsum ldem me//*
> *'di lho na a myes bya khyung*
> *chos dkar bo'i las la gzhol sa*
> *khrab nag po'i sil snyan 'khrol li*
> *'di rgyab na Brag dkar spun gsum//*
> *gshed ma run cham la phabs sa/*
> *lha dkar phyogs tsong 'khor 'dzom me//*
> *'di byang na tsong kha'i Skyes ri//*
> *gdugs dkar pod gung la btegs 'dra*
> *rje rgyal ba'i bstan pa skyong sa//*

> Now if I should speak of the great parts of this village:
> The blessed mountain gods and *naga*[17] turn;
> To the east of this is A ma Gong mo,
> resembling a black tent home.
> It is the place the young man's warrior deities circle.

> The white [cloud] billows about her head.
> To the south of this is *A myes Bya khyung*,
> like an outstretched eagle's wing;
> the place where the white dharma is maintained in work,
> playing cymbals of black armor.
> Behind this is *Brag dkar spun gsum*;
> the place where the unsuitable enemy is defeated;
> the virtuous gods gather around the market.
> North of this is Skyes ri of Tsong kha;[18]
> like a white parasol hoisted into the sky;
> it is where the teachings of the conquering lord are nurtured.

DIEMBERGER (1994, 144) has further pointed out that, "particularly among border communities which have kept a certain degree of autonomy from the state they [protective deities] seem to be a part of the sacred relation between territory and self-definition of a community." For a pastoral community such as Sprel nag, only recently accessible by car, and traditionally on the edges of almost every possible official state apparatus—Tibetan, Chinese Imperial, and even on the borders of the Reb gong region—this mandalization of place as described in this *sa bstod* certainly does seem to suggest such a self-definition of the community.

After verbally creating the borders of the mandala the orator places Sprel nag at the mandala's center. The remainder of the speech then focuses on the good attributes of the village, its inhabitants, and its perfect nature. Buddhist theory suggests that the center of the mandala is an ideal place for religious practice, just as the *sa bstod* suggest about Sprel nag and its inhabitants. The orator is thus verbally creating this location, Sprel nag, as an auspicious place that is ideal for religious practice. As discussed above, this oral turn is impossible without the concept of *rten 'brel*.

MAKLEY argues "that in practice mandalas were most importantly frameworks for vital exchanges between substantially coexistent human and divine agents" (2007, 56), and the role of the divine agent is not nearly as important in the case of the *sa bstod* as the existence and oral creation of the mandala itself. With the concept of *rten 'brel* one can understand that the mandala is actually, in some way, being created to protect the inhabitants; through saying these things, it actually happens in this way. Such a construction is, however, impossible without the thorough descriptions of the village's environment and inhabitants.

Furthermore, *sa bstod*, being praises of place, feature long sections employing the same final syllable (the nominalizing particle *sa*, meaning place). In this way, the orator may describe the people, the seasons, and the animals all flourishing, with the implication that they do so thanks to the excellence of that particular place.

In underlying many forms of oral performance, *rten 'brel* plays a key role in this place-making process. As each successive line praises a different aspect of the place, the speech metaphorically indexes an auspicious place suitable and indeed ideal for habitation through consistent reference to only the best things and the ideal nature of the place, thus helping to both sanctify that space, and lend meaning to it as an auspicious nexus of forces ideal for human habitation.

As the above-mentioned discussions have shown, the *sa bstod* employ a meter and register that are highly reminiscent of several genres of traditional Tibetan verbal art. In doing so, the *sa bstod* uses a Tibetan folk chronotope—"the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature… fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole" (Bakhtin 1981, 84)—through which the performer is able to elliptically refer to a much larger tradition in a very economical way.[19] References to individual locations simultaneously intersect with, refer to, and fuse with several genres of similar synchronic and diachronic performances of verbal art discussing an individual or community's experience making offerings and pilgrimages to a particular mountain and its associated deity, as well as listening to myths and personal experience narratives of the same. Not stopping with mountains and mountain deities, the myriad spirits and deities of the Tibetan numinal world are ubiquitous, and every reference to rivers further draws upon this. Indeed, in merely referencing a place, the orator refers to it for its sacred, social, and historic functions. Furthermore, through locating Sprel nag in relation to these more renowned sites, the speaker is able to locate the village within the Tibetan cosmological world.[20]

Conclusion

The *sa bstod* sub-genre of Tibetan secular oratory has a particular function within the larger realm of the Tibetan folk-religious world view. It simultaneously has played an important role in the continuum of Tibetan folklore genres, and works in dialogue with *rten 'brel* to affect Tibetan understandings of place and place-making activity. The *sa bstod* adheres to many of the formal and poetic conventions of the larger *gtam bshad* speech genre of which it is a part and shares themes with a number of other related genres in that it is limited by its content, which permits it a direct expressive power. The speeches refer metonymically to a larger Tibetan folk tradition in terms of both its formal features and content. However, it is important to recognize that the *sa bstod* relates not only to other Tibetan oral traditions, but, like many others, further derives its expressive word power in relation to the natural world through Tibetan economies of fortune, and particularly the native concept of *rten 'brel*.

Understanding the *sa bstod* in this manner gives a starting point for further research and speech collection that can help us to understand this genre's unique relationship with the environment, the referential power of toponyms in Tibetan culture, and the depth and meaning of many of the metaphors used. Indeed, using this as a starting point, such future studies can help to unravel how the oral tradition contributes to what Makley calls "Tibetans' ritualized relationships with natural or constructed environments" (2003, 600).

Time is of the essence as it is becoming increasingly difficult to collect such speeches, particularly in something resembling an original performance context. In many parts of A mdo, the only people who could perform these speeches

died toward the end of the twentieth or beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Younger orators like Tshe ring are increasingly rare, and communities of audiences even more so. Furthermore, though images of the natural world remain strong in other genres, the expressive power of such metaphors and the relation to the still-influential concept of *rten 'brel* is likely to change in the coming years, as Tibetans adapt their traditions to new philosophies, technologies, and lifestyles.

Notes

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** A version of a Sprel nag *sa bstod* accompanies this article as an online Appendix (please refer to the *Asian Ethnology* website). The speech is an important example of a dying piece of the Tibetan oral tradition, and gives insight into a number of still-vibrant socio-religious views. It was chosen by virtue of it being the most complete *sa bstod* that I could find. In interviewing dozens of performers, I found more examples of other genres, and a handful of *sa bstod*, and I chose this because it was both original and representative. It was of a unique and fairly limited geographic area which made it easier to handle, but also used the same register as other speeches.

1. A note on Romanization: because of the enormous differences in pronunciation across dialects in Tibetan, I employ the Extended Wylie Transliteration Scheme (EWTS) for all Tibetan terms (see Anton-Luca 2006). This system transliterates orthography rather than pronunciation. If, however, an English publication uses alternative Romanizations for the author's name, or for proper nouns in the title, I retain the spelling as published. For Chinese terms, I use the *pinyin* Romanization system.

2. I use the term "secular" to describe any tradition in which "neither Buddhist nor Bonpo clergy have any significant role" (Karmay 1994, 115).

3. Reb gong is a traditional Tibetan toponym that "may roughly be seen as identical with today's Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous prefecture including the counties of Tongren, Jainca [Gcan tsha], Zekog [Rtse khog], and Henan [Rma lho]" (Gruschke 2001, 51). Henan, however, is more commonly aligned with Blab rang Monastery in Gansu Province. For a more detailed discussion of the traditional definition of Reb gong, see Reb gong pa mkhar rtse rgyal 2009, 43–50; Tuttle 2011; Yangdon 2011.

4. A mdo comprises most Tibetan areas of Qinghai Province (excepting the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province, and Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province.

5. This comes from anecdotal evidence. My thanks to Gerald Roche for pointing this out.

6. Personal communication with Chos 'phel, 12 August 2010.

7. *Kha btags* are silk scarves presented to guests and important persons. *The Rangjung Yeshe* dictionary defines *kha btags* as "ceremonial silken scarves, short and long" (Kunsang 2003, 219). *Kha btags* are frequently white, though yellow ones are occasionally presented.

8. Exceptions to this taboo exist. The author has heard of a village in Dme shul, a nomadic area at the southern reaches of the Reb gong region where people may sing love songs in front of any family members. People in the Sman shad region of Sde dge (Ch. De ge 德格) County, Sichuan Province, also may sing love songs in front of family members.

9. For more on Tibetan proverbs, see Sørensen 1990; Cüppers and Sørensen 1998.

10. Dge 'dun chos 'phel (1903–1951) was "one of the most important cultural icons of modern Tibet because of his heterodox writings and literary views" (Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008, xxvi).

11. Here I differ from Gruschke (2001, 51–59) who suggests that the toponym is Rong bo, and that Reb gong refers only to the twelve tribes of the area. As Rong bo is the name of a monastery, a cluster of villages, and—when associated with *nang so* (imperially empowered chieftains prior to 1949)—a political office, I am hesitant to use it here.

12. The speech genre does not seem to adhere strictly to this metrical system throughout the Tibetan plateau. Although publications from the Reb gong area frequently employ such a meter, wedding speeches from Ne'u na (Tshe dbang rdo rje, Anton-Luca, and Stuart 2009), Nyag rong County in Sichuan Province (Bkra shis bzang po 2012), and Dingri in Nepal (Aziz 1985) employ this meter much less rigidly. Other genres (particularly folk songs) seem to rely heavily upon this meter as well as an eight syllable 1+2+2+3 meter (see Sujata 2005).

13. Here I distinguish between space and place in the vein of humanist geographers such that "Space… is a realm without meaning… a 'fact of life' which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life. When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way… it becomes place" (Cresswell 2004, 10). The highly relevant term "place making" is a process in which "words and speech are a vital force" (Tuan 1991, 695).

14. For a study of the way in which animal and plant lore is embedded in other ethnic minority cultures of Southwest China, see Bender 2008.

15. The mandala is a form of Buddhist meditational art (Tucci 2001; Stoddard 1999).

16. *Rma chu* is the Tibetan term for the Yellow River (Ch. Huang he 黄河).

17. *Naga* are serpent deities most commonly associated with the water (Kunsang 2003, 61); when offended, they can cause illnesses and disasters.

18. Skyes ri is the birthplace of Tsong kha pa, a religious reformer, teacher, and founder of the Dge lugs pa sect (also known as reform, or yellow hat) of Tibetan Buddhism (Tuttle 2010, 25).

19. Reb gong pa mkhar rtse rgyal (2009) provides oral historical accounts from Reb gong villagers about the power of mountain deities, including Bya khyung and Brag dkar spun gsum. For more information on Skyes lha, see Tuttle (2010). *Gong mo* is a relatively little-known mountain located to the east of Sprel nag (Snying bo rgyal and Rino 2008, 214), and is also one of the eight power places for attainment in Reb gong (see the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center database at www.tbrc.org, under Reb kong grub gnas brgyad; accessed 1 December 2010).

20. For more on the notion of the chronotope as applied to folkloric and religious responses to the environment and other external stimuli, see Mueggler 2001.

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