

KUN MCHOG DGE LEGS

*Seng rtse Village, Skye rgu Region, Yul shul Prefecture, Qinghai*

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## Tibetan Tricksters

### Abstract

Aa khu bstan pa, Aa tsi byivu mg and Ston pa shes rab, Rdzun khro lo, Nyi chos bzang bo, Vbrug pa kun legs, and Ge sar are Tibetan characters who act at times as tricksters. Aa khu bstan pa appears to be the best known of these, according to a survey of 53 Tibetan students from Qinghai Province, China. Relevant literature and oral accounts known to the authors are utilized to describe these tricksters.

**Key words:** Tibet—tricksters—Qinghai—China minorities—Aa khu bstan pa—Ge sar

This article examines tricksters that are known to Tibetans. These include Aa khu bstan pa,<sup>1</sup> Aa tsi byivu mgo, Ston pa shes rab, Rdzun khro lo, Nyi chos bzang bo, Vbrug pa kun legs, and Ge sar. For centuries, monks of various ethnic backgrounds (Tibetan, Mongolian, Monguor, Yogor, Han)<sup>2</sup> living in the same monastery have shared stories of tricksters that they retell wherever they go. More recently, higher rates of literacy, the publication of trickster accounts, and access to radio and television have enhanced awareness of the adventures of certain tricksters. Nevertheless, research on Tibetan tricksters is almost non-existent,<sup>3</sup> and certain tricksters appear to be unknown outside particular geographical areas. Research is required to ascertain where each figure is known and among which nationalities, and to compare Tibetan trickster accounts with other ethnic groups.

#### AA KHU BSTAN PA

A survey of fifty-three Tibetan students from Yul shul, Mgo log, Rma lho, Mtsho byang, Mtsho lho, and Mtsho nub<sup>4</sup> prefectures studying at Qinghai Education College in Xining, showed that all the students had heard Aa khu bstan pa stories, thirty-three students had heard Afanti<sup>5</sup> stories, three students had heard Dran gsal<sup>6</sup> stories, two students had heard Sgyu ma mkhan spun drug stories, two students had heard Ge sar<sup>7</sup> stories, one student had heard Rgyal po bu mo stories, one student had heard Rgyal po na gzav stories,<sup>8</sup> one student had heard Srid pa rgan po stories, one student had heard Vcham pa spun gsum stories, one student had heard Mi rgan long ba stories, one student had heard Rgyal sras gnyis stories, one student had heard Vkhyam tshe snga lo stories, one student had heard Aa rig glen pa stories, one student had heard Heb rkyal dang rdzun Rkyal stories, and one student had heard Nyi chos bzang bo stories.

This suggests that, of all Tibetan characters who act at times as tricksters, Aa khu bstan pa may be the most widely known. RA SE DKON MCHOG RGYA MTSHO (1996) notes that Aa khu bstan pa stories are widespread throughout areas where Tibetans live—including Sikkim and Bhutan. Ra se

Dkon mchog rgya mtsho sees two aspects to Aa khu bstan pa's character. One is the advocate for justice, who uproots social oppression and subdues landlords and tyrants. This Aa khu bstan pa assists the powerless populace and provides a role model in terms of resisting social oppression and striving for justice. The other side of Aa khu bstan pa is destructive towards religion and a clever swindler. Ra se Dkon mchog rgya mtsho further suggests that Aa khu bstan pa lived in Vbri gung, Tibet, during the twelfth century, and was a practitioner of Bkav rgyud, a Tibetan Buddhist sect founded by Karma Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193)<sup>9</sup> that claims there is an oral tradition of the word of Buddha that is available through a continued chain of teachers and disciples apart from the written scriptures.<sup>10</sup>

“*Aa khu*” means “uncle” in Tibetan. This term not only refers to paternal and maternal uncles, it is also added to an older man's name when referred to by a person of a younger generation. The term “*aa khu*,” as applied to Aa khu bstan pa, conveys a vague sense of respectability and being lovable. In contrast, another side of Aa khu bstan pa is revealed by the expression, “Aa khu bstan pa's bad character will probably be revealed if he jumps too much” (*Aa khu bstan pa lding rgyu mang na mtshang brtol la*).<sup>11</sup> This expression derives from an Aa khu bstan pa account that has him disguised as a nun in a nunnery and having sex with a nun. After the nun becomes pregnant, the nuns plan to identify the man masquerading as a nun in their midst. The abbess lies in a ditch and the other nuns must jump over her in turn, at which time their reproductive organs are visible. In preparation, Aa khu bstan pa ties one end of a string around his reproductive organs and ties the other end around his neck. When he jumps over the ditch, his masculinity is not detected. Being over-confident, and thinking that the nuns might still harbor some suspicion that he is a man, he decides to jump over the ditch again. This time, as he jumps, the string breaks and his gender is revealed. The expression quoted above might be used when someone has gotten away with something and is tempted to do it again.

The foreward to the Tibetan version of *Stories of Aa khu bstan pa*, published in 1980 in Sichuan 四川 Province, informs that a Chinese version 阿叩登巴的故事 was first published in 1966.<sup>12</sup> This Chinese version was then “improved” and a “few things were changed” in the course of preparing the Tibetan version. *Stories of Aa khu bstan pa* contains forty-eight accounts that were purportedly collected primarily in Dkar mdzes Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Rnga ba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province in the 1960s. A total of three-hundred stories were collected, from which forty-eight were selected for inclusion in the book. The forty-eight stories strongly criticize landlords, religious personalities, and feudalism. Aa khu bstan pa appears as a familiar contemporary “model ordinary person/worker” intent

on the abolition of “criminal slavery feudalism” and struggles mightily against the ruling class. The story *Dpon mgo bcad pa* [Behead the Lord], for example, has a landlord demanding that a mountain be moved quickly so that more sunlight will strike his home. When those who have been ordered to carry out this task experience difficulty, Aa khu bstan pa remarks, “To cut off the Lord’s head is much easier,” emphasizing Aa khu bstan pa’s revolutionary nature.

None of these stories show the seamier side of Aa khu bstan pa, e.g., his sexual exploits. That there is such a side to Aa khu bstan pa is implicitly acknowledged in the preface to the Tibetan version mentioned above, which mentions that because “reactionary forces” do not like Aa khu bstan pa, they alter his accounts. Furthermore, in our survey of fifty-three Tibetan students, twenty-one students noted that Aa khu bstan pa stories may be sexual.<sup>13</sup> This aspect of Aa khu bstan pa explains why, at least in the Reb gong area of Qinghai, the telling of Aa khu bstan pa stories is taboo in the home.

#### AA TSI BYIVU MGO AND STON PA SHES RAB

Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture lies in Southwest Qinghai. Larger than Nepal, it is a vast area where the principal economic activity is herding, particularly in areas of high altitude. Areas of lower elevation are devoted to agriculture, as in the region surrounding Skye rgu (Jiegu 結古), the prefectural capital, and in certain areas of Nang chen (Nangqian 囊謙), Kri vdu (Chenduo 稱多), and Yul shul counties. With only 227,000 people, Yul shul is sparsely populated (BYANG MCHOOG RIN CHEN 1991, 3).

Aa tsi byivu mgo<sup>14</sup> and Ston pa shes rab are two religious practitioners who always appear together in trickster accounts in areas near Seng rtse (Xinzhai 新寨) Village, Skye rgu Region.<sup>15</sup> They are neither genuine monks nor laymen. Such men are called *skya min ser min* and, today, are not numerous in Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. They wear robes made out of the identical dark-red cloth Tibetan monks make their clothing from. *Skya min ser min* also wear a yellow sash. In contrast, Tibetan Buddhist monks wear a two-piece suit: the bottom part is a long skirt and the upper part is a sleeveless shirt.

*Skya min ser min* also do not live in monasteries. They live in their home villages and derive their primary livelihood from conducting after-death and secular religious services in nearby homes. *Skya min ser min* specialize in secular services: astrological divination, scripture-readings in homes to exorcise evils that cause illness, rituals that ensure wealth, good health and success, and rituals that will bring good luck before construction begins on a new house. Although monks are numerous in Yul shul today, and many can perform all these rituals, if a *skya min ser min* is famous he

might be invited rather than a monk to perform needed rituals.<sup>16</sup>

*Skya min ser min* has a derogatory connotation. For example the Tibetan saying “*Skya min ser min sangs rgyas bstan pavi dgra bo*” means that *Skya min ser min* are enemies of Buddhists. The Buddha is quoted by local people as having said, “*Nga yi bstan pa seng ge ro dang mtshungs. Nga yi bstan pa nga udra ba yi bshig,*” or “My doctrine is like a dead lion. My doctrine will be destroyed by people similar to me.” This latter phrase suggests that a dead lion still impresses other people and that internal, not external forces, will ruin Buddhism. This coincides with the idea that neither heretical philosophies nor external dynamics can destroy Buddhism—only professional Buddhists who no longer follow Buddhist discipline have that power. In daily life, expression for this is found in Lamas, Living Buddhas, and monks living in violation of their Buddhist vows, which causes ordinary people to be disappointed with Buddhism. In contrast to monks, who have monasteries where monastic law may be strictly enforced, *skya min ser min* have no such controls. Consequently, local people feel that they are particularly likely to damage Buddhism. To call or nickname a Buddhist “*skya min ser min*” is impolite. This does not convey the idea that the individual is a trickster; rather it suggests that the individual is in violation of religious law.

Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab are poorly trained *skya min ser min* who lie and steal. Their lack of religious knowledge means that their scripture chanting during ritual performances is pretense. The goal of any ritual they attempt is a handsome payment and a good meal. Aa tsi byivu mgo-Ston pa shes rab stories exhibit contradiction between the respect ordinary people accord them because they believe that they are knowledgeable religious figures deserving respect and their utter ignorance and incompetence. This absolute worthlessness also highlights a sense that ordinary people—the people who invite them to their home—are even more ignorant. Thus, when local Tibetans laugh at Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab, they are also laughing at themselves. Although these two frauds lie, cheat, and steal, they never engage in sexual activity. To do so would mean that they are not professional religious practitioners and thus the sense of humor would evaporate. They engage in activity that compromises their professional integrity, but this activity does not negate it. Engaging in sexual activity would deny it. Sexual content would also prevent the telling of these stories in the home.

A distinction may be drawn between Aa tsi byivu mgo-Ston pa shes rab stories and those of Aa khu bstan pa. The trickster in the latter stories engages in illicit sexual activity and frequently tricks rich and evil people in order to help impoverished and powerless people. The tricksters in the former stories, on the other hand, never engage in sexual activity and frequently hoodwink

each other as well as the poor and powerless. Aa khu bstan pa robs the rich to give to the poor, whereas Ston pa shes rab and Aa tsi byivu mgo rob anyone—particularly the poor—because they are the most vulnerable.

Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab also trick each other. Aa tsi byivu mgo appears as the more clever of the two, with Ston pa shes rab being the more honest and, therefore, gullible, and he is usually cheated by Aa tsi byivu mgo. Some argue that “Ston pa shes rab” should be “Ston pa gshen rab.” The pronunciation of “Ston pa shes rab” and “Ston pa gshen rab” is nearly identical. The former is a common name while the latter is the name of the originator of Bön.<sup>17</sup> This leads some to conclude that Aa tsi byivu mgo is Buddhist while Ston pa gshen rab is a follower of Bön and, in an area where Bön is almost nonexistent and seen as heretical, this somehow justifies Ston pa gshen rab’s position as the fall guy.

Certain residents of Seng rtse Village relate Aa tsi byivu mgo-Ston pa shes rab trickster tales to a young, very thin man who lived in Seng rtse Village in the late 1940s.<sup>18</sup> His nickname was Skyi mo, meaning “skin.” In this area, very thin people are called “skin” because, like Skyi mo, they seem to have no muscle or fat, only skin.

#### RDZUN KHRO LO

Rdzun khro lo may be translated as “lying bell.” The story offered in this paper (Account Nine) is well known in Skye rgu Region, where Rdzun khro lo has become so synonymous with “lying person” that people may nickname those who often lie “Rdzun khro lo,” e.g., children who lie to their parents. It can also be a verb meaning “to ring a bell.” If a person exaggerates and her audience does not appreciate it, they might say, “Don’t ring the bell.”

Another local term, “*kram pa bkra shis*,” approximates the meaning of *rdzun khro lo*. “*Kram pa*” means “trickster” and “*Bkra shis*” is a common male Tibetan name. The subtle distinction between “Rdzun khro lo” and “*Khram pa bkra shis*” is that the former suggests “liar” whereas the latter suggests “trickster.” The account *Rdzun mkhan phun tshogs*, or Lying Man Phun tshogs (Account Ten) is very similar to the *Rdzun khro lo* story. Both accounts are from Yul shul Prefecture.

#### NYI CHOS BZANG BO<sup>19</sup>

Nyi chos bzang bo stories are well known in Lho kha Region, Tibet Autonomous Region, which is north of the Himalayas and south of Yar klung River.<sup>20</sup> Sne gdong is a place name that appears in ten stories and is in the present Sne gdong County. Nyi chos bzang bo, a minister, and King Sne gdong are the two protagonists in the stories. Nyi chos bzang bo is intelli-

gent, resourceful, and courageous, and enjoys helping poor people. Sngdong rgyal bo, on the other hand, is stupid, miserly, irritable, and selfish, and mistreats subordinates. Nyi chos bzang bo struggles for equality and reduced taxation, and regularly tricks the king, often in surprising ways. For example, in the story *Rgyal bor khyi skad rgyag du vjug pa* (The King Imitates a Dog and Barks),<sup>21</sup> Nyi chos bzang bo tricks the king into barking like a dog and, in *Gnam skyag dkar po* (White Excrement from the Sky), he tricks the king into eating his (Nyi chos bzang bo's) excrement.

#### VBRUG PA KUN LEGS

Vbrug pa kun legs was a monk who had gained perfection, lived in the sixteenth century<sup>22</sup> and belonged to the Vbrug pa bkav rgyud Sect (ZHANG 1993, 2002).<sup>23</sup> There are two well-known biographies of him: *Gtsang rnam* (Clean Biography) and *Btsog rnam* (Dirty Biography). The latter biography, as the name suggests, contains accounts of his sexual escapades. Vbrug pa kun legs, as an enlightened being, engages in profane (e.g., sexual, scatological) activities in order to awaken people from the dream-like reality that prevents them from understanding Truth.<sup>24</sup>

#### GE SAR

Many written accounts of Ge sar, a powerful hero who at times acts like a trickster, are recordings of illiterate tellers who utilize their knowledge of folklore—including trickster accounts—to create Ge sar. Ge sar's uncle Khro thung and Hor Gur dkar (King of Hor Country) are both cowardly, jealous, and lustful men, and frequently appear as Ge sar's competitors. Ge sar always wins by ingenious tricks and traps—not outright violence.<sup>25</sup>

## Trickster Accounts

#### ACCOUNT ONE: AA KHU BSTAN PA<sup>26</sup>

Long ago, a local tyrant owned much property. Local peasants, who were his tenants, could only live by renting the tyrant's farmlands and other farming necessities. The local tyrant lived a comfortable life in his palace-like dwelling by ruthlessly levying a heavy charge on whatever the tenants hired from him. This caused his tenants much suffering.

Aa khu bstan pa, an intelligent man, confronted a shortage of plow animals. At that time, the local tyrant forced local people to use his female yaks for their tillage, so that he might charge a butter tax on each yak. All the tenants, with the exception of Aa khu bstan pa, obediently drove the female yaks to their home.

Some days later, Aa khu bstan pa approached the local tyrant's home. When he first saw him, the local tyrant suspected that Aa khu bstan pa was clever and might well play a trick on him. Aa khu bstan pa then requested that he be allowed to rent a pair of male yaks, on which he would also pay the butter tax. The local tyrant believed that Aa khu bstan pa was fooled and granted his request.

Aa khu bstan pa made good use of the yaks to plow his farmland. One year later, long after other people had paid the butter tax, Aa khu bstan pa still had not paid the butter tax that he owed. The local tyrant was furious and dispatched a person to Aa khu bstan pa's home. At Aa khu bstan pa's home, he was told that Aa khu bstan pa was soon to deliver a child and that visitors could not be received for some time.

The messenger returned to the local tyrant and reported what happened. This so enraged the local tyrant that he trotted to Aa khu bstan pa's house. The local tyrant shouted in Aa khu bstan pa's courtyard, "How could a man possibly be pregnant!?" in front of a crowd of onlookers. A few moments later, Aa khu bstan pa came out and said, "My dear respected gentleman, how could I possibly cheat my patron? My only concern is that I am unable to pay the butter tax in a timely manner. Now, I think that I will not be able to pay the tax, because the pair of male yaks did not yield any milk for the entire year."<sup>27</sup> Then the local tyrant realized that he had fallen victim to Aa khu bstan pa's trick.

#### ACCOUNT TWO: SKYI MO I<sup>28</sup>

When Skyi mo and other boys went to Ngo ru Monastery near Lha sa to take part in a ceremony to become monks, he tricked many herdsmen. He was very ambitious, clever, and always energetic. He asked his companions to pretend to respect him, and the poorest boys obeyed. When they visited a herdsman's home as a group, the family thought he was a Lama or Living Buddha. While reciting scriptures at the family's request, he would divine what religious activity the family needed to do. A common ploy was to say, "Your family's problem is caused by a water deity. Prepare a stomach full of butter and a copper pot full of *rtsam pa*<sup>29</sup> and put it near the river." After completing the religious activity, he and his followers would secretly take the food.

#### ACCOUNT THREE: SKYI MO II<sup>30</sup>

Skyi mo and another man went to a rocky slope behind Seng rtse Village to collect herbs. Before they reached their destination, he stole his companion's wallet. Some herbs they wanted to collect grew on the side of a cliff. Skyi mo tied a rope around his waist while his companion held the end of the rope.

While he scrambled down the cliff, he suddenly shouted, “Dear friend, a dark object has fallen from your robe. Oh! Oh! Oh! It’s disappeared far below.” He rhythmically said, “Oh! Oh! Oh!” as though the imaginary black object was hitting the side of the cliff as it fell. Holding on to the end of the rope, some distance from the edge of the cliff, his companion could see nothing.

Some moments later, when Skyi mo returned to the cliff top, he asked, “What did you lose?” His companion checked his robe and said, “I lost my wallet.”

ACCOUNT FOUR: AA TSI BYIVU MGO AND STON PA SHES RAB I<sup>31</sup>

One day, Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab were invited to a home to perform a religious ritual. During the morning, they pretended to recite scriptures. Meanwhile, the host prepared blood sausages for lunch. As the blood sausages boiled on the stove, an appetizing aroma pervaded the room. Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab were eager to have a delicious lunch and felt that the time passed very slowly, especially as their stomachs were rumbling. Aa tsi byivu mgo suggested to Ston pa shes rab, “Why don’t you steal some sausages for us?” Ston pa shes rab immediately agreed.

Then the two waited for a chance to steal some sausages. When the host left the room, Ston pa shes rab jumped off the bed and, barefoot, walked over to where the sausages were cooking and picked up a bunch of hot blood sausages. When they heard the host returning, Ston pa shes rab anxiously asked, “What should I do with the sausages?” Aa tsi byivu mgo said, “Hide them in your hat.” Ston pa shes rab put the hot blood sausages in his hat and then donned the hat. As the host entered the room, they continued “reciting.” Aa tsi byivu mgo recited inarticulately, “Blood sausage juice drips down Ston pa shes rab’s head...”

Ston pa shes rab noticed this and felt so embarrassed that he ran away. The host worriedly said to Aa tsi byivu mgo, “It doesn’t matter. Please call your companion. What’s his name? I will go call him to come back.” Aa tsi byivu mgo said, “His name is Ltos aa.”<sup>32</sup> The householder then stepped outside and shouted, “Ltos aa, Ltos aa.” When Ston pa shes rab heard this he thought the householder was very angry and he ran even faster.

Aa tsi byivu mgo inwardly gloated, enjoyed a wonderful lunch, and kept all of Ston pa shes rab’s payment for the scripture recitation.<sup>33</sup>

ACCOUNT FIVE: AA TSI BYIVU MGO AND STON PA SHES RAB II<sup>34</sup>

Aa tsi byivu mgo borrowed some money from Ston pa shes rab. Ston pa shes rab also had an exquisite copper pot that Aa tsi byivu mgo admired a great deal.

Ston pa shes rab frequently urged Aa tsi byivu mgo to return his money, but Aa tsi byivu mgo had no money. One day, Aa tsi byivu mgo said, "Oh! I'm so lucky." Ston pa shes rab asked, "Why?" Aa tsi byivu mgo said, "A hermit living in a cave behind that mountain bestowed good luck on me." Ston pa shes rab anxiously said, "I'm always unlucky. I want to be a lucky man. Please tell me how to visit this good-luck-bestowing hermit." Aa tsi byivu mgo said, "Certainly I'll tell you, but it is very difficult to go there. You first must go up a sandy slope and then come down a rocky slope. After you reach the cave, close your eyes, raise your right hand and then say, 'Dear Lama, please bestow good luck upon me'."

Ston pa shes rab thanked him and started off. After he left, Aa tsi byivu mgo scrambled up the rocky slope and he reached the cave before Ston pa shes rab arrived because it required a long time to get to the top of the sandy slope. When Ston pa shes rab reached the cave he was exhausted. He closed his eyes, crouched on the ground and said, "Dear Lama, please bestow good luck upon me."

Aa tsi byivu mgo clutched his hand and said in a deep solemn voice, "I'm going to bind you with a solemn oath." Ston pa shes rab was very frightened and said, "Please don't bind me with a solemn oath. Whatever I must do, I will do if you let me go." Aa tsi byivu mgo asked, "Did you loan some money to Aa tsi byivu mgo?"

"Yes," Ston pa shes rab answered.

"Give up that money and also give your copper pot to him. Can you?" said Aa tsi byivu mgo.

"Yes, yes I can," said Ston pa shes rab.

Aa tsi byivu mgo then released him and Ston pa shes rab came down the rocky slope. Aa tsi byivu mgo then raced down the sandy slope. When Ston pa shes rab reached the place from where he had started, Aa tsi byivu mgo was waiting for him. He asked Ston pa shes rab, "Did you obtain good luck?" Ston pa shes rab wore a morose expression and said with little feeling, "Please don't mention it. I'm so unlucky. I was nearly bound with a solemn oath. I promised to give up the money I loaned to you and give you my copper pot. Only then did he allow me to leave."

#### ACCOUNT SIX: AA TSI BYIVU MGO AND STON PA SHES RAB III<sup>35</sup>

Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab were given a horse as payment for a religious ritual they conducted in a home. Each wanted the horse for himself, but a horse cut in two sections had no value. They then decided that the one who took the best care of the horse would be the horse's owner.

Aa tsi byivu mgo said, "Would you prefer to feed the horse's head or buttocks?" Ston pa shes rab thought, "Horses eat with their mouths, not

their assholes. I'm really stupid if I agree to feed the horse's head." Then he said, "I prefer to feed its buttocks."

Aa tsi byivu mgo fed the horse only several barley grains each day and it quickly grew thinner and thinner. Meanwhile, each day Ston pa shes rab forcefully inserted barley into the horse's rectum.

After more days passed, Aa tsi byivu mgo said, "It's your fault that the horse is getting thinner and thinner." Ston pa shes rab asked, "Why is it my fault?" Aa tsi byivu mgo said, "Before we divided the work of feeding the horse, the horse's head was thin and its buttocks were fat. But now the head is no thinner than before but its buttocks are really thin." Ston pa shes rab said, "All right, you feed the buttocks and I'll feed the head." Aa tsi byivu mgo then put a barley straw into the horse's rectum each day while Ston pa shes rab generously fed the hungry horse. Some days later the horse had noticeably gained weight.

Ston pa shes rab confidently said, "Look at the horse. This is my achievement." Aa tsi byivu mgo said, "No, it's my achievement. The horse's head is still thin but now its buttocks are fat. I'm the horse owner."

ACCOUNT SEVEN: AA TSI BYIVU MGO AND STON PA SHES RAB IV<sup>36</sup>

Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab lived in a small dilapidated house near a village. One evening, they caught a sheep that happened to pass by their door.

As the sheep owner was searching for his sheep, his son said, "Two people in that small house stole our sheep." The father quietly approached the door and listened carefully to ascertain if his sheep had really been stolen.

Aa tsi byivu mgo sat by the window as a sentry and noticed the sheep owner listening. He then signaled Ston pa shes rab, who asked, "What should I do, my lama?" Aa tsi byivu mgo, pretending to be a high-level lama, replied in a voice dripping with grandeur, "Circle the holy peak." Ston pa shes rab then tied the sheep's mouth tightly shut with a rope and then asked, "What should I do next, my lama?"

"Please, remove the outside square white silk scarf," Aa tsi byivu mgo answered. Ston pa shes rab skinned the sheep.

"What should I do next, my lama?" Ston pa shes rab asked.

"Please wave the lucky silk scarf in the sky," Aa tsi byivu mgo answered. Ston pa shes rab removed the fat membrane of the stomach and hung it on the wall.

"What should I do next, my lama?" Ston pa shes rab asked.

"Please, invite the Tantras<sup>37</sup> Monastery," Aa tsi byivu mgo answered. Ston pa shes rab removed the intestines.

"What should I do next, my lama?" Ston pa shes rab asked. "Please,

invite the Great Sublime Guru,” Aa tsi byivu mgo answered. Ston pa shes rab hung the mutton from the ceiling.<sup>38</sup>

The house owner returned to his home and beat his son. He said, “You wrong an innocent person. They are busy inviting the gods.”

The next day, they were invited to the sheep owner’s home to perform a religious ritual. They worried that wild dogs would eat their mutton. Aa tsi byivu mgo said to the house owner, “Today, a noble guest will visit us. When he comes, either I or Ston pa shes rab must receive him at our home.” The host said, “Of course, please leave at any time.”

Aa tsi byivu mgo sat by a window and watched their dilapidated house as they pretended to recite scriptures. When Aa tsi byivu mgo saw a dog enter their house, he said to Ston pa shes rab, “Our noble guest has come. It is the right time to go. Incidentally, please visit the meditation lama.”<sup>39</sup> Ston pa shes rab immediately left for their rundown house. When he arrived, the dog had already eaten the intestines and was eyeing the mutton. Ston pa shes rab beat the dog with a stick and, as it tried to escape from the room barking and whining, Ston pa shes rab hit it with three stones, making it run away.

When he was returning to the prayer service, Ston pa shes rab went to a marmot’s den where they had placed a trap. A marmot had been caught in the trap and had died. When he returned, Aa tsi byivu mgo asked, “What did our noble guest do?”

“He had already invited the Tantras Monastery,” Ston pa shes rab said. “And he was observing the Great Sublime Guru. Then, owing to the fact he had visited, I led the way with one hundred sticks of incense. He was delighted and kowtowed to the room’s four directions. Next, I offered him three silver ingots. He then recited *pin ka la*<sup>40</sup> one hundred times and left. Finally, I visited the meditation lama and found he had gone to paradise.”

#### ACCOUNT EIGHT: AA TSI BYIVU MGO AND STON PA SHES RAB V<sup>41</sup>

Ston pa shes rab had an exquisite copper pot that Aa tsi byivu mgo coveted. One day, Aa tsi byivu mgo asked Ston pa shes rab if he could borrow the pot and Ston pa shes rab agreed. Two days later, Aa tsi byivu mgo returned it, along with a small copper pot. Ston pa shes rab wondered why Aa tsi byivu mgo returned two pots when he had borrowed only one. Ston pa shes rab asked, “Why do you return two pots to me?” Aa tsi byivu mgo said, “Your big pot gave birth.” Ston pa shes rab then thought, “Aa tsi byivu mgo is so stupid. I’ll be happy to lend him more things.” Ston pa shes rab said, “You are welcome to borrow my copper pot again at any time.”

A few days later, Aa tsi byivu mgo borrowed the exquisite copper pot again. Two days later, Aa tsi byivu mgo visited Ston pa shes rab’s home with

a morose face and said, "I'm sorry to tell you that your copper pot has died." Ston pa shes rab said, "Who could possibly believe a copper pot can die? You are joking." Aa tsi byivu mgo replied, "If something can give birth, why can't it die?" This rendered Ston pa shes rab speechless.

ACCOUNT NINE: RDZUN KHRO LO<sup>42</sup>

Many years ago, there was a man called Rdzun khro lo. One day he met a rider and said to him, "What's your name?"

"My name is Rider Man. What's your name?"

"My name is Rdzun khro lo."

"Why are you called Rdzun khro lo?"

"Because I always lie."

"Please tell a lie now."

"I want to lie, but I forgot my lying bell on the other side of the river. I can't cross the river if you don't loan me your horse."

"OK, here is my horse. Now, please bring your lying bell."

"But could you loan me your gun in case a big dog attacks me?"

The rider agreed to this also and then Rdzun khro lo, holding the gun, rode the horse toward the river. After he crossed, he shouted, "Ha! Ha! If you don't know what is lying, this is lying." Then he pushed the horse to a gallop and rode off in a cloud of dust.

ACCOUNT TEN: RDZUN MKHAN PHUN TSHOGS<sup>43</sup>

Many years ago, a man called Phun tshogs became rich because he tricked people. In another place there lived a king. In time, the king learned about Phun tshogs and invited him to visit his palace. Liar Phun tshogs got on his horse and rode to the king's palace. When he arrived, he said, "I am here. What's the matter, Sire?" The king gently said, "Are you Liar Phun tshogs?" "Yes, I am," Liar Phun tshogs replied. Can you tell me a lie?" the king asked. Phun tshogs pretended to be shocked. Then the king said, "What is wrong with you?" Phun tshogs replied, "I forgot my lying bag on the other side of the river. My horse is so exhausted that I doubt he can cross the river." The king ordered his servants to outfit his personal horse to loan to Phun tshogs, whose horse was greatly inferior to the king's. Phun tshogs mounted the king's horse and rode it toward the river. After reaching mid-river, Phun tshogs turned and shouted, "Do you now half-realize that I am a liar, now that I have half-crossed the river (and will soon escape with your wonderful horse)?"<sup>44</sup> But there was nothing the king and his subordinates could do.

ACCOUNT ELEVEN: VBRUG PA KUN LEGS I<sup>45</sup>

A woman gave Vbrug pa kun legs a turquoise after her mother died, in the

hope that her mother would soon be reborn. Vbrug pa kun legs immediately took the turquoise to a place where people gambled, played a gambling game, and lost the turquoise. When the woman learned this she said, “Why did you gamble away my turquoise?” Vbrug pa kun legs replied, “Oh! The fact that you feel sorry means that you are still more attracted to secular things than Truth. If you want me to continue to help your mother obtain another rebirth, please bring me a Buddha-image *thang ga*.” The woman then brought a Buddha-image *thang ga*. Vbrug pa kun legs spread it on the ground and defecated on it. The woman thought that he had blasphemed a holy object and said, “You defecated on the *thang ga*.” Vbrug pa kun legs said, “You still insist on not realizing what is Truth. It is only the appearance of the Buddha that attracts you.” Then he proceeded to have sexual intercourse with her. Afterwards, she began to understand what was Truth.

ACCOUNT TWELVE: VBRUG PA KUN LEGS II<sup>46</sup>

Sa pan was the master of Sa skya Sect at a time when Sa skya was the most powerful sect in Tibet. He was the first Tibetan lama to contact the Mongol empire. He was also a famous scholar, having debated five Indian non-Buddhist scholars and defeated them. No one could debate Sa pan and win. He not only obtained political power, but also had a great reputation as a scholar. He was very proud of himself and wrote letters on rocks with his finger that said “*Stod ni Sa pan nga, smad ni Sa pan nga*,” which means “It is I, Sa pan, in Upper Tibet and it is I, Sa pan, in Lower Tibet.” One day, Vbrug pa kun legs saw these letters on a rock. He thought Sa pan was becoming too proud and needed to be taught a lesson. Vbrug pa kun legs then added the Tibetan vowel *u* under the letter *nga* with his finger. This altered the original *nga* (I/me) to *ngu* (cry). Thus, the meaning of the sentence was changed to “It’s Sa pan sobbing in Upper Tibet, it’s Sa pan sobbing in Lower Tibet.”

ACCOUNT THIRTEEN: VBRUG PA KUN LEGS III<sup>47</sup>

Vbrug pa kun legs and several Dge lugs Sect<sup>48</sup> monks were sleeping in the open air in a Dge lugs Monastery. When stars began appearing in the sky, Vbrug pa kun legs began counting, “One star appears. Karma pa (founder of Karma Bkav rgyud Sect) is blessing me. Two stars appear. Karma pa is blessing me. Three stars...” This upset the aggressive young Dge lugs monks. They beat him and scolded him saying that Vbrug pa kun legs should pray to the founder of Dge lugs Sect, Tsong kha ba. Vbrug pa kun legs asked to be forgiven and promised that the next morning he would pray to Tsong kha ba. Early the next morning when stars were disappearing from the sky, he began counting, “One star is disappearing. Tsong kha ba is blessing

me. Two stars are disappearing, Tsong kha ba is blessing me. Three stars..." The infuriated monks said, "Why do you say stars appear for your sect founder but say they disappear for our founder?" and they got ready to beat him again. Vbrug pa kun legs said, "I counted how the stars appeared and disappeared as a way of venerating Karma pa and Tsong kha ba. The stars disappeared by themselves. It's not my fault." This left the monks speechless.

ACCOUNT FOURTEEN: GE SAR I<sup>49</sup>

Khro thung heard Jo rus<sup>50</sup> had a very good horse and immediately wondered how he might be able to get the horse. He thought that if Jo rus attended the upcoming horse race with this steed, he would surely win and thus become the king of Gling<sup>51</sup> and marry the beautiful Vbrug mo.<sup>52</sup> The horse race would determine who would be king of Gling.

One day, Khro thung saw Jo rus walking outside Khro thung's house. He approached him and said, "Dear nephew, please come and visit your uncle's home." Jo rus thought, "He never addressed me in this way before. He must be plotting something, but I know how to deal with him." Then he said, "Dear uncle, we haven't met for a long time, and I am really glad to see you," and then they went to Khro thung's home.

Later, at his home, Khro thung hinted that he was interested in the horse business. Jo rus expressed his own interest in the same topic. Khro thung thought, "If I receive him with enthusiastic hospitality, maybe he will sell me his horse," and offered him various foods. Jo rus ate a great deal of the food, put the remaining food in a bag, and then said, "Uncle, I have had such a nice meal. I'll give the remaining food to Mother. She will be very happy. I miss her very much. I'm sure she is now waiting for me so I'm going to leave."

Khro thung felt embarrassed and said, "Dear nephew, the horse..." but before he could finish Jo rus was gone.

ACCOUNT FIFTEEN: GE SAR II<sup>53</sup>

When Ge sar was in Hor<sup>54</sup> Country, he disguised himself as an abandoned boy from a large caravan. A famous metal worker, Mgar ba stobs ldan, found the boy and, as he had no son, he adopted him. People called the boy "Thang rnyed," which means "found on the grassland." The first day, Mgar ba stobs ldan didn't bring Thang rnyed into his home. He had him stay in his yard. Then Mgar ba stobs ldan told his daughter, Mgar bzav chos sgron, to take to Thang rnyed *rtsam pa*, a jar of yogurt, and a bone with a bit of meat on it.

Thang rnyed accepted the food and then he scattered the *rtsam pa* about the yard while saying, "To blow by wind the Hor Gur dkar's (king of Hor)

*rtsam pa.*” Then he threw the yogurt against a wall while saying, “Splatter Hor Gur dkar’s brain on the wall.” He kept the bone with meat and said, “This is not a bone, it is a stake to tie a wild donkey to.”<sup>55</sup>

Mgar bzav chos sgron went back into the home and told her father everything Thang rnyed had done. Mgar ba stobs ldan angrily picked up his hammer and strode into the courtyard with the intention of killing Thang rnyed. But when he saw Thang rnyed, things were not as his daughter had described. Thang rnyed was eating and murmuring to himself, “Dear Father is so kind. The food is so delicious.” Then he raised his head, saw Mgar ba stobs ldan and said, “Dear Father, what are you doing?” Mgar ba stobs ldan was embarrassed and quickly hid his hammer in his sleeve and said, “I... I just wanted to see you.”

Then Mgar ba stobs ldan went back inside and beat his daughter for attempting to create dissension between son and father.

#### ACCOUNT SIXTEEN: GE SAR III<sup>56</sup>

Hor Gur dkar’s golden chair was destroyed during the early years of the Hor-Gling conflict. Hor Gur dkar wanted to have a golden chair again and ordered all Hor Country metalworkers to come to his palace. Mgar ba stobs ldan was going to join that meeting. His son, Thang rnyed, said, “Take me with you, Father.” Thang rnyed was not afraid of anything and Mgar ba stobs ldan was afraid he might promise to make the golden chair, so he refused to allow him to come. But Thang rnyed pleaded with his father and, at last, Mgar ba stobs ldan agreed on the condition that Thang rnyed must say nothing when they had an audience with Hor Gur dkar.

When they reached the palace, all the metalworkers from Hor Country were there. Hor Gur dkar said, “I want an exquisite golden chair decorated with golden girls. I will generously pay the person who makes it the way I want.” No one dared promise. Thang rnyed tried to stand and speak but this frightened Mgar ba stobs ldan, who tried to pull him back down. Finally, Mgar ba stobs ldan could not control him. Thang rnyed shouted, “Dear King Gur dkar, I can make that golden chair.” Mgar ba stobs ldan was so terrified that his face became pale and he was speechless. Hor Gur dkar was delighted and asked Thang rnyed his name and who his family was. After Thang rnyed had answered, Hor Gur dkar said, “Mgar ba stobs ldan, you have such a wonderful son. I will give you all the material you need. You must finish in seven days.”

Mgar ba stobs ldan and Thang rnyed returned home. Mgar ba stobs ldan was very upset but, as usual, Thang rnyed was optimistic. Mgar ba stobs ldan said, “You promised to finish the chair in a week. We should start work immediately.” Thang rnyed replied, “It doesn’t matter. We still have

seven days. My plan is that the first day we will rest and do some planning, and then I and Mgar bzav chos sgron will go to the mountains and cut some trees for charcoal.”

The next day, Thang rnyed and Mgar bzav chos sgron took a bull and started to the mountains. When they reached a stream, Thang rnyed and Mgar bzav chos sgron removed their shoes and pulled up their trouser legs. Thang rnyed turned to the bull and said, “We took off our shoes and rolled up our trouser legs. So should you.” Although Mgar bzav chos sgron tried to stop him, Thang rnyed ignored her, took a stone, and beat off the bull’s hooves. Then he pulled up the skin of the bull’s legs. Mgar bzav chos sgron was amazed. After crossing the stream, Thang rnyed put the bull’s hooves back on and pulled down the leg skin.

When they reached their destination, they cut some trees and burned them to make charcoal. Then Thang rnyed said, “This is so boring; I’m going to burn the forest.” Mgar bzav chos sgron said, “We can’t do that. This is the Hor Country’s sacred forest. It is blasphemy.” But Thang rnyed did not listen and set fire to the forest.

Suddenly, it began to rain. Thang rnyed and Mgar bzav chos sgron tried to find shelter but there was no place to hide. Thang rnyed said, “Why don’t we kill the bull, skin the carcass, and use the skin for a tent?” Mgar bzav chos sgron tried to stop him but Thang rnyed ignored her, killed the bull, used the bones as pegs, used the intestines as rope, and soon they had a tent. Thang rnyed stayed under the “tent,” but Mgar bzav chos sgron refused to come inside and got very wet.

Some time later the rain ceased, which had also extinguished the forest fire, making perfect charcoal. They collected charcoal into bags. Mgar bzav chos sgron tried her best to collect charcoal, but got only a little. In contrast, Thang rnyed just said, “*Nag vthul lo*”<sup>57</sup> and charcoal automatically tumbled into his bag. Thang rnyed said, “Why don’t you imitate me and say ‘*nag vthul lo*’.” She hesitantly said the first word and the charcoal automatically began moving into her bag. Soon they had collected many bags of charcoal.

Thang rnyed had killed the bull, so they had no way to easily transport the charcoal. Thang rnyed said, “I did most of the work so you should carry most of the bags.” But Mgar bzav chos sgron could not carry very many bags. Thang rnyed scolded her and beat her. Mgar bzav chos sgron became very angry, returned home empty-handed and, in a weepy voice, reported everything to her father that Thang rnyed had done. Mgar ba stobs ldan angrily gathered his bow and arrows and started out to find Thang rnyed. A short time later, Mgar ba stobs ldan saw a bull carrying eight bags of charcoal and Thang rnyed carrying nine bags.

Mgar ba stobs ldan felt very embarrassed and hid the bow up his sleeve.

Thang rnyed approached and said, “Dear Father, you don’t need to wait for me here. Mgar bzav chos sgron got angry and left ahead of me. I carried her bags as well as mine.” Mgar ba stobs ldan did not know what to say. When he returned home, he beat his daughter.

At this point, Mgar bzav chos sgron realized Thang rnyed wasn’t a common person. She later secretly met Thang rnyed, offered him a white scarf, and asked him to reveal who he really was. Thang rnyed magically changed his body into that of Ge sar. She kowtowed and asked him to forgive her for not knowing who he really was. She promised she would do whatever Ge sar wanted and became his girlfriend.

Thang rnyed rested the next day. Mgar ba stobs ldan was worried that he could not finish the gold chair in time. On the fourth day, Thang rnyed made a stove for metal work. On the fifth day, Thang rnyed rested again. Mgar ba stobs ldan persuaded him to start work, but Thang rnyed said, “It doesn’t matter. We still have two days.” On the sixth day, Thang rnyed had not started work on the golden chair. Mgar ba stobs ldan tried to make it by himself, but it seemed to be impossible to finish in one day. Mgar ba stobs ldan complained to Thang rnyed that he would bring disaster to his family.

In the evening, Thang rnyed said, “Dear Father, I will start work tonight. But there is one condition: no one must watch as I work.” Thang rnyed closed the door to the room where he wished to work, and then invited Paradise’s metalworkers and water-deity metalworkers. Soon, the room was full of noise. Mgar ba stobs ldan was quite curious and peered through a crack in the door. A moment later, a shard of gold shot into his eye.

On the seventh day, Thang rnyed finished the golden chair. Mgar ba stobs ldan and Thang rnyed brought it to Hor Gur dkar’s palace. People were amazed by the exquisite gold chair. No one who saw it would not appreciate it. Thirteen gold girls decorated the chair. A talking gold bird was in the center of the chair. It said, “Put a saddle around Hor Gur dkar’s neck.” But when Hor Gur dkar heard the bird, he thought it said, “Wish Hor Gur dkar a long life.” Hor Gur dkar’s retinue advised that a talking chair was a bad omen, but Hor Gur dkar was satisfied with the chair and refused to listen to what anyone said. He generously paid Mgar ba stobs ldan’s family for their work in making the chair.

After Mgar ba stobs ldan and Thang rnyed left, generals surrounded Hor Gur dkar and said, “We should pursue and kill him. He is a dangerous man, and we should find a good way to kill him.” General Ca tsha ga ma, a general who had invaded Gling, said, “Why don’t you order Thang rnyed to bring the Hor’s holy tiger here? If he tries, he won’t return alive.” Everyone agreed and then Hor Gur dkar commanded Thang rnyed to bring the holy tiger and Thang rnyed promised to comply.

When Mgar ba stobs ldan heard about this, he tried to stop Thang rnyed but could not. He went to a remote valley where the tiger was. When the tiger saw Thang rnyed, it immediately attacked. Thang rnyed shot an arrow that killed the tiger, transferred the spirit of his protective deity into the tiger, and took the tiger, which now appeared to be fully alive, to Hor Gur dkar's palace.

Hor Gur dkar and his generals and servants saw Thang rnyed coming with the tiger. Sometimes the tiger walked in front of Thang rnyed, and sometimes Thang rnyed walked in front of the tiger. When he got near the palace, he shouted, "The holy tiger is here. Please open the gate." No one dared open the gate. The tiger was fierce and quarrelsome, and the palace shook from its roars. Hor Gur dkar was frightened and said, "Please take it back." Thang rnyed said, "He doesn't want to leave until he has eaten a person." Hor Gur said, "Someone should give themselves to the tiger." But no one wanted to be a sacrifice.

Meanwhile the tiger was becoming ever more threatening. Hor Gur dkar said, "Who suggested this ridiculous idea?" "Ca tsha ga ma," people answered. Hor Gur dkar said, "Feed him to the tiger." After Ca tsha ga ma was fed to the tiger, Thang rnyed left with the tiger.

#### NOTES

1. The Wiley system of Tibetan romanization is employed with one exception: a "v" is used for (').

2. Mongolians, Monguor (Tu 土), and some Yogor are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. In at least Qinghai, certain Han villages near Tibetan communities are also deeply influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. In 1999, several Han Chinese Living Buddhas were residing in Minhe Hui and Mangghuer Autonomous County.

The Monguor were classified as the "Tu" ethnic group by the Chinese government in the 1950s. We use "Mangghuer" to refer to Monguor who live in Minhe Hui and Mangghuer Autonomous County and "Mongghul" to refer to Monguor who live in Huzhu Mongghul (Tu) Autonomous County in Qinghai for these are the terms the people themselves use. We use "Monguor" when we do not know what certain Monguor call themselves.

3. The lack of research on Tibetan tricksters is evidenced by a recent database that lists 4,000 bibliographic records of Tibetan-language research articles published in China (ANTON-LUCA et al. 1998). The database, which the writers claim is nearly comprehensive for *Bod ljongs zhib ujug*, *Krung govi bod kyi shes rig*, *Bod ljongs nang bstan*, *Gangs ljongs rig gnas*, *Mtsho sngon slob gso*, *Nub byang mi rigs slob grwa chen movi rig gzhung dus deb*, *Rtser snyeg* and other journals, including the English-language *Tibet Studies*, provides only one reference for Aa khu bstan pa (RA SE DKON MCHOG RGYA MTSHO 1996).

4. In Chinese these prefectures are, respectively, Yushu 玉樹, Guoluo 果洛, Huangnan 黃南, Haixi 海西, Hainan 海南, and Haibei 海北.

5. Also known as Nassreddin.

6. "Dran gsal" is a story in the *Ro sgrung* (*Enchanted Corpse*) collection. At least one pub-

lished *Ro sgrung* version contains twenty-one stories (ZHANG 1993, 2722).

7. Ge sar is the name of a powerful king known to at least Tibetans, Mongols, and certain Monguor. According to a collection of heroic songs known as the *Rgyal bovi sgrung*, King Ge sar lived in the eighth century AD. His origins are lost in myth (DAS 1992, 224). One of the longest epics in the world told across Central Asia, it tells of a divine hero who abandons the delights of a Buddhist heaven to descend to earth to defeat beings with perverted aspirations (KORNMAN 1997, 39–40).

8. Rgyal bo na gzav appears in primary school texts that teach Tibetan language.

9. The first incarnation was Karma Dus gsum mkhyen pa, who was born in Dkar mdzes (Ganzi 甘孜) in the present Sichuan Province. His teacher was Dwags po lha rje, who, in turn, was a student of Mi la ras pa (1040–1123), a founder of the Bkav rgyud Sect (ZHANG 1993, 9).

10. Shagder (b. 1869) is an example of a Mongolian monk who is also immortalized in folklore as a trickster. At the age of eight, he was sent by his parents to Gelber Jo Temple in the present Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China, to become a monk, and there he demonstrated a gifted intellect and learned Tibetan well. He is well known in Inner Mongolia (STUART 1995, 51).

11. This expression is commonly understood in at least Reb gong.

12. We have not seen this 1966 Chinese version. Our comments are based exclusively on the Tibetan version published in 1980.

13. Twenty-one students said that Aa khu bstan pa stories do not have sexual content, ten students said that they did not know, and one student did not answer this question.

14. “*Aa tsi byivu mgo*” can refer to a type of stone peculiar to a few mountain peaks in Yul shul that is thumb-sized and shaped like a sparrow’s head. “*Byivu*” is “sparrow” and “*mgo*” is “head.”

15. We do not know exactly where Aa tsi byivu mgo-Ston pa shes rab trickster stories are told. Certain people reared in Skye rgu Region have never heard such stories. We speculate that they are most common in Seng rtse Village and nearby areas: Seng rtse Administrative Village, Skye rgu Town, Yul shul County, Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, including four natural villages: Ra wu pu, Ra wu mdav, Dri bzang, and Go bo. The total population is approximately one thousand. Seng rtse Village is five kilometers from Skye rgu Town, the capital of Yul shul Prefecture. Seng rtse is not only one of the largest natural villages in Yul shul Prefecture, it is also a center of religious activity drawing people from throughout Yul shul Prefecture, Rma stod County, Mgo log Prefecture, Ser shul County, and Dkar mdzes Prefecture, Sichuan. This religious activity is based on Seng rtse’s *ma ni* (the mystic six symbols of Tibetan Buddhism—*om ma-ni pad-me hum*) stones, which are reputed to be the world’s largest. The several million stones are situated in walls and piles. Each year, during the fourth, fifth, and twelfth lunar months, the Rgya nag Ma ni Festival is held that attracts people from a wide area. Circumambulating the *ma ni* at the festival is thought to be helpful in obtaining a better rebirth.

16. An old man who lives in Ja mgo Village near Vdam mkar Monastery and who is well known around Skye rgu Town, may be used as an example. He is unmarried and has no children. He is considered to be skillful at religious rituals. In addition to wearing a secular-style dark-red Tibetan robe, he wears a hat embroidered with a Sanskrit letter. He is occasionally invited by Vdam mkar Monastery to perform religious rituals at the monastery and to train young monks in religious rituals.

17. The pre-Buddhist religion of many Tibetans.

18. In 1998, Skyi mo’s brother, a resident of Seng rtse Village, was in his eighties.

19. Our comments on this trickster are based exclusively on BKRAS SGROL 1980.

20. This area includes thirteen counties: Sne gdong, Zangs ri, Gra nang, Gong dkar, Rgya tsha, Snang, Vphyongs rgyas, Chu gsum, Lho brag, Mtsho sna, Lhun rtse, Mtsho smad, and Sna dkar.

21. This story is very similar to *Balgansang's Practical Joke* recorded in STUART 1995, 64.

22. Certain stories Kun mchog dge legs is familiar with depict Vbrug pa kun legs as living at the same time as Sa pan (Sa skya pan di ta kun dgav rgyal mtshan [1182–1251]). He was the most important of the five great teachers of Sa skya Sect and the first Tibetan *pan di ta*, an honor bestowed on those versed in the five sciences (medicine, linguistics, dialectics, the mechanical arts, Buddhism).

23. During the thirteenth century, Gling ras pa and Gtsang pa rgya ras, two monks who had gained perfection, founded a branch of the Bkav rgyud Sect. Phur vbrug Monastery in Gtsang, Tibet was the first monastery of this sect (ZHANG 1993, 2002).

24. In contrast, Aa tsi byivu mgo and Ston pa shes rab are very far from being enlightened and, consequently, do not have license to engage in sexual activity.

25. SAMUEL (1993, 540) notes that “Ge sar himself is a trickster-shaman figure with many similarities to Padmasambhava.”

26. Told to Dpal Idan bkra shis by his maternal grandmother, Bsod noms skyid (b. 1924), in Gling rgyal Village in the 1980s.

27. For an almost identical Mongol account, see STUART 1995, 17.

28. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his friend Bsod noms dbang vdus (b.1971), in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

29. *Rtsam pa* has two meanings in English: one is flour made from roasted barley; the second is roasted barley flour mixed with butter, tea, dried bits of cheese and sugar (optional).

30. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his friend Bsod noms dbong vdus (b. 1971), in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

31. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his mother, Bskal yag (b. 1947), in Seng rtse Village in the 1970s.

32. *Ltos aa* means “(I will) look for (you).”

33. This story is similar to an Aa khu bstan pa story reported in SI KHON ZHING CHEN DMANGS KHROD RIG RTSAL BRTAG DPYOD TSHOGS PA and SI KHON MI RIGS DPE SKRUN KHANG named *Ca lag“vbyar”ba* (Sticky Fingers) (1980, 211–18).

34. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his mother, Bskal yag (b. 1947), in Seng rtse Village in the 1970s.

35. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his classmate Karma bkra shis (b. 1970) in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

36. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his mother, Bskal yag (b. 1947), in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

37. Tantric books contain information for subduing deities and for other ceremonies. “Tantra” in Tibetan is “*rgyud sde*” and “intestines” in Tibetan is “*rgyu ma*.” The humor in this expression comes from associating “intestines” with “tantric.”

38. A relationship is being made between the flesh of the sheep, which comprises most of the sheep’s carcass, to the great guru whose knowledge is all-encompassing.

39. Marmots hibernate in winter, during which they are in a condition not unlike Buddhist monks who practice a state of suspended animation.

40. The teller said *pin ka la* referred to “holy words.” In the context of the story, it corresponds to the dog’s barks and thus adds humor. We do not know what “holy words” *pin ka la* might be.

41. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his classmate Karma bkra shis (b. 1970) in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

42. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his maternal grandmother, Bsod noms chos mtsho (1921–1984), in Seng rtse Village in the 1970s.

43. Told in Xining to Kun mchog dge legs by his friend Bskal bzang bkra shis (b. 1975), who is from Khri vdu County in 1996.

44. The Tibetan, *chu phyed phyed brgal dus phyed phyed shes ai thes*, is more vivid than the English translation.

45. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his friend Bsod noms dbang vdus (b. 1971) in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

46. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his friend Bsod noms dbang vdus (b. 1971) in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

47. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by a monk aged about sixty from Gser thar (Seda 色達) County, Sichuan Province in 1996 in Seng rtse Village.

48. Dge lugs Sect (Yellow [Hat] Sect) was founded by the great Tibetan Buddhist reformer Tsong kha ba (1357–1419). Note that this suggests yet another time for the life of Vbrug pa kun legs.

49. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his mother, Bskal yag (b. 1947), in Seng rtse Village in the 1980s.

50. Ge sar's name when he was a child.

51. Ge sar's native country.

52. Vbrug mo is Ge sar's wife and the Queen of Gling.

53. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his grandmother, Bsod noms chos mtsho (1921–1984), in Seng rtse Village in the 1970s.

54. NORBU, ZHU and STUART (1999) claim that today Monguor are referred to as “Hor” in written Tibetan. QINGHAISHENG BIANJIZU (1985, 178) does not say what the term refers to, but suggests it should be further studied. GOLDSTEIN (1978, 1219) offers “Mongolians, Turks, Uighurs, and northern nomads.” YAN and WANG (1994, 822) state:

Huo'er 霍爾 is a Tibetan word. It is the name of a nationality. In the Han Dynasty 漢朝 [206 BC-220 AD], Chinese called the nomads in western China “hu'er” and “Hu.” In the Tang Dynasty 唐朝 [618–907 AD], Tibetans borrowed “Hu'er” as a term to refer to western nomads, which they rendered “Huo'er.” Since the Yuan Dynasty 元朝 [1271–1368 AD], “Huo'er” has referred specifically to the Monguor nationality.

In addition, the well-known Ge sar narrator, Tshe ring dbang vdus (b. 1938?), a native of the present Gdang la (Chinese, Tanggula 唐古拉) Township, administered by Gor mo (Chinese, Ge'ermu 格爾木) Municipality, told Kun mchog dge legs in June 1996 in Xining, that “Hor Country” refers to the area near Chi lin (Mongghul, Chileb; Chinese, Qilian 祁連) Mountains, lying in eastern Qinghai and western Gansu.

55. Ge sar's steed was a cross between a horse and a wild donkey (Tibetan, *rta rkyang rgod*).

56. Told to Kun mchog dge legs by his grandmother, Bsod noms chos mtsho (1921–1984), in Seng rtse Village in the 1970s.

57. *Nag vthul lo*: “nag” is “black,” and “vthul lo” means “collect.”

Sex	Birth Date	Home	Trickster/Source	Are Aa khu bstan pa Stories Sexual?
M	1982	Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Prefecture	AK-grandmother; AF-radio	yes
M	April 1983	Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Prefecture	AK-teacher; AF-book	yes
M	1981	Reb gong County, Rma lho Prefecture	AK-friend; AF-friend	yes
F	1976	Reb gong County, Rma lho Prefecture	AK-old people; Nyi chos bzang bo-book	no
M	1981	Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Prefecture	AK-friend; AF-radio	yes
M	November 1981	Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Prefecture	AK-old people; AF-teacher	yes
F	?	Them rdzong County, Mtsho byang Prefecture	AK-mother; AF-TV	yes
M	?	Rkang tsha County, Mtsho byang Prefecture	AK-old people; AF-uncle; Dran gsal-uncle	no
F	March 3, 1980	Rkang tsha County, Mtsho byang Prefecture	AK-radio; AF-radio	yes
M	June 1, 1982	Rkang tsha County, Mtsho byang Prefecture	AK-old people; AF-tape player	no
F	September 19, 1980	Heve yan County, Mtsho byang Prefecture	AK-grandfather; AF-grandfather	yes
M	December 5, 1979	Rkang tsha County, Mtsho byang Prefecture	AK-radio; AF-radio	no
F	January 5, 1983	Khri ka County, Mtsho lho Prefecture	AK-grandmother and friend; AF-teacher	yes
M	November 17, 1980	Gang ho County, Mtsho lho Prefecture	AK-uncle; AF-grandfather	no
M	1981	Gang ho County, Mtsho lho Prefecture	AK-uncle; AF-book	yes
M	1980	Gang ho County, Mtsho lho Prefecture	AK-friend; AF-friend, Aa rig glen pavi gnam rgyud- friend	yes
M	1981	Khri ka County, Mtsho lho Prefecture	AK-friend; AF-friend	yes
F	April 17, 1980	Mtsho nub Prefecture	AK-old people; AF-book	no
F	June 5, 1980	Mtsho nub Prefecture	AK-brother; AF-brother	yes
F	October 13, 1979	Mtsho nub Prefecture	AK-brother; AF-brother	yes
M	June 1981	Duvu len County, Mtsho nub Prefecture	AK-friend; AF-uncle	yes

Sex	Birth Date	Home	Trickster/Source	Are Aa khu bstan pa Stories Sexual?
F	1981	Mgo log Prefecture	AK-teacher; AF-brother	yes
M	November 25, 1980	Rma chen County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-tape player; AF-friend	no
F	February 24, 1981	Gcig sgril County Mgo log Prefecture	AK-old people; Srid pa rgan po-father	yes
F	October 2, 1981	Pad ma County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-performance at school; AF-teacher	no
M	October 28, 1978	Gcig sgril County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-old people; AF-friend	doesn't know
F	October 20, 1980	Rma chen County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-father; AF-uncle	no
F	1981	Gcig sgril County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-old people; Heb bskyal dang rdzun bskyal-friend	no
F	October 20, 1981	Dar lag County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-friend	yes
F	May 22, 1980	Dar lag County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-brother; Dran gsal-teacher	doesn't know
F	December 1, 1981	Dar lag County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-teacher; Sgyu ma mkhan spun drug-book	doesn't know
M	June 7, 1980	Pad ma County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-old people	doesn't know
F	July 1, 1980	Gcig sgril County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK- old people; Dran gsal-teacher	no
F	July 10, 1980	Rma chen County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-friend; AF- book	no
F	May 20, 1980	Dar lag County, Mgo log Prefecture	AK-uncle, Vkham tshe snga lo-friend	doesn't know
M	June 8, 1981	Mgo log Prefecture	AK-old people; Vcham pa spun gsum-friend; Mi rgan long ba-friend	doesn't know
M	October 10, 1978	Mgo log Prefecture	AK-uncle	yes
F	December 6, 1982	Yul shul Prefecture	AK-father; Ge sar-family	no

Sex	Birth Date	Home	Trickster/Source	Are Aa khu bstan pa Stories Sexual?
F	April 5, 1981	Rdza stod County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-old people; Rgyal sras gnyis-friend	no
F	February 14, 1983	Khri vdu County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-teacher; AF-friend	no
F	1981	Yul shul County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-uncle; AF-book	yes
F	September 28, 1981	Khri vdu County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-teacher; AF-friend	no
F	July 9, 1982	Skye rgu Town, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-grandmother	no
F	May 17, 1980	Nang chen County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-uncle; Rgyal povi na gzav-teacher	yes
F	April 7, 1980	Khri vdu County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-teacher; Sgyu ma mkhan spun drug-book	doesn't know
F	February 1, 1982	Chu mar leb County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-father; AF-teacher	no
F	1982	Skye rgu Town, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-grandmother; AF-father	no
M	October 15, 1980	Yul shul County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-uncle; Ge sar-uncle	yes
M	July 4, 1981	Rdza stod County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-father; AF-brother	doesn't know
M	July 23, 1979	Khri vdu County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-friend; Rgyal po pu mo-friend	doesn't know
F	June 28, 1981	Skye rgu Town, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-father; AF-teacher	no
F	July 18, 1982	Skye rgu Town, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-friend	no
M	August 4, 1980	Rdza stod County, Yul shul Prefecture	AK-grandfather	doesn't know

M = male  
F = female

AK = Aa khu bstan pa  
AF = Afanti

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