“The scientific study of Tibetan folk music may [...] be said hardly to have begun”. What was thus stated nearly thirty years ago by P. Crossley-Holland (1967b: 9) is still valid today, and may also be applied to the study of folk songs. This is largely due to the fact that research in this field is based on a comparatively small number of published sources from various regions collected and published in different ways (cf. Crossley-Holland 1967a: 170–72). In most cases, the word-texts of certain types of songs have been collected (in written form or rendered to writing) and published together with translations (see e.g. van Manen 1922, Namkhai Norbu 1967, Snyder 1972). Substantial contributions focusing on local or regional song traditions had as their object songs of Lhasa (Samuel 1976, although based on research among refugees in Nepal and India), folk songs of Gyantse and Western Tibet, i.e. in fact Spiti and Pooh in upper Kinnaur (Tucci 1966), marriage ceremony songs of Ru thog (Shastri 1994) and the cycle of the Victory Song (rgyal gzhas) from Spong rong (Ramble 2002). In addition, two important Tibetan language collections of songs have been published (Zhang zhung srid pa’i gre ’gyur 1996, Karma Khedup 1998) which provide new material or new versions of songs from Western Tibet. As regards the folk music and songs of Ladakh, due to its peripheral situation also open to ‘non-Tibetan influences’ (Crossley-Holland 1967a: 174), a great amount of material was collected, translated and annotated by Francke in the early 20th century in more than a dozen publications (see ibid.: 182–84). More recently, classifications of the folk songs of this area have been attempted (e.g. Shakspo 1985).
FIELD RESEARCH

Regarding the method of documentation, most of the previous publications represent oral collections of textual material (rendered into writing) or written versions of songs while in our case sound recordings (together with a documentation of contextual information) was the method used (see the contribution by Christian Jahoda in this volume). With the exception of a few but important cases, written versions of the songs, locally often referred to as dang po’i glu (i.e. songs dating from previous periods), do not exist. It is the aim to provide here an overview of the songs recorded (so far more than 150). Most of the songs being analysed at present were recorded by myself together with my field assistant Sonam Tshering from Tabo (Spiti) during four fieldtrips between October 2001 and July 2003.1

Most of the recording was done in exploratory sessions with village men and women from local Chazhang2 (tc’u’uŋ, WT cha zhang) families usually at their homes in different Tibetan-speaking villages of upper Kinnaur and lower Spiti. Whenever possible, the texts of the songs were transcribed and translated into English on the spot with the help of the singers. For the transcription the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is used to render the spoken local Tibetan dialect.3

The aim of the project also includes the documentation of the festivals or ceremonies with which some of the songs are related. This could be carried out in September 2002 at the Namkan festival at Tabo and at some Pingri (presentation of the heir) and wedding celebrations at different villages of lower Spiti in winter 2002/03.

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1 The research was carried out in the framework of the research project “Documentation of oral traditions in Spiti and upper Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, India” (directed by D. Schüller, Phonogrammarchiv, Austrian Academy of Sciences).
2 The land-owning high-caste families in Spiti call themselves by this term. In order to show the corresponding position in the Hindu caste system, the Hindi term rājput is sometimes given as an explanation.
3 Cf. the Appendix of this paper. In the text of the paper there is also IPA for the spoken form of a word or term in the local Tibetan dialect, sometimes followed by the Written Tibetan form (WT). Names of places or festivals are rendered in a romanised form. The local Tibetan dialect is categorised as Western Innovative Tibetan in Roland Bielmeier et al. 2002.