Tibetan Daily Life on the gCan tsha thang Grassland[1]

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What do most Tibetans do on an ordinary day in the grassland area where I[3] was born and grew up? I never considered this question until I came to Xi'an City in Shaanxi Province to do a college degree in English. Before this, I had been surrounded by Tibetans on a daily basis, while attending Tibetan primary schools and then during my five years at Rwa rgya School (Gangs ljongs shes rig nor bu'i gling) in mGo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, mTsho sngon (Qinghai) Province.

In 2012, I enrolled in Xi'an International Studies University and joined an English major class of 25 students, of whom 20 were female and five were male. There were two Uygur students from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and three Tibetan students (all young men, including me). The other students were all Han.

I was often asked about my community, for example:

> What do people often eat in your home place?
> What kind of clothes do you wear at home?
> What kind and how many livestock does your family have?
> Can you ride a horse?
> How did you go to school when you were a child?

Sometimes I joked in my broken Chinese,

> I rode wild yaks to school. I rode a gentle wolf to school.

The students stared at me in amazement when I talked to them in my broken Chinese. While answering their questions and registering their surprise, I realized how different my family's daily life was from the daily life of my classmates – many of whom became my friends. I also realized how few people in China and, in fact, the world lived as my family lives. I then decided to write about the daily life I was familiar with.

I am writing about daily life in rKang mo, Lo ba, Ka rgya dang bo, and Ka rgya gnyis pa pastoral communities based on my experiences and those of my family. There are many things I am not writing about, for example, the daily life of monks and nuns. I am also not writing about activities on special days such as during Lo gsar (Tibetan New Year), weddings, funerals, and so on.

Daily life is changing rapidly, as I detail at the end of this paper. My father, for example, bought a small, new pick-up truck in 2013, as higher sale prices for our

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[1] A version of this paper has been published earlier as Sangs rgyas bkra shis with CK Stuart. 2018. Tibetan Daily Life on the Gcan tsha thang Grassland. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 51:79–147.

[2] We thank Gabriela Samcewicz, Timothy Thurston, sNying lcags rgyal, and Phun tshogs dbang rgyal for reading and commenting on earlier versions of this paper.

[3] All first person references signify Sangs rgyas bkra shis.

livestock brought us more cash income. This truck and other relatively recent changes such as mobile phones, and more disposable income, explain many on-going changes in daily life.

1. Introduction

1.1 Family

My family consists of six people: my father (Rin chen rgyal, b. 1963), mother (Klu mo tshe ring, b. 1963), eldest brother (dGe 'dun shes rab, b. 1984), elder brother (Ban de rgyal, b. 1986), sister-in-law (gSer mtsho skyid, b. 1988), and me (Sangs rgyas bkra shis, b. 1991). My paternal grandmother (Pa lo skyid, b. 1940) lives next door in the home of Father's youngest brother (sKal bzang rdo rje, b. 1988). His family members consist of his wife (rDo rje skyid, b. 1988), and two sons (gCod pa don 'grub, b. 2006; dPal ldan bkra shis, b. 2007) and one daughter (g.Yang 'dzoms lha mo, b. 2009). Grandmother frequently goes back and forth between our two homes.

1.2 General Description

gCan tsha thang (Jianzhatan) Township is located in gCan tsha (Jianzha) County, rMa lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, mTsho sngon Province. The township consists of seven pastoral communities: g.Yon ru (Xiayangzhi), sPrel nag (Shinaihai), Gle gzhug (Laiyu), rKang mo (Gangmao), Lo ba (Luowa), Ka rgya dang bo (Gajiayi), and Ka rgya gnyis pa (Gajiaer).[4] gCan tsha thang Township, at an average elevation of 3,500 meters above sea level, has a land area of 642 square kilometers and a population of 4,000, of whom 99%, according to official statistics, is Tibetan.[5]

Agriculture is practiced only in Gle gzhug where locals cultivate barley, wheat, and canola. Nearly all families raise yaks, sheep, horses, and a few goats.

The township offices are located in the township seat/capital, which is called Jianzhatan. In 2014, this small settlement consisted of one main road along which there were several small shops that sold clothes, snacks, and candy; several township government offices; and a Hope primary school[6] that had three grades[7] with a total of some 200 students ranging from eight to 13 years old, who were mostly from g.Yon ru Pastoral Community, and ten teachers. Another Hope primary school located about 15 minutes by motorcycle from the township seat had four grades,[8] and in 2014, it had about 300 students and 13 teachers. This school is mostly attended by children from rKang mo, Lo ba, Ka rgya dang bo, and Ka rgya gnyis pa pastoral communities. When students finish Grade Three in the former school and Grade Four in the latter school,

[4] Data for elevation, population, and pastoral communities are from http://wapbaike.baidu.com/view/928121.htm and http://wapbaike.baidu. com/view/1620614.-htm (accessed 3 March 2014).

[5] Teachers, township government workers, and others constitute the remaining one percent.

[6] The non-governmental Project Hope, sponsored by the Communist Youth League Central Committee and the China Youth Development Foundation, provides support to schools in rural areas of China (http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/poverty/95783.htm, accessed 7 July 2015).

[7] Grades One, Two, and Three. There was no kindergarten/pre-school class.

[8] Grades One, Two, Three, and Four. There was no kindergarten/pre-school class.

those continuing their education attend primary school[9] in the county town, Mar khu thang.[10]

Other pastoral communities have their own elementary schools. I am from Lo ba Pastoral Community, which has about 115 households, 50 of which belong to the Lho ba *tsho ba* (tribe). The remaining 65 belong to the Lo ba Tribe. Every household has a fixed house where they live in winter. Tribal exogamy is practiced, i.e., members of Lho ba and Lo ba tribes intermarry. I belong to the Lho ba Tribe.

1.3 Religion

If asked to name their religion local residents reply, "Sangs rgyas chos lugs" (Buddhism). The dGe lugs monastery, dGa' ldan bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling, located in Ka rgya Pastoral Community, is the most important religious center for locals. From my home, this monastery is about a 30 minute walk or 15 minute motorcycle ride. This monastery was founded in 1897 by dPal ldan, a monk from rKang mo Village. At that time, the monastery was situated in rKang mo Village and called sGar chag. Later, a Tibetan scholar, Zhwa dmar Paṇḍita dGe 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, moved the monastery to its current location. The monastery was then offered to the fifth reincarnation *Bla ma*, Ngang rong lnga ba 'jam dbyangs mkhyen rab rgya mtsho, who became *dgon bdag* (head of the monastery).[11] In 2013, the monastery had about 36 monks, who visited homes when invited to perform such religious activities as funerals, healing rituals, and chanting sessions.

On the 15th day of the fourth lunar month, a representative from each family living in the four pastoral communities Ka rgya dang bo, Ka rgya gnyis pa, rKang mo, and Lo ba would go to dGa' ldan bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling and fast. This is called the bZhi ba'i smyung gnas (Fourth Month Fast),[12] and is the most widely attended ritual held at this monastery. The fast lasts two days. Attendance at other rituals, e.g., sMon lam, conducted at the monastery is much less, with locals preferring to go to larger monasteries such as bDe chen dgon pa,[13] also located in gCan tsha County.

For the Fourth Month Fast in 2001 when I was 13 years old, everyone gathered in the monastery chanting room and chanted. On the first day, we brought *rtsam pa*,[14] *mar*

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[9] Despite the existence of a national compulsory education law, about 80 percent of children born around 1991 (the year of my birth) did not complete nine years of school. About 30 percent never attended school at all, e.g., my older brother. To my knowledge, no local families were punished for not ensuring their children were in school.

[10] gCan tsha rdzong "gCan tsha County" is a term for Mar khu thang that is now widely used among younger, educated people. However, Grandmother and other elders generally say Mar khu thang.

[11] Information about this monastery is from mKhyen rab rgya mtsho (b. 1966), a monk from gShong mo che Monastery. dGa' ldan bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling Monastery is a branch of gShong mo che Monastery.

[12] The 15th day marks the Buddha's enlightenment and Mahāparinirvāṇa. While many locals may be unfamiliar with the particular nature of this date, they believe that it is an important religious time.

[13] bDe chen dgon pa is about 45 minutes from my home by car or motorcycle.

[14] *rTsam pa* refers to roasted barley flour. It also refers to a staple food that is made by pouring hot tea in a bowl and then adding butter, dry cheese, roasted barley and, according to personal preference, sugar. Four fingers are used to mix these ingredients to form a ball which is then eaten.

(butter), and c*hur ba* (dry cheese) for ourselves from home. We had milk tea in the morning and *rtsam pa* and milk tea for lunch. We tried to have a lot because we would not eat for the rest of the day, nor the next. That afternoon, we drank milk called *rung ja*. The next day we were not allowed to chat nor eat. We chanted the whole day. On the final morning we had flour cooked in milk – *thor thug*.

2. Winter House

The first month of the lunar calendar is the beginning of spring. Summer technically begins with the fourth month, fall with the seventh, and winter with the 10th. Because actual forage periods differ at different altitudes, we spend varying amounts of time at the different pastures.

My family lives in a house constructed from a combination of adobe and wood and also in tents in summer pastures in the mountains (FIGS. 3, 4) and on a separate grassland in late summer and autumn (FIGS. 17, 18). Our one-story winter home is located at the foot of a mountain on large grassland (FIGS. 1, 3). It has four rooms, none of which has a specific name. For the sake of convenience, I refer to them as rooms One, Two, Three, and Four.

Father lived all year round in a black yak hair tent until 1972, when he was about nine years old. At that time, my paternal grandparents constructed a simple one-room house. They then lived in this house in winter and in tents for other parts of the year while herding livestock. Later, my grandparents moved near where our present house is, and built another simple one-room house, after which they moved to our present home location and built another house.

In about 2005, Father again decided that we should have a new house. He paid and supervised about six Tibetans from farming areas in gCan tsha County to make the packed earth walls of the house. Wall-building required about one week. Father then paid a Chinese family that lived near Khri ka County Town for a yard full of trees. The trees were cut down, and the logs were transported to our home. The house was built by four Tibetan carpenters – three brothers and their brother-in-law – from bDe chen Village, gCan tsha County. They worked for about two months to build our house.

The flat roof of the home was made of wood, over which was layered lightly packed *sa dkar* ("white soil", i.e., loess), a piece of plastic, and finally another layer of *sa dkar*. After the house construction was finished, my family plastered the inside walls with a thin coat of mud which, after it dried, they whitewashed. We also made *hu tse*[15] and cooking stoves in rooms One and Three.

[15] Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart (2008: 26) give this explanation for the *hu tse*, which they spell *hezee*:

> "*Hezee*" is a Tibetan word that lacks an accurate standard written form. Today, it is also increasingly in literary Tibetan as "*tsha thab*" that translates as "hot stove." This is incorrect because the *heezee* is not a hot stove, rather, it is a hollow platform made of stones with a thin layer of dry, hard earth on top, which is where family members sleep and important guests eat.

We use the spelling "*hu tse*" because this closely approximates what is said locally.

Rooms Three and Four were paneled with wood. Floors of red bricks were laid in all rooms by a Chinese man from Khri ka County. In about 2010, we added a glass-enclosed porch in front of our home.

Brother and Sister-in-law sleep in Room One where there is a *hu tse* warmed by a stove. This room is where we cook. Cooking creates smoke that blackens furniture, walls, and the ceiling. Confining cooking to this room keeps the largest room where guests are entertained cleaner. Flour, cooking utensils, cups, bowls, plates, cooking oil, water buckets, potatoes, onions, cabbage, and flour are kept here.

There is a large bed (with a wooden frame) in Room Four, along with an *'o zo* (churn), sheepskins, flour stored in bags, ropes, tents, *rtsam pa*, *chur ba*, butter, and robes and other clothing. There is also a small metal stove in this room, but we rarely use it. If someone sleeps here in winter, an electric blanket provides warmth.

In Room Three, the largest room, there is a *hu tse*; a cooking area that includes a stove connected to the *hu tse*, several stools, a brick floor on which several carpets are laid out for guests who prefer to sit on the floor (e.g., older people), and a television across from the *hu tse*. Tea is routinely boiled on the stove in this room. Cooking, however, is done here generally only when we have many guests, for example, during Lo gsar. The *hu tse* runs the length of one wall, and is big enough to sleep five or six people. Room Three also has a freezer, refrigerator, washing machine, television, DVD player, two wall cabinets, and two free-standing cabinets. Felt mats and carpets are stored in the wall cabinets. Dishes, candy, metal buckets, large metal plates, tea bowls, butter, glasses, and chopsticks are stored in the free-standing cabinets. Under the red, free-standing cabinet is a metal box with dung and a wooden box that holds *rtsam pa*, butter, and dried cheese.

At one end of the *hu tse* is the *chos sgam* (scripture cabinet). This is a wooden, glass-enclosed cabinet holding several *thang ka*, several volumes of scriptures (e.g., *Ting 'phags skal gsum*, *gSer 'od*, and *gZungs ‘dus*), an electric powered prayer wheel, a mandala, and images of various religious personages (FIG. 7). There are pictures of Karmapa (O rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje, b. 1985), the tenth Paṇ chen rin po che (1938–1989), Jo bo rin po che,[16] and rJe rin po che (Tsong kha pa 1357–1419). The outside of the cabinet is framed by a string of colored electric lights that are turned on day and night for the first three days of Lo gsar. The lights are also turned on for a couple of hours on the nights of the first, third, fifth, eighth, and 15th days of each lunar month. In addition, a *mchod me* (butter lamp) is placed on the *mchod khri* and lit each night. The latter refers, in this case, to a table in front of the scripture cabinet on which are placed 28 *dung phor* (water bowls), I describe later (see below).

Different types of fuel are used in the house. Yak dung catches fire easily, burns quickly, and gives off much heat, which facilitates cooking. *lci ba* refers to wet yak dung and *ong ba* refers to dried yak dung. In contrast, *ril ma* (sheep/goat dung) does not catch fire as easily and therefore, yak dung is generally burned first to ignite it. Also, because sheep/goat dung burns more slowly, it is added to the fire at night in order to have embers the next morning. Sheep/goat dung is put in the back of a *thab ka* (stove) and yak dung is put in the front. In addition, yak dung pieces are put into the *thab khung* (literally, “stove hole”, but more precisely, it refers to the upper part of the top opening in the front of the stove) and added when necessary. Ash and embers are removed from a *go khung* (bottom opening) in the stove under the metal shelf.

[16] A Śākyamuni image in the Jo khang in Lha sa.

The *go dung* is a rectangular area (55 by 45 centimeters) that contains ash in front of the stove. Family members sit around the *go dung* during meals when there are no formal visitors. The general area for sitting and eating is the *go kha*, which is a rectangular space in front of the stove, where embers are scraped out of the fire from the stove to provide warmth.

Room Two is used mostly as the place for entertaining guests, particularly Han guests who prefer to sit in armchairs rather than on the *hu tse* or on a floor carpet. There is a metal stove where dung may be burned. However, if heating is necessary when guests visit, we now more often use an electric heater. In 2014, this room contained four large armchairs, three wooden stools, and a television that receives signals from our satellite dish. One wall is lined with stacked wooden boxes that contain clothes; cloth; quilts; pillows; and women's coral, turquoise, and silver adornments. The wall at the back of the room features a glass-faced cabinet that holds *thang ka*, some of my school awards, and plastic flowers. The lower parts of the walls of this room are covered with ceramic tiles bought from Khri ka County Town.

Our glass-enclosed porch is about four meters wide and nine meters long. It runs in front of rooms Two, Three, and Four. We dry our family's clothes here after washing, and also, chives.[17] Once dried, the chives are put in plastic bags and stored here, for later use as livestock feed.

The final space in the home to mention is the corridor that runs in front of Room Three. The outside wall is the glass wall that is shared with the glass-enclosed porch. The corridor is a space for bags of flour, rice, and barley, a motorcycle; and two cabinets for storing pots and other items.

3. Livestock and Herding

In 2013, my family made three seasonal movements with our livestock. In the fifth lunar month, Father, Elder Brother, and Sister-in-law took our livestock (30 yaks and 300 sheep) to the mountains. Typically, we would leave at about eight a.m. and reach the mountain campsite at about five p.m. and then pitch our tents. I was attending university at that time and unable to accompany them.

Mother and Grandmother stayed at our winter home, where they guarded the house and property and cared for the two sons of Father's youngest brother. They kept five goats of which they milked three. The goat milk is used only to make milk tea.

After about 45 days, Elder Brother and Sister-in-law packed the tent and other belongings, gathered the livestock, and left the mountain in the morning at around eight. They reached sTon sa (autumn place) at about six p.m. (FIGS. 15, 16). Here, our family shares a fenced pasture with two other families (FIG. 20). This location is about one hour on foot from our winter house. After about two months on sTon sa of herding the yaks and sheep, they moved back to our winter house.

We live in tents on the mountain and also on sTon sa. Until about 2005, we lived in black yak hair tents. Afterwards, we used a *ras gur* (cloth tent).

[17] We buy chives from Khri ka County Town and from Han businessmen from Khri ka County who come to our community with a truck and sell flour, chives, potatoes, barley grain, wheat grain, and bricks. These men speak good Tibetan and know local people who can contact them by phone and ask for delivery of certain goods.

sGa (pack frames) are put on the yaks the night before moving. Everything that is to be transported is made ready. The items to be transported are loaded on the yaks the next morning and then the livestock and herders begin the move.

In terms of our annual movements, we live in dGun sa (winter place) for about seven months, on the mountain for one and a half months, and in sTon sa for about four months. The exact times vary from year to year depending on weather and pasture conditions.

Annual Schedule

Lunar Month	Activity	People	Location
1st	caring for livestock	all	dGun sa
2nd	caring for livestock	all	dGun sa
3rd	caring for livestock	all	dGun sa
4th	caring for livestock	all	dGun sa
5th	go to the gSer chen Mountains to herd; Mother and Grandmother stay at dGun sa	Sister-in-law, Father, Brother, Mother (for one or two days)	gSer chen Mountains
5th	care for the home, milk three goats, cut grass, soften lambskins, watch the fences and fenced pasture to prevent trespassing livestock from O'u rong Village	Grandmother and Mother	dGun sa, sTon sa
15th day, 6th lunar month	pack, move to sTon sa	Sister-in-law, Father, Brother, Sister-in-law, Mother (who comes and goes)	sTon sa
15th day, 8th lunar month	herd sheep to dGun sa	Father and Mother	dGun sa
16th day, 10th lunar month	herd livestock	Brother and Sister-in-law (yaks); Mother and Father (sheep)	sTon sa (yaks) dGun sa (sheep)
11th	caring for livestock	all	dGun sa
12th	caring for livestock	all	dGun sa

I will now give three accounts that illustrate my experiences on the mountains, in the autumn camp, and at our winter home.

3.1 Account One

I went to the mountain with Uncle dKon mchog rgyal the first time when I was 11. I was in school and my family had already moved to the mountains when my summer holiday came. Uncle dKon mchog rgyal came to buy some supplies near the school where there were some small shops. Father had told him to pick me up.

It was afternoon when we reached the foot of the mountains, which were covered with dark, thick fog. It was lightly raining. I could only see about ten meters in front of me. My family's camp was in a deep valley. The mountains are very steep and I could hardly keep up with Uncle dKon mchog rgyal who said,

> Young people who lack experience here easily get lost. Sometimes even those who have often been here lose their way in the fog.

People shouted when they got lost, hoping to meet someone who would show them the right direction. There were piles of stones on the way that Uncle dKon mchog rgyal said local people had made to show the directions when someone got lost.

Grandmother once told me that Father's third brother, rDo rje thar, and fourth brother, bKra shis rgya mtsho, got lost when they were returning from Ko'u ba Monastery. They came to a place where white rocks were strewn about. We call those stones *ko ro*. It is very easy to slide on those rocks when it rains. bKra shis rgya mtsho lost his footing and hurt his foot so badly that he could not walk. rDo rje thar carried him on his back. When it got dark they heard wolves howling. It was very cold and bKra shis rgya mtsho almost died there. They finally found a home where they spent the night.

There is a spring of very clean water near our tent. We can hear the sound of the spring water trickling down the mountain. Mother and Father were delighted by my arrival. Mother gave me some sparrows and spoons that she had carved out of wood. Brother told me that he would take me to collect wild strawberries on a sunny day. All this excited me.

The next morning, there was no fog and not a single cloud in the sky. The sun shone unobstructed throughout the valley. Chirping birds flew about. The right side of the valley was covered with various trees and the left side was decorated with many beautiful flowers. The livestock wandered freely and herdsmen gathered at the top of the valley and enjoyed the beautiful views of the landscape.

Because my neighbor did not have children who could herd calves, I and other children herded my family's calves and our neighbor's calves. My neighbor gave me candy and cooked delicious food to reward me when I returned from herding. We often herded the calves into the trees and then washed our feet in a stream where we swam and splashed each other. Sometimes we competed to see who could collect the driest wood and carry it home. Parents praised us for helping bring back fuel.

One morning when fog covered the earth, I herded my calves to a hollow where there was wonderful, fresh grass and then I returned to our tent. I checked my calves at noon and found they were all gone. I searched everywhere, but I could not find them. The fog became thicker and thicker. Giving up on finding the calves, I decided to return home. It would soon be dark. Suddenly, I lost my sense of direction. I went from valley to valley searching for my family's camp. I shouted, hoping to meet someone. I was nervous and my heart was pounding.

We called a place with dense trees *spyang tshang* (den of wolves). We could hear the many wolves there howling when darkness fell. I thought I might be near that place and my legs quavered. Luckily, I met an older man who told me I was going in a completely wrong direction. He guided me for about one kilometer, pointed out the correct direction, and said that I should go straight ahead. I thanked him and returned home. My parents were calling my name loudly when I got near our tent. They knew I was lost and were afraid that I would not find the way back. Brother said the calves had found their mothers and were nursing them when he went to collect the mother yaks.

3.2 Account Two

Wolves are a very real concern. Every night on the mountains, men went out and shouted to prevent wolves from attacking our livestock. We camped with about seven

other families. Our camps are very near each other. The other families are our *ru skor* (neighbors). All of the group's sheep are put together in the center of the camp.

One night in about 2004, the dogs barked loudly and lunged against their chains, as though they were mad. The chains were clanking, the calves were bawling, and then someone shouted, "Everybody get up! Wolves are attacking our sheep!"

Father and Brother got up immediately and ran into the dark with their flashlights. I tried to go with them but Mother held me back. She scolded, "You are too young to go with them."

All the adult men shouted and went after the wolves. Only half of the sheep were left. About one hour later, Father and Brother came back with the others and reported,

> The wolves drove off half of the sheep. Some sheep were attacked and collapsed on the way. There are about three or four wolves and we can not get the sheep back if we do not have six men. It's dark and we do not know how many sheep are missing.

The next morning, injured and dead sheep were all around the camp. The injured sheep had been bitten on the neck and belly. Two dead sheep did not have heads. We threw away the dead sheep and vultures and crows swooped in for a meal. Father and Brother separated our sheep from the others and counted them. Though our sheep are not marked to indicate ownership, Brother and Father know them well and can easily recognize them. Two of my family's sheep had been injured and one was dead. One sheep's stomach had been ripped open. Father sewed it with a needle and a white string, and then wrapped it with cloth. The other sheep had a neck injury. A large piece of skin was missing. Father could not sew it so he wrapped it in cloth. In total, ten sheep were injured and five were dead.

Grandmother said,

> Wolves try to bite as many sheep as they can, and then try to take one with them at the last moment. They like to take sheep's heads and udders with them and teach their cubs how to attack sheep.

3.3 Account Three

We were living in a tent on the autumn grassland when I was about ten. Father went somewhere leaving Mother, Brother, and me at home. One night when I was sleeping, a bug crawled into my ear. I woke up because it was very uncomfortable. I could feel the bug moving in my ear. It was terribly painful. I woke Mother who said, "Don't be afraid and nervous. If you feel nervous and cry, the bug will go deeper into your head." She quickly built up the fire, heated a bit of butter, and poured it into my ear. My ear felt thick and dense but the bug stopped moving. My ear felt uncomfortable for some days. Later, my ear returned to normal and the bug dried and broken bits of the bug fell out of my ear. Grandmother often tells children,

> Don't sleep on the grassland while you are herding. Let me tell you why: One day, a woman was sleeping on the mountain while she was herding sheep. A snake crawled into her mouth. She was terrified and tried to pull the snake out with her hands. This frightened the snake, which moved deeper into her body. She ran to her home and her family took her to a hospital, but she was already dead when they arrived. A doctor examined her and said that the snake had bitten a big vein of her heart.

4 Winter

4.1 Morning

In the morning of a typical winter day, Mother gets up first at about six a.m., folds her quilt, and puts on her robe. She shovels the ash from the adobe stove with a *me lcags* (ember shovel) into a metal bucket that she carries outside and empties onto an ash pile that sits in a gutter near the front of our house.

Coming back inside, she puts soft dry yak dung atop embers in the adobe stove. The morning wind blows on the embers and the dung catches fire. Room Three begins to warm. Mother pours water from a thermos into a basin, adds some cold water, washes her face, and brushes her teeth.

She then puts a long mat on the floor and begins prostrating and chanting *sKyabs 'gro, sGrol ma, lTung bshags, Bar chad lam sel, bZang spyod smon lam*, and so on. Though Mother never attended school, she taught herself to read and has memorized texts that she often repeats. After 100 prostrations, she goes to Room One, wakes Sister-in-law, and locates their blue plastic water pails. As Mother walks around, the sound of her chanting pervades the house. It is often cold in the morning, and pausing her chanting, Mother urges Sister-in-law to put on a *rtsag pa* (full length, sheep-skin robe).

When dawn breaks, Mother and Sister-in-law each carry their own pail on their backs and go to fetch water (FIG. 10). All the while Father and Brother are each still on their warm *hu tse*, wrapped in a quilt.

rDo rje skyid is the wife of Father's youngest brother. We are neighbors. "rDo rje skyid! Come fetch water!" calls Mother. rDo rje skyid quickly emerges with her bucket. If it is still dark, they use flashlights to guide them.

About 15 minutes later they reach their destination, a small stream. The water is frozen. They break a hole in the ice with stones, and fill their buckets using plastic ladles. The water does not flow quickly into the hole. With three people scooping water, they must wait several seconds for the hole to fill again.

Other neighboring women come. It is difficult for one woman to put a bucket of water on her own back so they help each other. If a woman is alone, she must find a boulder or something higher on which to perch the bucket, and then slowly pull the bucket onto her back, using both hands.

On the way back, the women laugh and talk about the weather, livestock, clothes, and village news. This is also a good chance for them to chat without men overhearing what they say.

When Brother gets up, the sun is already shining through the window. He washes his face, brushes his teeth, and puts dung in the stove before Mother and Sister-in-law return. He helps them put their buckets on the floor in rooms One and Three.

Mother then puts fresh water into 21[18] copper *dung phor* on the table in front of the sacred images.

Brother puts some embers into a metal bucket and covers them with dung. He pours some milk and water into a ladle, puts the *bsang khug* (incense bag) into his robe pouch and holding both the bucket and ladle, walks to the *bsang khri* (incense altar) on a hill behind our house.

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[18] Three, seven, and 21 are believed to be auspicious numbers, which explains the number "twenty-one", i.e., three times seven. Circumambulation, for example, is often done seven times.

At the *bsang khri* he puts his hat on the ground, then moving the ash to the altar puts the embers on the incense altar. The embers blaze immediately in the wind. He raises the incense bag and removing a *bsang khem* (big spoon), puts three spoons of incense on the altar. He then pours water mixed with milk on it, flings the remainder of the milk-water mixture into the sky, and circumambulates the altar three times while entreating deities to bless people and livestock. The following approximates what he says:

ཡེ། མཆོད་ཨོཾ་ཨཱཿཧཱུྃ། མཆོད་ཨོཾ་ཨཱཿཧཱུྃ། མཆོད་ཨོཾ་ཨཱཿཧཱུྃ།
མཆོད་བླ་མ་ཡི་དམ་སངས་རྒྱས་བྱང་སེམས་དཔའ་བོ་མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཆོས་སྐྱོང་སྲུང་མ་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག། མགོ་ནག་གི་སྐྱབས་རེ་ས། གནམ་ས་ཕ་མ་འདྲ་བོ། ང་གར་སོང་ས་ནས་ཁ་ལས་དགེ་དགོས། གར་འོང་ས་ནས་བསམ་དོན་འགྲུབ་དགོས། མི་ལ་ནད་ཚ་འོང་མི་ཉན། ཕྱུགས་ལ་གོང་ཁ་འོང་མི་ཉན། བཙན་གྱི་རྩེ་མོ་དགུང་ལ་མཉམ་དགོས། ཕྱུགས་ཀྱི་རུ་མ་ཐང་ལ་བརྡལ་དགོས། ངས་ཁྱོད་གར་སོང་ས་ནས་མཆོད་ཀྱིན་ཡོད། ང་ལ་མགོན་སྐྱབས་རེ་གནོངས།

Ye/ mchod om ā hum/ mchod om ā hum/ mchod om ā hum
mChod bla ma yi dam sangs rgyas byang sems dpa' bo mkha' 'gro chos skyong srung ma yul lha gzhi bdag/ mgo nag gi skyabs re sa/ gnam sa pha ma 'dra bo/ nga gar song sa nas kha las dge dgos/ gar 'ong sa nas bsam don 'grub dgos/ mi la nad tsha 'ong mi nyan/ phyugs la god kha 'ong mi nyan/ btsan gyi rtse mo dgung la mnyam dgos/ phyugs kyi ru ma thang la brdal dgos/ ngas khyod gar song sa nas mchod kyin yod/ nga la mgon skyabs re gnongs/

Men loudly call the names of buddhas, *bla ma*, and mountain deities when they offer *bsang*. Women also call the same names, but not loudly. In addition, women do not go to mountain *lab rtse* (FIG. 11), although more recently, female students do so, for example, before an important examination.

Father gets up last. He folds his quilt and tidies all the pillows and quilts. He sweeps the felt mats made from sheep hair on the *hu tse* with a plastic broom. Sister-in-law pours warm water into the basin for Father, who washes his face, brushes his teeth, and then goes to the sheep-shed to see if any ewes have given birth.

Mother sweeps the floor and corridor in our home, and brings yak dung and sheep and goat pellets from outside. The milk tea is boiling by this time, sending out a plume of steam. Sister-in-law puts *rtsam pa*, dried cheese, and butter into everyone's bowl. We are then ready for breakfast. We sit around the *go kha*. Father sits on the right side of the *go kha*[19] closest to the stove, followed by Brother and then me. Mother and Sister-in-law sit on the left side. Sister-in-law pours milk tea into Father's bowl and offers it with both hands. She then offers tea to Brother, me, and then Mother. Younger people use both hands when they receive or offer something to older people to show respect. Meanwhile, my family's three cats approach and we feed them with food that we are eating. Conversation during the meal might include, for example, livestock; chanting; and village news such as illnesses, births, deaths, engagements, the weather, and so on. Father gives instructions about what we should do that day. We also watch TV, for example, programs featuring singing and dancing; and programs in Tibetan such as *Journey to the West*.[20]

[19] Right, in terms of facing the *go kha*.
[20] *Journey to the West* is a TV series adapted from the classic Chinese novel of the same name. First broadcast in 1986 (in Chinese) it was later dubbed in Tibetan and was extremely popular

At about eight-thirty, Mother takes her *bzho ze'u* (wooden milk bucket) and goes to milk eight female yaks. Sister-in-law carries a *sle bo* (wooden basket) on her back to the yak shed where she picks up yak dung, puts it into the basket, and carries it to the yak dung pile on a small hill in front of our house (FIG. 8). Using a stick she spreads out the wet dung so it will dry more quickly. She collects dry dung and puts it atop the pile and daubs the pile with wet dung, so it will be less likely to collapse and also appear more neat and tidy.

In winter, we divide our sheep into three flocks: ewes and their lambs, two-year-old sheep (both male and female), and ewes that did not give birth and other male sheep. Ewes that recently gave birth cannot walk quickly, lag behind the other sheep, and need a warm place to stay.

We also use a fenced pasture that we share with seven other families. How many sheep a family can put in this fenced pasture depends on how much land it owns inside the fence. We herd our two-year-old sheep and yaks in our own, separately fenced pasture on the mountain.

Father and Brother go to the sheep-shed and feed chaff mixed with dried grass to the very thin sheep and ewes that recently gave birth. We keep ewes that ignore their lambs in the sheep-shed the whole day. Mother feeds them and holds them so that their lambs can nurse.

The eight families that share the fenced pasture have to limit their time in this pasture. They must herd the livestock to the fenced area (FIG. 12) at ten-thirty a.m. and lead them out by five p.m., otherwise the grass will not be able to re-grow. There is nowhere else to herd the livestock. Heavy snow spells disaster on highland pastures in winter. Mother and Grandmother told me about a very bad winter when, after a month of heavy snow, half of the family's livestock of 800 sheep, 110 yaks, and 25 calves died.

At around ten-thirty, Father wraps his face and neck in a thick scarf and herds the ewes into the shared, fenced pasture. He cannot herd two sheep flocks at the same time because the path is too narrow so Brother herds the second flock into the fenced pasture after Father. After returning home, Brother leads the third flock to the fenced pasture on the mountain that belongs to my family. One or two hours later, he again returns home.

In the meantime Mother finishes milking, puts the milk bucket in Room Four, herds the yaks into the fenced pasture on the mountain half a kilometer from our home, and returns home. She prepares food for our two dogs that are fed three times a day. She puts flour and bread in a metal bucket, adds water, heats it, and pours it into two basins – one for each dog. Lambs and thin sheep that die are skinned, chopped up, and also fed to the dogs.

Sister-in-law fetches water again. We need a lot of water for the sheep that are kept at home. The other sheep are watered once every two or three days at water sources near or within their respective pastures.

Next, Mother and Sister-in-law collect and bag loose wool in the sheep-shed. With brooms they sweep the dung into small piles, collecting it in bags that they empty onto a pile of sheep dung.[21] This takes about one and a half hours.

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with Tibetan audiences. This program is referred to locally as Tang sin Bla ma and also as Sun Wukong, after characters in the series.

[21]After it dries, this dung is put inside a walled enclosure about half a meter tall that is made of yak dung (FIG. 9).

4.2 Afternoon

After cleaning the sheep-shed, Mother and Sister-in-law prepare lunch, which is often potatoes fried with meat, bread, and black tea. At about one-thirty, Brother returns from herding sheep. We rest after lunch and chat, or do what we like, for example, wash clothes, wash our hair, sit on the porch, and drink tea. If any sheep have died, Mother skins them and puts the skins on a wall inside the porch to dry. She also chops up dead lambs to feed the dogs.

Father herds the sheep all day, chanting, and chatting with other herdsmen. He does not come home for lunch,[22] because lambs will run to others flocks if they are unattended. Lambs might also sleep in a warm place and not follow their mothers or jump into water no matter how cold the weather is. Foxes are also a danger. Local Tibetans no longer wear fur, especially fox-skin hats and consequently, with fewer fox hunters, the fox population has increased.

At about four-thirty, Sister-in-law prepares *chas*. She mixes dried grass, chaff, and water on a big piece of plastic, in preparation for feeding the sheep (FIG. 13). This requires about thirty minutes.

Meanwhile, Mother pours water in a *'gu tse* (kettle or pitcher) from the copper bowls on the *mchod khri* in front of the *chos sgam* (scripture cabinet), goes outside, and pours the water on a hill behind the house to ensure that this sacred water is in a higher, unpolluted location. She returns to the house and puts the copper bowls on a porch shelf. Next, she makes dough, puts it into a big metal pot with the lid on, and covers it with embers. Thirty minutes later we have baked bread. Next, she takes some meat from the *lci sgam* (yak dung freezer) and leaves it to thaw near the stove so that it will be easy to chop later for meals. We rarely use our home freezer in winter, because meat kept in the yak dung freezer is tastier than that kept in the home freezer and the cold winter temperatures ensure it stays frozen.

Sister-in-law goes to the mountain and drives the yaks to the small river from which we fetch our household water. The yaks need water every day while the sheep just every second day. Sister-in-law then leaves the yaks at the river, returns to the fenced pasture on the mountain, and drives the sheep in this pasture back home. Sister-in-law and Mother then put *chas* into the troughs to feed these sheep.

Brother goes to help Father with the herding. They sort the sheep into three flocks. Brother herds one flock back home where Mother and Sister-in-law feed them. Meanwhile, Father stays with the other two flocks on the pasture. Brother then returns to the pasture and herds another flock home. By this time, Mother and Sister-in-law have finished feeding the first group of sheep and have put feed in the troughs for the second flock. Finally, Father brings the third flock home, which is also fed. Feeding the sheep is difficult, because they bolt for the troughs as soon as they smell *chas*. At least three people are needed for this process, which takes about two hours in total.

After feeding the sheep, Brother goes to collect the yaks from the river and herds them back home. Mother yaks with calves are also fed. Brother and Sister-in-law tie the yaks to a *rdang* (rope with a peg at each end) staked in the earth. Tied to each *rdang* are about ten *rtsa lo* (short rope loops). A *ske thig* (rope put around yaks' necks) features a

[22] In winter, Father, like many herders, does not eat or drink anything until returning home for supper.

round piece of wood on one end of a yak hair rope. A *cha ri* (short round piece of wood) is attached to the rope. The *cha ri* is fastened securely to the *rdang*.

Every winter in about the tenth lunar month when it is very cold, we put a *kheb* (thick pad) on the mother yaks' backs at night to keep them warm, and remove it in the morning. The pads are made from old clothes that we no longer wear. Grandmother cuts our old clothes and sews them together so they form a thick pad. A rope is sewn to the pads. When the pad is put on the yaks, the rope is tied around the pad and tied at the top. Horses are treated the same way when it is very cold. *Kheb* are no longer used in the late second lunar month.

4.3 Evening

Tired from herding his two flocks, which gives him little time to rest, Father rests by the stove once he is back home. Mother gives him *rtsam pa* and bread, pours tea in a bowl, and then offers *tsha gsur*.[23] After putting embers on a square earth in front of our house, she puts *rtsam pa* and butter on top as an offering for *dri bza'* (odor eaters).[24]

Father turns on the TV and watches Tibetan language news, the weather report, and singing and dancing programs. Brother offers incense again as he did in the morning. Mother and Sister-in-law cook dinner, which is usually noodles and mutton. Sometimes we have boiled beef for dinner. We rarely have vegetables. We have dinner together at about nine p.m. Sister-in-law scoops noodles into bowls and Father cuts and divides the meat among those present. After dinner, Mother feeds the dogs with the leftovers. Father sits on the *hu tse* and watches TV. Sometimes he watches Chinese-language TV programs. Mother does not like to watch TV because she says that she does not want to see people killing each other. Instead, she prefers to wipe the copper offering bowls with a clean towel while chanting. Sometimes she goes to Grandmother's home which is adjacent to ours, and chats. The rest of us sit around the stove and watch TV.

Around ten-thirty, four or five boys and young men between 15 to 27 years of age often come to my home to chat or watch TV. Father kindly welcomes them. They sit around the stove and talk about women, buying and selling sheep and yaks, whose horse is fastest, cars and motorcycles, the weather, the condition of the grassland, marriage, and romantic relationships. Brother and I offer tea to our visitors.

Similarly, Brother often visits neighbors to chat with older boys and young men where they are not being supervised by old people. I often visit Grandmother and whoever is in her home.

Sister-in-law may visit Grandmother, watch TV with us, or go to bed early. Local young women generally do not leave their home in the evenings other than to visit nearby relatives.

Mother often goes to bed at about eleven p.m., while the rest of us go to bed at about midnight. After adding more sheep pellets to the stove to make it easier to start a fire the next morning, Sister-in-law also goes to bed.

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[23] *Tsha gsur* refers to an offering to odor eaters made by roasting mixture of *rtsam pa* with butter. Additional materials such as candies and bread may also be added. A small altar for *tsha gsur* made of a square piece of earth is situated at a lower place in front of the house.

[24] A class of deities on the plane of sensory desires that live on fragrances (https://bit.ly/2zGjSmT, accessed 25 June 2014).

5. Summer

In summer, the male heads of household gather, either informally while herding, or at a home to discuss the time to set off for the mountain pastures. The families are expected to take their yaks and sheep to the mountains to ensure that all the local families share the mountain pasture equally. Furthermore, all the livestock are expected to leave the winter pasture within a few days of each other to protect individual fenced pastures from being grazed by others' livestock.

Families stay on the mountains for about only 45 days because, by this time, the grass has been heavily grazed by the approximately 450 yaks and 4,000 sheep that have been brought here.

The night before leaving our fixed home, Father, Brother, and I put pack frames on about five yaks that are veteran pack animals. Around seven-thirty the next morning, we load the pack yaks with clothes, a pot, a kettle, bedding, chopsticks, bowls, two or three thermoses, *rtsam pa*, wheat flour, bread, salt, tea, sugar, a small solar electricity generating panel that powers a small light in the tent and charges mobile phones, a milk bucket, a churn, ropes, a radio, about three mobile phones, a *ras gur* (white cloth tent), *sha skam* (dry yak meat), and so on. We also prepare a motorcycle that we ride to the base of the mountain and park for safe-keeping in the home of a nearby family.

After the usual breakfast, we start off. Grandmother is sad to see us leave. Mother comes with us and helps pitch the cloth tent and makes the stove using various sized rectangular stones and mud. Two or three days later, she returns to the winter house and stays with Grandmother.

We camp on a mountain that has thick forests where people may easily become lost if they are unfamiliar with the local area. Around us are also big rocky mountains. Because it is easy to slide down the mountains on gravel deposits and suffer injuries, parents forbid their children from going there. About 15 families live here in summer. There are no fences on the mountains.

We use cloth tents on the mountain. There is no flat land; therefore, a tent base must be made by digging away soil to create a level area. We generally put our tent in the same place year after year. When viewed from a distance, the cloth tents resemble giant mushrooms.

The tent is narrow at the top and wide at the bottom and requires three poles. After pitching the tent, we cover it with a large piece of plastic to keep it drier when it rains. The plastic is fastened to the tent by throwing ropes over it, pulling them tight, and tying them to tent pegs. This prevents the plastic from blowing away. Stones are put around the tent to prevent wind from blowing inside.

In the past, *phying pa* (felt cloth) was used as a raincoat during rainy weather, but now commercially available plastic raincoats are used. I used a *phying pa* made by Grandmother when I was a child. It was warm and kept me dry.

The soil on the mountain is wet. To keep us dry, *spen ma* (tamarisk) branches are collected, put on the earth, and covered with thick plastic over which cushions are scattered. This is the sitting and sleeping area.

Women usually make a stove with flat stones and mud. How well the stove is made is a topic of conversation among families, particularly among the women. Consequently, families boast that their stove is made well.

bSang khri and *tsha gsur* are also made with stones, because it is easy to make a fire on the stones. The *bsang khri* is always in a higher position than the *tsha gsur*.

Since 2011 when Brother married, Father, Brother, and Sister-in-law have gone to the mountains. Before Brother's marriage, Mother also lived with them on the mountains and sTon sa during summer.

In 2011, there were 15 families camped on the mountain. They divided into four groups with three or four families per group. Each group put their tents in a circle. At night, the sheep were kept in the center of the circle, surrounded by the yaks. The calves were tethered to a wooden peg with a *be'u thig* tied around their front leg to prevent them from suckling their mothers. The *be'u thig* were swapped between the right and left legs on alternate nights to avoid injury to the calf. Generally, the mother yaks do not approach their tied calves. If they do, then they are tied to *rdang* away from their calves. *Lug lhas* refers to the circle of sheep, which are neither tied nor enclosed inside a fence. *Nor lhas* refers to the place where the yaks are kept. This arrangement protects the sheep from wolf attacks and also against thieves. In addition, each family usually brings a dog to protect the livestock and herders.

Thieves, who are generally Tibetans from neighboring villages, try to sneak into the area undetected when it is dark or foggy, herd the stolen sheep to the county town, and sell them to Muslim or Han butchers. Wolves are considered very intelligent and may also attack sheep at night during foggy weather, therefore, after dinner, men often go outside the tents and shout to frighten away both wolves and thieves.

5.1 Morning

Sister-in-law gets up at about six in the morning, puts on her robe, washes her face, and brushes her teeth. She then makes a fire, using some of the firewood piled by the stove, on top of which she puts *spen ma* (dried plants) and yak dung. Using a cigarette lighter, she sets the dung on fire. After boiling water in a pot on the stove, Sister-in-law washes her hands again. Taking a wooden bucket, she goes to the *nor lhas* to milk. Some female yaks return from grazing and lie by their calves. These yaks are tied to the *rdang*. A yak's calf is untied and allowed to nurse for two or three minutes, and then tied again. After the yak is milked, the calf is allowed to nurse for about ten minutes, and then tied again.

Brother gets up after Sister-in-law, dresses, washes his face, brushes his teeth, and then goes to collect the female yaks that did not return. They are usually near our tent. He uses a *'ur cha* (sling) to help herd them home, where he ties them to the *rdang*. He then offers *bsang* on the *bsang khri* behind the cloth tent on a large flat stone and offers *tsha gsur* on another stone in front of our cloth tent. The ritual is the same as in our winter home and on the autumn pasture (FIG. 14).

Sister-in-law milks about 15 female yaks. After all are milked, they are untied, and Brother herds them to nearby valleys. The location may vary depending on where the grass is more plentiful.

After the female yaks are driven away, Sister-in-law unties the calves and guides them toward nearby tents. The male yaks are allowed to graze freely.

Collecting yaks and milking is relatively easy on a sunny day but, if it is rainy or foggy, it may be difficult to locate the yaks. Summer is often rainy and the place where the yaks are tied is muddy. Sister-in-law must wear rubber boots when she milks. It is difficult to pull and tie the calves in the mud.

Father gets up last. He dresses, folds the quilts and cushions and puts them around the inside base of the cloth tent to keep out the wind. He then goes to the *lug lhas* and

separates our sheep from other families' sheep. The sheep generally separate automatically when the herdsmen call, "*Ao ho*! *Ao ho*! *Ao ho*!" If they do not, Father spends about an hour separating them. Meanwhile, Brother has returned and helps Father count our sheep to ensure none are missing.

At about eight, we have a breakfast of bread, milk tea, and *ja kha*[25] or *rtsam pa*. We chat about where there is good grass and water for livestock. After breakfast, Father herds our sheep to the best grass. He takes his prayer beads and chants while herding.

Brother herds the yaks a bit further from home, and then goes to find the male yaks. We do not bring the male yaks back to our camp. Instead, Brother takes them to a place where there is good grass and then collects them once every three or four days. Wolves do not attack male yaks, so we do not worry much about them. Brother also goes with other herdsmen to collect yaks.

Sister-in-law feeds our dog and then unties the calves and drives them to a place near our tent where she can watch them. Children often herd calves, but my family has no child who can watch the calves on the mountain. Sister-in-law must therefore watch them.

Next, Sister-in-law puts the yak dung together, pressing some against the earth with her shovel to make it as thin as possible. The surface side is dry one or two days later at which time Sister-in-law turns it over so that the other side will dry. A day later, she brings this *kho shog* (pieces of dry yak dung) home. Next she goes to the *lug lhas* to collect sheep dung. She must do this early or other women will collect all of it. It often rains on the mountain, sometimes for as many as ten consecutive days, so there are few chances to collect dry sheep dung. It is impossible to collect fuel if it rains. Consequently, we collect as much as we can on sunny days.

Sister-in-law returns to the kitchen to make butter. She warms the milk in a pot, pours it back into the churn, adds some *zho* (yogurt), and starts churning with the *'o 'khor* (churn handle). She also prepares lunch.

5.2 Afternoon

We have lunch at about twelve-thirty, when Father and Brother come home from herding. We have bread, *rtsam pa*, and sometimes, fried green peppers or, eggplants with meat, and milk tea.

After lunch, Father listens to the radio. Sometimes he naps. Young people Brother's age like to gather on a hill and play cards or chat. We do not have to stay with the livestock all day on the mountain. Sheep are herded to an area where there is good grass. When they are full, they are brought back near the tent where they can be easily watched. Consequently, because there are no fences, herding here is much easier than in the winter pasture, where the sheep must be watched constantly in fear they will cross fences into another family's pasture.

Brother sometimes collects firewood after lunch. In the afternoon, Sister-in-law feeds our dog again, bakes bread and, about once every two days, churns milk. Butter forms after about three hours of intermittently churning and doing chores. Sister-in-law removes the butter, puts it into cold water in the milk bucket for about one to two hours, slaps it with her hands to remove excess water, and stores the butter in a basin.

[25] *Ja kha* is similar to *rtsam pa*. Roasted barley, dry cheese, and butter is put in a bowl. Hot tea is added and the ring finger is used to mix the ingredients, although some women use their index finger. The resulting mixture is drier than *rtsam pa*.

Next, she boils *da ra* (liquid in the churn after removing the butter) in a pot and pours it into a *chur sgye* (cheese cloth) hanging from a small pole set across two forked poles outside the tent. A basin catches *chur khu* (whey) underneath the cheesecloth. The next morning, she removes the cheese and spreads it on a big piece of plastic and, on a sunny day, dries it. When it is not sunny, the cheese remains in the bag for drying later when sunny. Dried cheese is stored in coarse bags of either plastic or yak skin.

Sister-in-law also fetches water in the afternoon from a stream near our tents. We often have *ja lhag* (tea extra) which is a meal of bread and milk tea at about five. Afterwards, Father herds the sheep back. Meanwhile, Sister-in-law gathers the calves and ties them. At the same time, Brother herds the female yaks home and ties them. Sister-in-law milks them in the same way as she did in the morning. Meanwhile, Brother offers *bsang* and *tsha gsur*. After Sister-in-law finishes milking, Brother herds the female yaks to graze in a valley and then returns to the tent.

5.3 Evening

We use solar-powered light at night. Some families use candles. Sister-in-law prepares dinner, which is often noodles cooked in beef or noodle soup, and sometimes we also eat pieces of mutton with the noodles. Sister-in-law washes the bowls and pot after dinner and feeds our dog for the third time.

Later, Brother might visit other families and play cards. Father listens to the radio. We go to bed at about eleven.

5.4 Butter and Salt

Father often visits Mother and Grandmother. He walks to our motorcycle carrying the butter and cheese in bags over his shoulder. If what he carries is too heavy, he loads the articles onto a horse, and rides it to the motorcycle. The times of his departure and return are flexible, and often depend on the weather. When he returns he brings mutton, dried beef, *rtsam pa*, bread, and vegetables.

Mother and Grandmother deal with the butter together. The butter to be stored is put in cold water and allowed to sit for about half an hour. The pieces of butter to be stored have different consistencies because they have been exposed to the air for different lengths of time.

Butter is commonly stored in clean, dried, sheep stomachs. Before butter is stored, the dried stomach is soaked in water for about half an hour. If butter of different consistencies is put into the sheep stomach in this condition, there will be empty places between the different chunks of butter. To prevent this, the butter is soaked again and pounded by hand on a flat stone, ensuring the butter is of equal consistency. Pounding the butter also removes excess water and ensures the butter will not spoil. Mother takes the pounded pieces of butter and uses her fist to press them inside the sheep stomach. When full, the stomach is sewn up and stored in Room Three.

We must herd livestock twice a month near a stream so they can have salt from both the stream and from the mud near the stream. Typically, we start off at nine in the morning and start to return at about four. The stream runs across a shared grassland. The many fences in this area create narrow lanes through which the livestock must pass. This is difficult work because the livestock try to enter the fenced pasture in order to graze and must be constantly watched. When the livestock arrive, they lick the salty mud and drink salty water from the stream. They are allowed to stay for three or four

hours. Although they try to graze, the area is very overgrazed and they are unable to provide much forage.

5.5 Grandmother and Mother at the Winter House

Grandmother and Mother live in our winter house all year round, guarding it and our property. Thieves are common and may steal coral, silver ornaments, gold earrings, televisions, motorcycles, and so on from unattended homes.

5.5.1 Morning

Mother gets up about seven-thirty, does about 100 prostrations, fetches water and, upon returning, milks our three female goats. Then Grandmother gets up and prepares breakfast. She also offers *mchod pa*,[26] *bsang*, and *tsha gsur*. They have *rtsam pa*, bread, and milk tea for breakfast, and feed our cats with left-overs. After breakfast, Mother goes to the sheep-shed and covers the nannies' udders with a *nu kheb* (udder cover) that prevents the kids from nursing. The *nu kheb* has four strings – one at each corner – that are tied together on top of the goat's back. Then the goats are allowed to go outside.

Mother and Grandmother take *zor ba* (sickles) to cut vegetation that grows near our house and the sheep-shed. When dry, the cut plants are stored in the *rtswa khung* (grass room).

Once every three to five days, Mother climbs the mountain in the morning, examines our fence, and collects mushrooms. Sometimes livestock from neighbor villages on the mountain trespass on our fenced pastures, which is why Mother does this inspection.

5.5.2 Afternoon

At about twelve-thirty we have a lunch of bread, black tea, and sometimes mushrooms fried with mutton. We do not often go outside at this time because it is hot. Instead, we stay inside and soften sheepskins and lambskins. After being soaked in *ldar*[27] for about ten days, the skins are removed, dried for three or four days in Room Three, returned to the *ldar* for a few hours, and then softened with *gnam shad*.[28] Skins are softened with *pags shad*[29] about two days later. When very smooth, the skins are softened with both hands, and sometimes rubbed with a rough stone to further soften them.

Grandmother and Mother also make ropes, *rtsa lo*,[30] *ske thig*,[31] and *be'u thig*,[32] with both yak hair and sheep wool. They give them to Father to replace the old ropes.

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[26] *mChod pa*: an offering of water in copper bowls put in front of religious images.

[27] *Da ra* refers to liquid that remains after removing butter from a churn. The *da ra* is boiled until cheese forms. The cheese is removed. The remaining liquid is *chur khu*, which is put in a wooden bucket. Salt, a bit of chaff, and some *da ra* are added. Skins are then put in a bucket of this mixture, which is now called *ldar*.

[28] *gNam shad*: a tool for softening skins made of a forked tree branch with a metal blade between the forks.

[29] *Pags shad*: a wooden tool resembling a thin saw that is used to soften skins.

[30] *rTsa lo*: a short rope tied to a *rdang*, which is a long rope that has a peg on each end. There are about ten *rtsa lo* tied to a *rdang*.

[31] *sKe thig:* a rope tied around a yak's neck and the short wooden stick sewed to it.

[32] *Be'u thig*: a short rope made of yak hair tied around a calf's foot and tied to a peg.

Grandmother also makes sheepskin robes (FIG. 2), although the last one I remember her making was in 2001.

If it is not hot outside in the afternoon, Mother and Grandmother collect dried plants and put them in the *rtswa khung* (grass house). In winter, we used to beat the stalked plants with a wooden stick and then fed them to sheep and yaks. Now, however, we use a machine to chop the plants. When it gets dark the goats come back. Mother ties them in the sheep-shed and milks them. Grandmother offers *bsang* and *tsha gsur*.

5.5.3 Night

For dinner, Mother cooks noodles which she also feeds to our cats. After dinner, she washes the bowls and pot and makes bread that she gives to Father when he returns from herding on the mountain. Grandmother wipes the copper water-offering bowls with a clean cloth and then chants *maṇi* while turning a hand prayer wheel. Mother prostrates and chants after making bread and then both go to bed at about eleven.

6. sTon sa (Autumn Pasture)

Around eight a.m. we pack and set out for *ston sa*, arriving some ten hours later at about six. Mother brings us hot tea and bread from our winter home. She comes on foot. There is no time to make the stove that night as we must quickly pitch the cloth tent and move everything inside. We do not tie the yaks that night, because they are hungry and need to graze. Father grazes the sheep for some hours and then herds them back, otherwise they madly run everywhere when they see fresh grass. We put mats on the earth, bring quilts, and go to bed soon after eating bread and tea for supper.

Each family has their own *mtsher sa* (tent site) on the mountain and at *ston sa*. If the stove from the year before is salvageable, it is repaired, and a new stove is not needed. We use the old stove if it has not been destroyed by rain or children. However, if a new stove is necessary, the next morning, Mother and Sister-in-law make it from sod bricks they cut from the grassland with a shovel. They strengthen the stove with mud and then thrust *rdang* into the earth. Father makes a square, earthen incense altar behind the tent, and makes a square *tsha gsur* in front of the tent. Brother herds our livestock. Mother (FIG. 19) and Sister-in-law milk the yaks. Mother returns to our winter home two or three days later.

A challenge in autumn is the lack of water. We typically water the yaks every day. At noon, we set out for a spring. Along the way, we must guide the yaks through narrow lanes between fenced pastures. After about an hour we reach the spring. We start back an hour later when the livestock have had enough water. This is an unpleasant daily experience because about ten families water their livestock at the same spring. Consequently, the spring is surrounded by livestock struggling to get to the head of the spring where the water is colder and cleaner. Although there is no generally agreed upon herding schedule among local families, sheep are typically watered in the morning and yaks in the afternoon. We water our sheep once every one or two days.

Life on the autumn pasture is, in many ways, easier than on the mountains. The grassland is level and so it is easy to walk around, and the many different colorful flowers that grow there make it beautiful. Delicious wild mushrooms are collected, cooked, and eaten, which adds variety to our diet. Motorcycles and cars can be easily driven here. Young people often herd sheep and yaks with motorcycles. Fog does not often cover the grassland and there is less fear of wolf attacks.

There are some tent shops on the grassland that sell fruits, snacks, drinks, and clothes. Beautiful clothes are often worn because most of the community's young people congregate here, and there are many activities, for example, horse races and song competitions. In many other ways, however, daily life is almost the same as on the mountains.

7. Conclusion

Life on the grassland is enjoyable in various ways, but there are also many challenges. I describe one of these challenges in the account below:

7.1 Account Four

It was in late autumn in 2013 when my family, as usual, moved back to our winter house. My family chose about twenty sheep and my uncle's family chose about 40 sheep to herd in our fenced pasture where there was plenty of grass. My family planned to sell them when they got fat so that we could earn more money. This is what most families do in my village. At night, my family and Uncle's family put those sheep with other sheep in a big yard in front of our houses, which are very near each other.

One night, Father was not at home. The next morning, Brother and Uncle separated our sheep and counted them. Forty sheep were missing. Three people's tracks were at the gate of the yard. My family's relatives came and tracked the thieves, but all traces disappeared about one kilometer from my home. We did not know in which direction the thieves had taken our sheep.

Father then asked a monk for a divination. Father and Uncle drove Uncle bKra shis rgya mtsho's car to Khri ka County and Zi ling, looking for the sheep. They did not find them. Uncle rDo rje thar and another man also went to gCan tsha County Town looking for the sheep, but returned empty-handed.

Brother and some other young men made two groups and went to the main roads of Khri ka and gCan tsha counties by car every night for about a week and quietly waited, hoping to meet the thieves with our sheep. They thought that the thieves might go to a county town to sell the sheep. The thieves never appeared.

We guessed that the thieves were very familiar with our family and knew that Father was not at home. Livestock were stolen from some other families that year, too. Villagers hesitantly wondered,

> Maybe the thieves in our village and neighbor villages are cooperating. Otherwise how would thieves from other villages know which family has fat sheep that are easy to steal?

When thieves steal livestock at night, they put them in a secluded place that night, and then load the livestock into a truck and take them to a county town the next night. Those stolen sheep were worth at least 23,000 RMB. After this theft, we took greater care of our livestock. Grandmother said,

> I was really worried about this loss, but now I am not. We tried as hard as we could to find them, but we didn't find them. Maybe we owed some sheep to those thieves in our previous life. Now forget them. Stealing happens to most families sooner or later.

Locals often discuss change. Daily life today is quite different from the way it was during my childhood. Fifteen years ago, my family had four horses. Today we have

none. There were no bicycles, motorcycles, cars, TVs, and phones. People made clothes for themselves. Women spent much time making yarn and various ropes while herding. Children played games together when they were herding calves for their families. All the family members chatted and chanted after dinner. Children also learned many folktales and riddles from their grandparents and told them to other children in the home to compete to see who could tell the most after dinner and when they went to bed.

Today, people have more money and buy motorcycles and cars. Since electricity came to my community in about 2007, locals have bought televisions, phones, refrigerators, and washing machines. Most children now attend school and never tell each other folktales. People spend less time interacting with each other at night. Instead, they watch TV, or are busy with their phones.

Daily life has been deeply impacted by all these new changes. Some locals have bought houses and live in the county town. Assignment of a certain amount of land limits the number of livestock a family can own and has created more conflict between families because of a sense of land ownership. In 2014, locals believe that there are neighboring areas where herders are paid salaries to herd for the government and no longer their own livestock – all in the name of protecting the environment. Locals worry that they will eventually have to move to busy, crowded towns.

Non-English Terms

'Gu tse འགུ་ཙེ།
'O 'khor འོ་འཁོར།
'O zo འོ་རྫོ།
'Phang འཕང་།
'Ur cha ཨུར་ཁ།
Ban de rgyal བན་དེ་རྒྱལ།
Bar chad lam sel བར་ཆད་ལམ་སེལ།
bCa' sdod བཅའ་སྡོད། (Jisu 寄宿)
bDe chen dgon pa བདེ་ཆེན་དགོན་པ།
bDe chen བདེ་ཆེན།
Be'u thig བེའུ་ཐིག
bKra shis rgya mtsho བཀྲ་ཤིས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Bla ma ཟླ་མ།
Blo brtan rdo rje བློ་བརྟན་རྡོ་རྗེ།
bSang khem བསང་ཁེམ།
bSang khri བསང་ཁྲི།
bSang khug བསང་ཁུག
bZang spyod smon lam བཟང་སྤྱོད་སྨོན་ལམ།
bZhi ba'i smyung gnas བཞི་བའི་སྨྱུང་གནས།
bZho ze'u བཞོ་རེའུ།
Cha ru ཆ་རུ།

Chas ཆས།
Chos sgam ཆོས་སྒམ།
Chur ba ཆུར་བ།
Chur khu ཆུར་ཁུ།
Chur sgye ཆུར་སྐྱེ།
Da ra དཱ་ར།
Dar lcog དར་ལྕོག
dGa' ldan bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling དགའ་ལྡན་བཤད་སྒྲུབ་དར་རྒྱས་གླིང་།
dGe 'dun shes rab དགེ་འདུན་ཤེས་རབ།
dGe lugs དགེ་ལུགས།
dGon bdag དགོན་བདག
dGun sa དགུན་ས།
dKon mchog rgyal དཀོན་མཆོག་རྒྱལ།
dPal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྡན་བཀྲ་ཤིས།
dPal ldan དཔལ་ལྡན།
Dri bza' དྲི་བཟའ།
Dung phor དུང་ཕོར།
g.Yang 'dzoms lha mo གཡང་འཛོམས་ལྷ་མོ།
g.Yon ru གཡོན་རུ། (Xiayangzhi 辖羊直)
Gangs ljongs shes rig nor bu'i gling གངས་ལྗོངས་ཤེས་རིག་ནོར་བུའི་གླིང་།
gCan tsha rdzong གཅན་ཚ་རྫོང་།
gCan tsha thang གཅན་ཚ་ཐང་། (Jianzhatan 尖扎滩) Township
gCan tsha གཅན་ཚ། (Jianzha 尖扎) County
gCod pa don 'grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་འགྲུབ།
gDang དང་།
Gle gzhug གླེ་གཞུག
gNam shad གནམ་ཤད།
Go kha གོ་ཁ།
Go khung གོ་ཁུང་།
Go re gcus ru ma གོ་རེ་གཙུས་རུ་མ།
Go re གོ་རེ།
Gru gu གྲུ་གུ།
gSer chen གསེར་ཆེན།
gSer mtsho skyid གསེར་མཚོ་སྐྱིད།
gSer 'od གསེར་འོད།
gShong mo che གཤོང་མོ་ཆེ།
Gur mgon skyabs གུར་མགོན་སྐྱབས།
gZungs bsdus གཟུངས་འདུས།
Han 汉
Hu tse ཧུ་ཙེ།

Ja kha ཇ་ཁ།
Ja lhag ཇ་ལྷག
Jo bo rin po che ཇོ་བོ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
Jo khang ཇོ་ཁང་།
Journey to the West (nub phyogs su skyod pa'i sgrung ནུབ་ཕྱོགས་སུ་སྐྱོད་པའི་སྒྲུང་།; Xiyouji 西游记)
Ka rgya dang bo ཀ་རྒྱ་དང་པོ། (Gajiayi 尕加一)
Ka rgya gnyis pa ཀ་རྒྱ་གཉིས་པ། (Gajiaer 尕加二)
Kheb ཁེབ།
Khem ཁེམ།
Kho shog ཁོ་ཤོག
Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ
Klu mo tshe ring ཀླུ་མོ་ཚེ་རིང་།
Lab rtse ལབ་རྩེ།
Lag skor ལག་སྐོར། (*mchig* མཆིག)
lCi ba ལྕི་བ།
lCi sgam ལྕི་སྒམ།
lDar ལྡར།
lHa sa ལྷ་ས།
lHo ba ལྷོ་བ།
Lo ba ལོ་བ། (luowa 洛哇)
Lo gsar ལོ་གསར་
lTung bshags ལྟུང་བཤགས།
lug lhas ལུག་ལྷས།
Ma ṇī མ་ཎི།
Mar khu thang མར་ལུ་ཐང་།
Mar མར།
mChod khri མཆོད་ཁྲི།
mChod me མཆོད་མེ།
mChod pa མཆོད་པ།
Me lcags མེ་ལྕགས།
mGo log མགོ་ལོག
mKhyen rab rgya mtsho མཁྱེན་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
mTsher sa མཚེར་ས།
mTsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན། (Qinghai 青海) Province
Ngang rong lnga ba 'jam dbyangs mkhyen rab rgya mtsho ངང་རོང་ལྔ་བ་འཇམ་དབྱངས་མཁྱེན་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Nor lhas ནོར་ལྷས།
Nu kheb ནུ་ཁེབ།
O rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje ཨོ་རྒྱན་འཕྲིན་ལས་རྡོ་རྗེ།
O'u rong ཨོའུ་རོང་།

Ong ba ཨོང་བ།
Pa lo skyid པ་ལོ་སྐྱིད།
Pags shad དཔག་ཤད།
Paṇ chen rin po che པཎ་ཆེན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
Phun tshogs dbang rgyal ཕུན་ཚོགས་དབང་རྒྱལ།
Phying pa ཕྱིང་བ།
Ras gur རས་གུར།
rDo rje skyid རྡོ་རྗེ་སྐྱིད།
rDo rje thar རྡོ་རྗེ་ཐར།
Ril ma རིལ་མ།
Rin chen rgyal རིན་ཆེན་རྒྱལ།
rJe rin po che རྗེ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
rKang mo རྐང་མོ། (Gangmao 刚毛)
rMa lho རྨ་ལྷོ། (Huangnan 黄南) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
rTsam pa རྩམ་པ།
rTsa lo རྩ་ལོ།
rTsag pa རྩག་པ།
rTswa khung རྩ་ཁུང་།
Ru skor རུ་སྐོར།
Rung ja རུང་ཇ།
Rwa rgya རྭ་རྒྱ།
Sa dkar ས་དཀར།
Sangjiezhaxi 桑杰扎西
Sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱས་བཀྲ་ཤིས།
Sangs rgyas chos lugs སངས་རྒྱས་ཆོས་ལུགས།
sPen ma སྤེན་མ།
sDud ma སྡུད་མ། (*rtswa phyags* རྩ་ཕྱགས།; *phyags ma* ཕྱགས་མ།)
sGa སྒ།
sGar chag སྒར་ཆག
sGrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།
sGye ཀྱེ།
sGyo ཀྱོ།
Sha skam ཤ་སྐམ།
Sha 'thag ཤ་འཐག
Shaanxi 陕西
Shaanxi 陕西_Normal University
Shugs mo ཤུགས་མོ།
sKal bzang rdo rje སྐལ་བཟང་རྡོ་རྗེ།
sKe thig སྐེ་ཐིག

sKyabs 'gro སྐྱབས་འགྲོ།
sLe bo སྙེ་བོ།
sMon lam སྨོན་ལམ།
sNying lcags rgyal སྙིང་ལྕགས་རྒྱལ།
Sun Wukong 孙悟空
sPrel nag སྤྲེལ་ནག (Shinaihai 石乃亥)
sPyang tshang སྤྱང་ཚང་།
sTon sa སྟོན་ས།
Tang sin bla ma ཐང་སིན་བླ་མ།
Thab ka ཐབ་ཀ
Thab khung ཐབ་ཁུང་།
Thang ka ཐང་ཀ
Thor thug ཐོར་ཐུག
Ting 'phags skal gsum ཏིང་འཕགས་སྐལ་གསུམ།
Tsha gsur ཚ་གསུར།
Tsho ba ཚོ་བ།
Xian 西安
Xi’an International Studies University, Xi’an waiguoyu daxue 西安外国语大学
Xinjiang 新疆
Ya ru ཡ་རུ།
Zho ཞོ།
Zhwa dmar paṇḍita dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho ཞྭ་དམར་པཎྜི་ཏ་དགེ་འདུན་བསྟན་འཛིན་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

FIG. 1
In front of my family's house.
The mountains to the left in the distance are where yaks and sheep are herded in summer.
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014.)

FIG. 2
I wear Grandfather's (1942–1992) sheepskin robe that Grandmother made (PHOTO: Gur mgon skyabs 2014).

FIG. 3
My home and nearby landscape in summer
(PHOTO: Sang rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 4
Camping and herding on the mountains in summer
(PHOTO: Rin chen rgyal 2013).

FIG. 5
Ya ru "Two year old yaks" and their mothers
(PHOTO: Rin chen rgyal 2013).

FIG. 6
My family (right to left): Klu mo tshe ring, gCod pa don 'grub, Rin chen rgyal, Ban de rgyal, Pa lo skyid (kneeling), g.Yang 'dzoms lha mo (b. 2009), and rDo rje skyid (PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 7
Scripture cabinet in my home
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 8
Yak dung is collected, dried, and stacked here, about fifty meters behind our home (PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 9
Sheep dung is winnowed to remove the fine, dry powder which, when burned, only smolders, giving off much smoke. The dust from the winnowing collects to the right and is put in bags (background). Later, Chinese friends from Khri ka come in trucks, take the bags back home, and use the pellet powder for fertilizer. This gift of fertilizer is part of a mutually beneficial relationship between our family and the Chinese families. In this photo, rDo rje skyid uses a thin board to fill bags with sheep dung.
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014.)

FIG. 10
Mother, Sister-in-law, and two neighbors fetch water at about six-thirty a.m.
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 11
gSer chen Lab rtse
(PHOTO: Rin chen rgyal 2013).

FIG. 12
Sheep being driven to the shared, fenced pasture
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

Fig.13
Feeding *chas* to sheep
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 14
Incense altar in sTon sa
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 15
Moving from the summer pasture to the autumn pasture
(PHOTO: Sangs rgya bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 16
Father, Mother, and Elder Brother unpacking a yak on the autumn pasture
(PHOTO: Sang rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 17
My family on the autumn pasture
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 18
Autumn pasture
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 19
Mother milking one of our yaks on the autumn pasture
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).

FIG. 20
Father, fencing on the autumn pasture
(PHOTO: Sangs rgyas bkra shis 2014).