



The singing of seventeenth-century *mgur* in Amdo today: A continuing tradition

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I seek to expand our understanding of the genre of *mgur* by investigating further the notion that *mgur* have generally been sung to folk song melodies. In order to do so, I analyze the ongoing tradition of singing the *Mgur 'bum* (*Collected Songs of Spiritual Realization*) of Skäl Idan rgya mtsho (1607–1677), the cultural hero of Amdo who to this day is revered as the first in one of the most important reincarnation lineages of Reb gong.

Oral tradition claims that the present style of singing his *mgur* dates back to one of his direct disciples. Still today monks and lay soloists sing them in rituals, which is unusual because the singing of most other *siddhas' mgur* has died out. Even more unusual is the general standardization of their performance today. To my knowledge, this is the first musical analysis in Western literature of any collection of *mgur* sung in a consistent way.

My previous textual analysis of stylistic features in the *Mgur 'bum* led me to conclude that Skäl Idan rgya mtsho's *mgur* were more influenced by folk songs than by classical verse. Most of his meters are found in folk songs, which indicates that he may have sung his *mgur* with folk melodies. My present analysis further supports this theory by showing that the melodic and rhythmic style are like those of folk songs sung in Eastern Tibet, and hence may well resemble how Skäl Idan rgya mtsho sang his songs.

Since to my knowledge I am the only Westerner who has heard his songs, I will illustrate my points with examples from my CD containing some of my recordings from Amdo.