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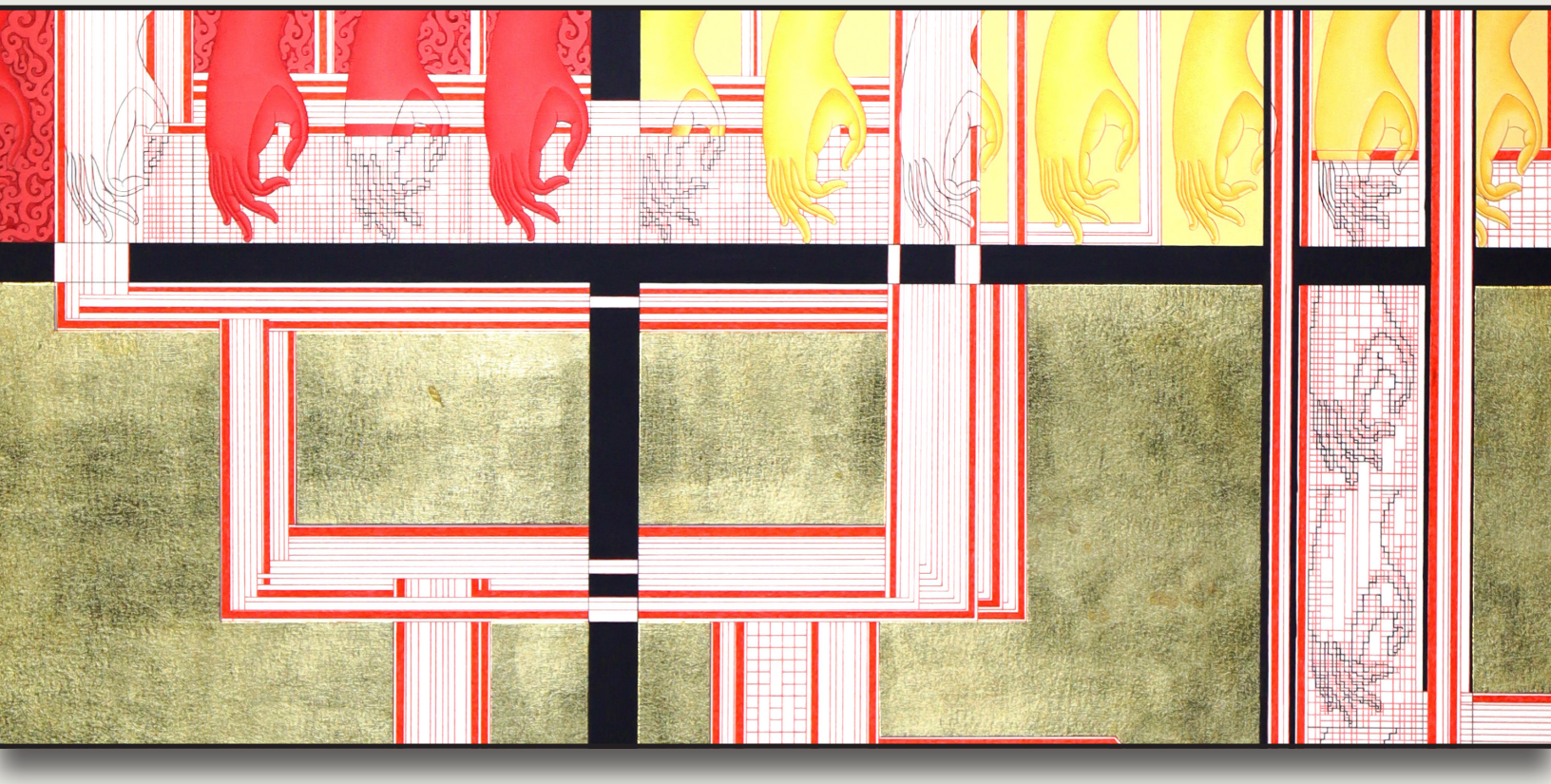

RESEARCH

Research articles on the history, form, content, and social dimensions of Tibetan-language literature

TRANSLATION

Translations of poetry and prose spanning the full scope of Tibetan literary history

CRITICISM

Essays on current issues in the study, appreciation, and analysis of Tibetan-language literature

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Letter from the Editors

Andrew Quintman & Kurtis R. Schaeffer

On the question of defining literature, Laurent Dubreuil begins his 2007 essay "What is Literature's Now" with the suggestion, "Of course it is impossible. To define literature—if by this we mean finding a sense that is fixed or given once and for all—nobody'll do it. 'Literature is—' has nothing of an easy beginning." With this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Tibetan Literature*, we present a space for considering the contours of literature and the literary across the landscape of Tibetan expression, and we aspire for an easy beginning even as we resolutely refrain from definitions that are either fixed or given once and for all.

The *Journal of Tibetan Literature* (JTL) is an open-access, peer-reviewed publication dedicated to research, translation, and appreciative criticism of Tibetan literature. The journal approaches the subject of Tibetan literature in a capacious way. In the broadest sense, we use the phrase "Tibetan literature" to refer to any Tibet-language text, oral or written, from the beginnings of Tibetan composition to the present day, as well as literary works by Tibetan authors in other languages. More narrowly, the journal's name is meant to direct attention to the literary qualities of Tibetan texts—that is, to places where a self-awareness of forms, structures, and styles seems to break through the page, and in which those attributes become central to the creation of meaning and its impact on readers. This rather open-ended definition is also meant to expand the genre-bound taxonomies that often replicate static categories of literary types (poetry, fiction, drama, philosophy) or maintain predetermined notions of *belles lettres*, or "fine writing." The foundational work of José Cabezón and Roger Jackson in the introduction to their book, *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (1995), provides firm footing for exploring strategies for working with "genre" in Tibetan contexts. They suggest that, even as Tibetan composition lacks a precise equivalent to Western notions of genre, Tibetan writers seem to have implicitly accepted the concept of genre, one based largely on subject matter and less so on qualities of form or function (*Tibetan Literature*, 20–26). It is upon Cabezón and Jackson's work that we have based our efforts to focus more intently upon issues of literary composition and style.

The expansiveness of our operational definition of literature—perhaps stated briefly as "texts in which form and content both matter"—has the obvious advantage of inclusivity, even as it creates a challenge for making choices about what to include and what to leave out. In response to this challenge, we might consider how Tibetan writers have exploited the intricacies and richness

of language to evoke a vivid and diverse range of human experiences. We might further scrutinize how to read such works so as to attend to ways in which they might "convey feelings and experiences and kinds of knowledge beyond the purely documentary, or descriptive," as Janet Gyatso suggests in her essay in this issue. These considerations remain ongoing tasks, to be sure, in both Tibetological scholarship and in the publication of a new journal. But we hope the challenge will prove generative in the pages and issues that follow.

With the launch of JTL we aspire to develop a distinctive arena for considering a wide range of Tibetan writing as literature. Our interest in curating this space in the form of a peer-reviewed academic journal has developed over an almost two-decade period (as we describe below) and, more recently, in the context of the growth of publications dedicated to Tibetan literature, arts, and culture, including blogs and journals such as *High Peaks Pure Earth*, *TibShelf*, *Waxing Moon*, and *Yeshe*. Of course, the field of Tibetan studies, both inside and outside of Tibet, has been intensely concerned with texts since its earliest days. Much of this work—especially on materials created prior to the twentieth-century—has been rooted in text-critical methodologies, and has therefore paid less attention to questions arising from the perspective of literary criticism. Where literary criticism has so far figured into the study of Tibetan literature, it has often focused on late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century texts, to the exclusion of earlier writing. Indigenous forms of literary critical writing have much to offer in our understanding of Tibetan forms of expression. Numerous recent multi-volume Tibetan-language publications on the topics of literature (*rtsom rig*) and classical poetics (*snyan ngag*) will help contemporary readers better understand the Tibetan notions of the literary, as will attention to the category "domains of knowledge" (*rig gnas*), understood as a broad swath of cultural production that is deeply connected to writing and reading in Tibet. Our hope is that JTL can serve as a venue where multiple types of textual study—from text criticism and philology to translation and forms of literary theory—can work synergistically in an effort to better understand and appreciate Tibetan literature.

JTL accepts and publishes contributions under three broad rubrics: research, translation, and criticism. Scholarly research on all aspects of Tibetan literature constitutes a key component of JTL's offerings. The journal offers a peer-reviewed academic venue exclusively dedicated to the study of Tibetan writing, Tibetan authors, and Tibetan literary activities. While the practice of translation has long been central to the study of Tibetan literature, it has frequently been undervalued or overlooked in the academy as a productive form of scholarship. Accordingly, there have been few venues for peer-reviewed publication of translations. JTL seeks to highlight not only the final products of academic translation but asks translators to reflect on their approaches, contexts, problems, and practices in their work. Finally, under the rubric of criticism, the journal invites both critical and appreciative perspectives on issues of relevance to the reading and research of Tibetan literature. These include opinion pieces, explorations of recent scholarship in multiple

languages, or constructive essays that offer productive viewpoints on contemporary engagement with Tibetan literature.

The *Journal of Tibetan Literature* builds on the work done by a network of scholars extending back to the mid-2000s, beginning with a series of conference panels on biography and autobiography at conferences of the American Academy of Religion, the Association for Asian Studies, and the International Association of Buddhist Studies, as well as a pair of workshops organized at Columbia and Princeton Universities by Sarah Jacoby and Andrew Quintman. These activities eventually led us to propose a 5-year seminar at the AAR (2010–2014) titled "Religion and the Literary in Tibet." This gathering included a group of some twenty participants, and the meetings were productive enough that we held an additional series of five meetings at the University of Virginia, University of Toronto, Harvard University, University of California, Berkeley, and Latse Library. Participants in these early discussions of Tibetan literature included: Benjamin Bogin, Lara Braitstein, Pema Bhum, José Cabezón, Bryan Cuevas, Jacob Dalton, Brandon Dotson, Holly Gayley, Frances Garrett, David Germano, Jonathan Gold, Janet Gyatso, Lauran Hartley, Roger Jackson, Sarah Jacoby, Nancy Lin, Gedun Rabsal, Jann Ronis, E. Gene Smith, Antonio Terrone, Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, Nicole Willock, and Carl Yamamoto. We would like to offer our profound gratitude to each of our colleagues who took part in these workshops and seminars. Their contributions were instrumental to the development of this journal, and the first few issues will profile work done during those seminars.

At the 2019 International Association of Tibetan Studies Seminar convened in Paris, then-president Tsering Shakya called on participants to center the voices of native Tibetan researchers and to bridge the frequently segregated worlds of Tibetan and non-Tibetan scholarship. Recognizing that the journal's origins lie largely in the work of American and European scholars, we hope that this new venue can play a role in enacting the work that Tsering Shakya provokes by bringing Tibetan academics, scholars, and writers into conversation with scholars around the globe. In its early issues, JTL will publish in English with abstracts translated into Tibetan. It will also profile contemporary Tibetan scholars and writers through interviews and commissioned essays. We hope that at some point JTL will be able to simultaneously publish English and Tibetan versions of every article, though this remains beyond the journal's present means. The cover of each issue will incorporate original artwork commissioned from Tibetan artists, together with an artist statement. The inaugural issue's cover features art by Tenzing Rigdol. The cover also features the journal's Tibetan title, བོད་ཀྱི་རྩོམ་རིག་དུས་དེབ།། *(Bod kyi rtsom rig dus deb)*, in Tibetan calligraphy penned by Pema Bhum.

In this inaugural issue we are pleased to present a wide spectrum of work under the three rubrics of research, translation, and criticism. In Research, Gedun Rabsal and Nicole Willock's article "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers: A Discussion on Decolonization and Anti-Colonial Translation Practices for Tibetan Poetry" chronicles Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's use of poetry in rees-

tablishing the authority of Tibetan lamas for the revival of Tibetan Buddhist culture following decades of state-sanctioned violence against Tibetans in the People's Republic of China. In "How to Read Like a Dead Horse Listens: Audience and Affect in 'The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang,'" Brandon Dotson explores the interplay between oral and textual literary works. He asks how might it matter to us as readers that the intended audience of an oral text is deceased? In "Studies in the Life and Thought of Mkhas grub rje II: Notes on Poetry, Poetics and Other Things in Mkhas grub rje's Oeuvre," Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp returns to a topic about which he has written before, the intellectual life of Khedrupjé, this time investigating this fourteenth/fifteenth-century author's perspectives on poetics.

Under Translation, Sarah Harding presents excerpts from a collection of spiritual songs of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage in her translation and study "Songs That Tell the Thousand-Year Story of the Shangpa Lineage." Lowell Cook translates Dondrup Gyal's short story, "Tsultrim Jyamtso," which reflects on the complex contemporary social and emotional worlds inhabited by Tibetan *tulkus* and those who know them. Palmo's "I Am Who I Am," here translated by Lama Jabb, delivers a searing portrayal of the conundrums of being a contemporary Tibetan woman writer. Lhashamgyal's "Sunshine on the Road" is translated by Rongwo Lugyal, who states that this short story by a major writer from Amdo "reflects the daily life of Tibetan people in central Tibet, in particular the people of low status, the people that society usually ignores or condemns."

Under Criticism we include several pieces. First, Janet Gyatso provides a compelling example of practical criticism in "Reading the Mila Life Story: Doubles, Double-Takes, and the Literary Affordances of Text." Next, Lama Jabb offers a commentary on Palmo's "I Am Who I Am" (translated above) and other recent writings from Tibetan women authors in "Distilling Joys and Woes: An Appreciation of Contemporary Tibetan Women's Writing (རྒྱུད་སྐྱག་བསྐལ་པའི་དེང་རབས་བོད་མོའི་བརྩམས་ཆོས་རྒྱུང་རོལ།)." Then the JTL editors interview historian, teacher, and translator Gedun Rabsal on his recent translation from English into Tibetan of Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel, *On the Road*. We include an edited transcript of our conversation together with a short video presentation and reading by the translator himself. Tashi Dekyid Monet reports on a groundbreaking international conference in "Conference Notes on the Tibetan Women Writing Symposium: A Celebration of Tibetan Women's Literature (གངས་ཅན་རྒྱས་མས་རྩོམ་རིག་གྲྭང་བ། བོད་མོའི་རྩོམ་རིག་མཛད་རྩེས་གཟིངས་སུ་བསྟོད་པ།)." Finally, Tenzing Rigdol brings the issue to a close with his artist statement on the cover art.

The Journal is grateful to Tsadra Foundation, whose financial support has allowed us to pursue an open access publication model. JTL is published in cooperation with the Buddhist Digital Resource Center and we are appreciative of BDRC's technical support in researching publication models and for its logistical help in its daily operations. We also thank the input of the Journal's editorial board, whose members span a wide range of geographic locations and research specialties. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we would like to acknowledge the tireless work of

JTL's managing editor Tenzin Dickie, who is an accomplished author and translator in her own right. She has been involved in every phase of the journal's development and without her input this issue would not have made it into print.

We hope you will find the pages that follow engaging. And we warmly encourage scholars and translators of Tibetan literature to submit work for possible publication in future issues of the journal.

Andy & Kurtis

"*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers:" A Discussion on Decolonization and Anti-Colonial Translation Practices for Tibetan Poetry[1]

Gedun Rabsal and Nicole Willock

Abstract Our translation and analysis of sections of the epic poem, "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" showcases Tibetan-language poetics or "nyen-ngak" (snyan ngag). In this case, this mode of fine writing serves to reestablish the authority of Tibetan lamas as integral to the revival of Tibetan Buddhist culture in the aftermath of decades of state-sanctioned violence against Tibetans in the People's Republic of China. Within the context of the early 1980s in China, the use of Tibetan *belles-lettres* flouts the nation-state's purported civilizing mission which legitimizes its rule by disparaging Tibetan culture as inferior or backward. Evading this denigrating discourse, the poem's author, the Buddhist monastic scholar, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung, creates a literary mandala radiating from his birthplace that centers on the subject of the poem, the Géluk Buddhist hierarch, the Tenth Panchen Lama, who was also born in Xunhua County, and was a key figure in the survival and continuance of Tibetan culture in the early Deng Xiaoping era. We translate sections of the twenty-page epic poem and discuss our translation choices as an ethical imperative to bring attention to the particularities of Tibetan poetics in terms of style and subject matter. We view this as part of a larger discourse on decolonization and anti-colonial translation practices because this foregrounds Indigenous epistemologies of literary aesthetics. In order to make these heuristic moves, we are indebted to insights from *Decolonising the Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and from a claim in the philosophy of aesthetics that decouples objective values from aesthetic principles, which help us open up discursive space for Tibetan Indigenous aesthetic and epistemic values in English translation. After establishing our theoretical basis, we analyze the intertextual literary figures in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" by drawing upon Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's *General Commentary on Poetics* (snyan ngag spyi don) to develop an appreciation for the specifics of Tibetan poetics and enrich the English language with new types of wordplay.

1. We express our thanks to an external reviewer for their comments on a draft of this paper and Emily Yeh for insightful discussions on decolonization and anti-colonial practices.

"And I always sing the same song: Let every language in the world express its unique musicality."[2]

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

Introduction

If we literary aficionados agree with PEN Award winner Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's aspiration to "let every language in the world express its unique musicality," then one must recognize that reading, writing, and translation practices are embedded in systems of power. This abstract notion becomes grounded in everyday life when we look at the lived experiences of Indigenous writers and scholars. Alak Tséten Zhabdrung, the author of thirteen volumes of Tibetan-language texts including the poem "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," was jailed in China from 1965 until 1976 for writing in his native Tibetan and for his subject position as a Tibetan Buddhist incarnate lama.[3] In 1978 when Tséten Zhabdrung finished composing his autobiography, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was in jail in his native Kenya for writing in his mother tongue of Gĩkũyũ and his subject position as an author-activist. Although their perspectives, literary oeuvres, and approaches to writing are vastly different from one another, both men were imprisoned for writing in their native languages within hegemonic regimes that systematically suppressed Indigenous languages (spoken and written) and cultures. With respect for and as allies of Indigenous writers, we highlight Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's invocation to "let every language in the world express its unique musicality" to advocate for Indigenous languages and to promote world literature in translation. This article on the poem "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" (*rtogs brjod dngul gyi me tog*) in the inaugural issue of *Journal of Tibetan Literature* focuses on Tibetan poetics, i.e. *nyen-ngak* (*snyan ngag*), by taking an interdisciplinary approach that draws in part on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*, an argument within the philosophy of aesthetics, and aspects of Tibetan literary criticism by the poem's author.

Whereas Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o marshalled the politics of language, perhaps most formidably in his *Decolonising the Mind*, to advocate for publishing and writing in his mother tongue but eventually was forced to live in exile,[4] Alak Tséten Zhabdrung promoted Tibetan language education and publishing within the People's Republic of China (PRC), in particular, within its discourse on ethnic-national minorities (*minzu*), and he never went overseas.[5] Further, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung did

2. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's acceptance speech for the 2022 PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature. https://brittlepaper.com/2022/03/pen-made-me-return-to-gikuyu-ngugi-wa-thiongos-acceptance-speech-at-the-pen-nabokov-award-ceremony2/ Accessed March 15, 2022.
3. Willock 2021, 44.
4. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/an-interview-with-ngugi-wa-thiongo. Accessed March 16, 2022.
5. Willock 2021, 219–227.

not identify the PRC as a colonial regime vis-à-vis Tibet and throughout his life upheld the notion that Tibetan language and culture would be supported by the nation-state. So why place this text written by a Buddhist monk in China within the discourse on decolonization especially since we are aware of the pitfalls of using "decolonization" as a metaphor for all social justice issues?[6] In this study of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," decolonization theory, in particular aspects of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind,* can be useful for three reasons: 1) to establish the conditions to act as allies to those writing in Indigenous languages and to recognize the deep connections between Indigenous languages and land rights; 2) to counter the ideological tendencies of hegemonic regimes that disparage Indigenous languages and literature; and 3) to connect Tibetan writings with other Indigenous writers around the world even though the case of Tibet vis-à-vis colonization is complex.

Placing "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" within the decolonization discourse of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o also points to a way of addressing negative evaluations of Tibetan literature and poetics. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ identifies the phenomena of "colonial alienation" which "starts with a deliberate dissociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and the community."[7] This results in part from a systematic denigration of Indigenous languages and cultures in formal education. "In schools and universities our Kenyan languages," Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o explains, "...were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation, and punishment."[8] In Tibetan areas of China, the situation is very similar to that of Kenya. While Tséten Zhabdrung was in jail, education in Tibetan language was forbidden and all Tibetan literature and writings were banned as "poisonous weeds."[9] Even after liberalization under Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s, state rhetoric denigrates Tibet as "backward" and "underdeveloped" as its civilizing mission is one of the ways it legitimizes its rule over Tibet as benefactors.[10] The editors of a volume on Tibetan literature which published "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" recognize how scholars in China (presumably both Chinese and Tibetan) devalue this rich literary tradition.[11] When it comes to Tibetan poetics or *nyen-ngak* in particular, Western scholars also express their distaste of this style of writing[12] and rarely pay attention to the vast commentarial tradition on poetics that allows one to understand this system of lit-

6. "Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools." Tuck and Yang 2012, 1.
7. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986, 28.
8. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986, 28.
9. Pema Bhum 2001.
10. On Chinese state civilizing projects vis-à-vis ethnic minorities, see Harrell 1995: 4–7; On how narratives of the benevolence of Chinese-state altruism mask asymmetrical power relations between Tibetan citizens and the state on land development projects and personhood see Yeh 2013: 264–267 and Makley 2018: 46–56.
11. Kapstein 2003, 790.
12. See also Nancy Lin, forthcoming, "What Language We Dare Learn and Speak: Decolonizing the Study of Tibetan Poetry."

erary aesthetics on its own terms. For Ngũgĩ, the answer to the problem of colonial alienation was to abandon writing in the language of the colonizer and to write in his native language.[13] He also advocated for paying attention to the specifics of languages when he wrote, "Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries."[14] Tséten Zhabdrung similarly disregarded the hegemonic language, which in his case was Chinese,[15] and wrote in Tibetan. His "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" showcases Tibetan-language poetics or *nyen-ngak*. This mode of fine writing serves to reestablish the authority of Tibetan lamas as integral to the revival of Tibetan Buddhist culture in the aftermath of decades of state-sanctioned violence against Tibetans in the People's Republic of China.

The complexity involved in any discussion on Tibetan literature vis-à-vis colonization has to do with the contested historical status of Tibet's sovereignty. The Chinese Communist Party vehemently denies that it has colonized Tibet and insists that Tibet has been part of the Motherland "since ancient times."[16] In opposition to this claim, some American scholars and Tibetan historians identify Tibet as a colony of China since the People's Liberation Army seized control over Tibetan territories.[17] For example, Carole McGranahan makes the case for identifying the PRC regime as an "empire" and recognizes its colonial presence in Tibet as settler colonialism and not internal colonialism.[18] In his description of the social conditions that gave rise to modern Tibetan literature in the mid-late 20th century ("*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" was written in 1981), Tsering Shakya foregrounds the role of Chinese colonialism:

> The consolidation of Chinese rule in Tibet resulted not only in political and administrative control of the region but also in Tibet's first encounter with the modern world—that is, with engagement with a technologically-advanced society imbued with a modern and materialistic ideology. One also has to take into account the missionary zeal of the new Communist regime in China, which focused not only on the incorporation of Tibet into the great 'Motherland' of China but also on a colonial mission of 'civilising' the backward region. The structural displacement of Tibetan society by Chinese colonial rule has proved to be the most signif-

13. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986, 28.
14. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986, 28.
15. Interestingly both Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Tséten Zhabdrung were proficient in the dominant language of their respective countries, English and Chinese respectively.
16. Sperling 2009.
17. This terminology refers to ethnic or cultural Tibet in recognition that the Lhasa Podrang Government did not have control over all territories inhabited by Tibetans. On western academic arguments on the contested terrain of Tibet, see McGranahan 2010, 48–52.
18. McGranahan 2019, 521–522.

icant factor in the creation of the Tibetan experience of the modern world.[19]

To be clear, "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" does not even mention the Chinese state and does not call attention to the status of Tibet's sovereignty vis-à-vis China. However, the poem discursively repatriates Tibetan territory by creating a literary mandala—a sacred landscape that transforms state-controlled land into a terrain that supports the authority of Tibetan Buddhist lamas. While the text makes this decolonizing move, we authors recognize that our analysis is not calling for the return of Indigenous land, and therefore we view our heuristic moves as both anti-colonial and anti-Orientalist practices.[20] Within the context of the early 1980s in China, the use of Tibetan *belles-lettres* flouts the nation-state's purported civilizing mission which legitimizes its rule by disparaging Tibetan culture as inferior or backward. "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" has not been translated into English before, therefore this analysis is made possible through acts of translation.

Since Lama Jabb's path-breaking keynote speech "An Act of Bardo: Translating Tibetan Poetry," which systematically theorized "translation practices"[21] for Tibetan Studies, our attention has turned to ways to mitigate the violence committed against Tibetan texts, especially poetry due to the erasure of sound, cadence, and mood in English language translations. To diminish this, we begin by contextualizing the formal aspects of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers." Another approach that we use to do this is to provide the Tibetan original next to the English translation. Another strategy in translation theory known as "foreignization" maintains the foreignness of the original text by resisting the dominance of the target language and its culture as an ethical imperative for the translator.[22] We also view the technique of "foreignizing" as an ethical imperative; however, we move away from employing this term because we view English language as capacious enough to include Tibetan Indigenous aesthetic and epistemic values within it. In order to open up the possibility of developing an appreciation for Tibetan poetics in English, we make the theoretical move to decouple aesthetic principles from objective values to view good taste as a capacity. With this in mind, readers can perhaps develop an appreciation of Tibetan literary figures, similar to the way in which, for example, the Haiku is appreciated in English as it is in Japanese. "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" provides a valuable opportunity to explore Tibetan literary forms because the author annotates stanzas with the types of literary figures he draws upon as a poet. In the last section of our essay, we analyze these literary embellishments such as types of simile and metaphor in light of the author's *A General Commentary on Poetics* (*snyan ngag spyi don*). The insertion of literary figures coupled with Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's commentary on them enable us translators to dive into the specifics of Tibetan poetics enriching the English language with new types of wordplay.

19. Tsering Shakya 2004, 43.
20. See Tuck and Yang 2012; Liboiron 2021, 8–10.
21. On translation practices, see Venuti 2017; Bassnett 2011; Bellos 2011.
22. Venuti 2017.

Contextualizing "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers"

Prior to presenting our translation of *"Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," we contextualize formal aspects of the poem and consider some of the varying approaches available to readers of this long poem.[23] Some readers may be able to read the Tibetan text alongside its English translation. The presence of the Tibetan text helps to lessen some of the violence committed against the Tibetan language through the erasure of syntax, meter, and phonics in its translation as mentioned above.[24] Some who read Tibetan, like those who do not, may find its ornate style difficult to understand. Further, due to intertextual insertions of poetic figures and Indic-inspired narratives, a reader not versed in Tibetan adaptations of Sanskrit *kāvya* may find this disorientating. For others the literary mastery of *"Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" will become more apparent through textual analysis.

The poem's title *"Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," its sections, verse structure, and literary inspirations situate it within a literary tradition in Tibet that developed after Sanskrit *kāvya* was translated into Tibetan in the 13th century. Its author is the Tibetan Buddhist polymath Alak Tséten Zhabdrung Jikmé Rigpai Lodrö (A lags Tshe tan zhabs drung 'jigs med rigs pa'i blo gros, 1910–1985); in short, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung, whereby Alak is an honorific title in Amdo Tibetan dialect. He was among the few monastically-trained Tibetan scholars who survived the tumultuous twenty-years of social and political chaos (ca. 1958–78) that decimated Tibetan society and culture in China. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung became renowned for his contributions to the academic study of Tibetan language, history, and literature, as well as the revival of Buddhist monasteries and monastic ordination lineages in eastern Tibet (Amdo).[25] During the waxing moon of the 11th month of the iron-monkey year (winter of 1980/1981), despite the relative political liberalization under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, continued restrictions on religious practice forced the author to compose this poem not within his monastic quarters, but at his familial residence.[26] The subject of his poem is the esteemed Buddhist hierarch of the Géluk school of Tibetan Buddhism,

23. Bronner and Hallisey (2022, 4) point out the importance of being attentive to our reading practices when approaching world literature: "Sometimes we read to get something that we can use, other times our reading is an end in itself. This means that when we read translations, sometimes we read to learn more about a culture in a different time or place, while sometimes we read translations just for the pleasure that the text in translation will hopefully give us. We can also remind ourselves that we approach a text in different ways. We can try to get nearer by gathering knowledge about the context and about the other texts that the original assumed its readers would know. We can also read while remaining afar, unfazed by our lack of such knowhow."
24. Lama Jabb's keynote speech, "An Act of Bardo: Translating Tibetan Poetry," at the Lotsawa Translation Workshop University of Colorado Boulder, October 5–8, 2018. Tsadra Foundation Media Channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZRJnPCP5Z8.
25. Willock 2021.
26. Tshe ten zhabs drung 2007, 3: 278; Willock 2021, p. 211.

the Tenth Panchen Lama Losang Trinley Chökyi Gyaltsen (Blo bzang phrin las chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1938–1989), who was born in the same county as Alak Tséten Zhabdrung. The poem commemorates the Panchen Lama's tour of Amdo in the summer of 1980.

"*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" was published multiple times in the People's Republic of China between 1985 and 2007.[27] An excerpt of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" was first published in *Light Rain,*[28] the literary magazine which is credited with launching modern Tibetan literature.[29] Then it was published in its entirety in the Tibetan-language volumes: *Ingots of Gold* (1988)[30] and *The Collected Works of Tséten Zhabdrung Jikmé Rigpai Lodrö*. We referred to the latter publication for our translation.[31]

"*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" is divided into eight sections. Following Tibetan literary conventions, each chapter title concludes that section. Our translation follows standard English-language conventions, whereby a section's title precedes its content. The title and length of each section are as follows: 1) Offering Verses to the Field of Holy Persons, Wondrous Words Setting the Stage for a Perfect Topic in eleven stanzas; 2) Wondrous Words on The Mountains and Forests of the Birthplace of the Holy One, a Leader of Gods and People in eighteen stanzas; 3) Wondrous Words on the Miraculous Achievements of Early Buddhists in this Area in nine stanzas; 4) Wondrous Words in Praise of the Environment and the Inhabitants South of the Machu River in eight stanzas; 5) Wondrous Words on the Merit of the All-Seeing One at Bīdo Monastery in sixteen stanzas; 6) Wondrous Words, Soft Rain Falling from the Sky, and the Benefit of Visiting the Ewam Retreat at Karing Monastery (Ka ring) in nineteen stanzas; 7) Wondrous Words on Traveling to Gyashu (Rgya zhu) at the Invitation of the Common People and the Community of Dentik (Dan tig) Monastery, the First Sacred Place in Amdo in thirty-two stanzas; and the final section: 8) Wondrous Words on Visiting the Family Residence of Jikmé Rigpai Lodrö, a Buddhist monk, in eighteen stanzas.

Following the rules of Tibetan *kāvya*-style meter, each stanza consists of four lines and has the same number of syllables per line. From stanza to stanza, the syllable count varies throughout the poem. The majority of lines are nine-syllables long and the longest are fifteen.

Due to the length of this poem, we selected a minimum of two stanzas from each section, prioritizing those selected based on content and the intertextual literary figure annotated by the author in the stanza. The poem ends with a colophon written in prose within which Alak Tséten Zhabdrung details his literary inspiration for this work—an *avadāna* composed by his teacher,

27. Tshe tan zhabs drung 1985: 29–30; 1988, 2166–2197; 2007, 3: 263–278.
28. Tshe tan zhabs drung 1985, 29–30.
29. Tsering Shakya 2008, 64–66.
30. Tshe tan zhabs drung 1988, 2166–2197.
31. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2007, 3: 263–278.

Giteng Losang Palden (Sgis steng blo bzang dpal ldan, 1881–1944), who penned "*Avadāna* of Golden Flowers," in a mix of verse and prose.

The colophon to "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" tells us that "*Avadāna* of Golden Flowers" commemorates the visit of the Tenth Panchen Lama's previous incarnation, the Ninth Panchen Lama Thupten Chökyi Nyima (Thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma, 1883–1937) to Rongwo Monastery in Rebgong at the behest of its head incarnate lama, Shar Kalden Losang Trinley Lungtok Gyatso (Shar skal ldan blo bzang 'phrin las lung rtogs rgya mtsho, 1916–1978); a.k.a. Shar Kalden Gyatso.[32] Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's teacher Giteng Rinpoché proclaimed in the first stanzas of his poem that the Seventh Shar Kalden Gyatso was the reincarnation of Dromtönpa (1004/5–1064) and the Ninth Panchen Rinpoche was the emanation of the great Indian Paṇḍita Atīśa Dīpaṃkara (982–1054), who is accredited with initiating the Buddhist renaissance in the 11th century. Drawing upon Tibetan Buddhist history, Giteng Rinpoché compares the devotion of the disciple Dromtönpa who organized Atīśa's teaching circuit in Central Tibet with that of Shar Kalden Gyatso, who welcomed his guru, the Ninth Panchen Lama, to his monastery with great fanfare.

Likewise, the story told in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" honors the Tenth Panchen Lama's visit to the region at a key historical juncture marking the beginning of a Buddhist revival in the post-Mao era. Like a mandala radiating outward from the birthplace of the poet and his subject, the area, referred to as "South-North" (*lho byang*) throughout the poem is the territory north and south of the divide caused by the Machu River. On the south side lies Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, the Chinese political name for the county of their birthplaces.

32. See also 'Jam dbyang grags pa 1999, 204.

Selected stanzas from "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers"

1) **Offering Verses to the Field of Holy Persons, Wondrous Words Setting the Stage for a Perfect Topic:**	
མཚན་དཔེ་ལྡན་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀུན་གྱིས་ཀྱང་།། སྤྲ་ལའི་ལྗོངས་འདི་ཅི་དགར་བོར་བ་ནི།། ཐུགས་རྗེའི་གཅིར་མཛོད་ཟླ་བ་ལྟོད་གཅིག་པུས།། སྐྱེན་རས་བཙས་པའི་བཀའ་དྲིན་བསམ་ལས་འདས།།	As all Buddhas with their characteristic marks voluntarily left this land of the sal tree,[33] you alone, Matchless Treasure of Compassion, transcend kindness by looking upon us! (1.5)
འདི་ནི་མ་བརྟགས་ཉམས་དགའི་གླུ་ངག་མ་ཡིན་ལྟ་ ཅེན་ཚངས་པའི་གྲེ་འཁྱུར་ཏེ།། གང་བྱང་ཆོག་སྟེབ་བཅོས་མའི་ངག་རྩོམ་མ་ཡིན་མཆོ་ བྱང་སྐེག་མོ་དགྱེས་པའི་དབྱངས།། འཕེལ་མེད་བྱང་ཆུལ་སྦྱ་བའི་ཅ་ཅོ་མ་ཡིན་འཕགས་ཆེན་ དམ་པའི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྗོད།། རབ་བཏགས་ཕུལ་བྱང་ཆོག་གིས་འྲེད་སྤྲོག་མ་ཡིན་ བདེན་དོན་ལྟག་པའི་བརྗོད་བྱས་ཕྱུག། བསྟོན་དོར་གཟུགས་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱན།	This is not some happy, naive lyrical song, but is the reverberations of Lord Brahmā's vocals. It is not an artificial mumbo jumbo rambling of words, but is the Lotus-born goddess'[34] joyous melody. It is not the jibber jabber of indiscriminate noise, but is an avadāna about a great holy being. It is not boasting with fine exaggerations, but is replete with topics pouring out the truth! (1.10) Metaphor that conceals reality (*tattvāpahnava rūpaka)*.
རོ་འཛིན་སྤོག་ཞགས་འཕྲུག་པ་དོན་ཡོད་ཕྱིར།། ཐམས་ཅད་གཟིགས་པའི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ཆ་ཙམ་ཞིག དབྱངས་ཅན་ཕང་འགྲོའི་རྒྱུད་དུ་དབངས་པ་ལ།། དད་ལྡན་ཆ་བས་ཡུད་ཙམ་གསན་པར་རིགས།།	For this darting flash, a ribbon lightning of a taste-organ to be purposeful, on the strings of Sarasvati's lute, I play a little avadāna song to the Omniscient One. Faithful ones, prick up your ears! (1.11)

33. The "land of the sal tree" refers to Tibet.

34. An epithet for Sarasvatī, the goddess of literature and music. She is called Yangchenma in Tibetan.

2) **Wondrous Words on The Mountains and Forests of the Birthplace of the Holy One, a Leader of Gods and People:**	
བྱང་ན་རྒྱལ་སྲས་གཞོན་ནུ་དོན་གྲུབ་ཀྱིས།། སྒྲིན་པའི་ཕར་ཕྱིན་སྒྲོད་མཆོག་རྫོགས་མངོད་པའི།། དན་ཏིག་ཤེལ་ཀྱི་རི་བོ་གྲུབ་པའི་གནས།། གནོད་སྦྱིན་ཁྲོས་པའི་ཟམས་བརྒྱ་ཡྱན་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ།།	In the north young prince Döndrup[35] accomplished the Perfection of Generosity at Dentik, the Crystal Mountain, the sacred place of siddhas, where forms of fearsome yakṣa appear naturally. (2.5)
མཇོས་པར་བྱས་སོ་སྐྱེ་བྱང་འཇོམ་མའི་བྱོན།། ཚངས་ཆེན་བློ་གྲོས་མེ་ལོང་ཕང་བར་ཏེ།། མཐོ་རིས་སྐྱིད་ཚལ་སྐྱིང་དུ་སྐུག་པའི་དཔྱིད།། མདོ་ཁམས་སྐྱེ་བྱང་འཇོམ་མའི་ཐིག་ལེར་ཅོ།། བྱ་བ་ཐོག་མའི་གསལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱན།	Exquisitely made are: the "South-North" expanse of mother-earth[36] in the lap of Great Brahmā's paradise, the Wisdom Mirror,[37] and likewise, springtime in the glorious gardens of the heavenly realm, the essence of mother-earth's "South-North" in Dokham (2.8) Illuminator *(dīpaka alaṃkāra)* of action in the initial foot
ཅི་འདི་སྐབས་གསུམ་དབང་པོའི་ཡུལ་སྤྲོངས་སུ།། བདག་ཅག་མཐོ་རིས་སྐས་ཁར་འཛེགས་སམ་ཅི།། ཡང་ན་གདེངས་ཅན་གོང་གི་སྒྲིང་ཚལ་གྱི།། གནམ་སྐོ་ཟྱེ་སྟམ་བདག་ཡིད་ཁྱོགས་ལ་འཕྱང་།།	What's this? Have we climbed the ladder to higher realms—to the land of Indra, Lord of the Triple World, or have we opened the gateway to the gardens in the city of the Nāga? My mind sways to and fro like a palanquin. (2.12)
ཐེ་ཚོམ་གྱི་དཔེ་རྒྱན།	Simile expressing doubt (*saṃśayopamā*)

35. Name of the main protagonist in a Tibetan remake of the Vessantara jātaka tale. Young prince/Bodhisattva Döndrup is a previous incarnation of Siddhartha Gautama.
36. "Lho byang" is the region "south" (lho) and "north" (byang) of the Ma Chu/ River. Xunhua lies on the southern banks of the Ma Chu.
37. The lap of Brahmā's Wisdom Mirror is an epithet for heavenly realms parallel to "*mtho ris*" in the second couplet.

གནས་འདིར་ཉིན་མོ་ཚ་ཟེར་རླུ་བྱེད་ཅིང་།། མཚན་མོ་བསིལ་སྦྱིན་དབང་པོ་འཚར་བའི་ཕྱིར།། ལྷ་ཀླུའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་མཐོང་བ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ།། ཆུ་ཀླང་ལྷོ་རླུད་འཇོན་མའི་ལྷོངས་སུ་ངེས།། གཏན་འབེབས་ཀྱི་དཔེ།	Since in this place the sun causes heat of the day and the moon bestows coolness at night, I saw neither the realms of Gods nor Nāga so this certainly is the land south of the Machu. (2.13) Simile expressing decisiveness (*nirṇayopamā*)
3) Wondrous Words on the Miraculous Achievements of Early Buddhists in this Area	
བློང་དོར་འཕྲལ་མེད་འདོམས་པའི་འཆད་པ་དང་།། སྨྲ་ངན་ལོག་རྟོག་དྲངས་འཕྱིན་རྩོད་པའི་དཔལ།། ཚོམ་གྱན་དྲི་ཟའི་ང་རོར་འགྱགས་པའི་རྩོམ།། མཁས་པའི་བྱ་བ་རྣམ་གསུམ་འགྲན་བཞིན་འཕེལ།།	Teachings expound true discernment; Glorious debates uproot mistaken views and negative talk; Compositions summon all phenomena as the voice of celestial musicians; These three activities of the scholars prosper in competition. (3.2)
གསང་ཆེན་རླུང་སྟེ་རྣམ་བཞིའི་བུམ་བཟང་ལས།། ཚེ་གཅིག་ཉིད་ལ་སངས་རྒྱས་སར་འགོད་པའི།། ཉེ་ལམ་བདུད་རྩི་ངོ་བརྒྱས་རྩོལ་པའི་ཐྲུ།། མཁའ་སྤྱོད་ཞིང་དུ་འཕྱང་བའི་མཐའ་མི་ལང་།།	Countless are the yogis who flew to the Pureland of Vajrayoginī by imbibing the potent ambrosia of the quick path to reach the bhūmi of Buddhahood in one lifetime–a path from the perfect vessel of the four classes of Tantra, the Vajrayāna. (3.9)

4) Wondrous Words in Praise of the Environment and the Inhabitants South of the Machu River	
ཡ་མཚན་བཟོ་རིག་དགུ་ཐག་ཟུང་ལྡན་པའི།། འཇམ་དཔལ་གདུལ་ཞིང་མ་ཉ་ཅོ་ནའི་གྲོང་།། ཁྱད་འཕགས་གྲགས་པའི་རླུང་ཆུབ་ནམ་མཁའི་མཐར།། འགོག་མེད་འཕྲུང་བའི་ངོ་མཚར་ཆད་དུ་ཐྱུང་།།	Yadzi astounds with its myriad arts and crafts, a city of China, the realm of Mañjuśrī. The wind of its fame for excellence flies unhindered into the vast sky; wonderful and marvelous! (4.1)
གཞན་སྡེ་ཟིལ་གནོན་ས་ཅི་དཔའ་རྩལ་ཅན།། རིགས་གཟུགས་ལང་ཚོས་སྐེམས་པའི་འགྲོ་འདི་དག། ཚོས་རྒྱལ་མེས་དབོན་དུས་སུ་སོ་སྐྱང་དུ།། མངགས་པའི་ཝོ་ཏ་རང་གི་འཁྲུལ་མེད་རྒྱུད།།	With the strength and courage of a lion that overpowers outsiders, a people who take pride in their lineage, stature, and youthfulness, are Bho-ta, unmistakably of Tibetan descent, sent as border guards at the time of our ancestral Dharma Kings. (4.8)
5) Wondrous Words on the Merit of the All-Seeing One at Bīdo Monastery	
དེ་ཚེ་མིག་སྟོང་ལྡན་པ་གཟིགས་མོའི་ཕྱིར།། དགུང་སྟོན་སྨིན་གྱི་ཡོལ་བ་རྣམ་བསལ་ཏེ།། ཉིན་མོར་བྱེད་པའི་སྒྲོན་མེ་ལག་ཐོགས་ནས།། ས་ཐོག་འགྲིམ་པའི་ཚེ་འཕྲུལ་གཟུགས་སུ་ཤར།	At that time for the show, "The One Endowed with a Thousand-Eyes"[38] removed the curtain of clouds to reveal a blue sky and held the lamp that made it day. You appear as a magical display to wander the earth. (5.7)
མེཏས་པའི་ཉིན་ཏ་ཅང་གནམ་ཐང་བ་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་རབ་བཏགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱན།	Postulation (*utprekṣā alaṃkāra*) written with focus on the great weather on the arrival day.

38. This is an epithet of the deity, Indra.

སྐུ་མཆོག་གསེར་གྱི་ལྷུན་པོ་མཐོང་བ་དང་།། གསུང་དབྱངས་ཆོས་ཀྱི་གན་ད་ཐོས་པའི་དགེས།། བགྱང་ཡས་སྐལ་ལྡན་སྐྱེས་དགྱེའི་ཡིད་ཀྱི་མཚོར།། ལེགས་ཚོགས་པད་མའི་སྡེན་བཟང་སྐྱེད་དུ་བསྒོམས།།	The virtue of seeing the glorious golden mountain, your holy body, and hearing the percussive *gandhi* woodblock of the Dharma, the melody of your teaching voice, has brought to creation the lotus groves of virtues in the lake of the mind of countless fortunate people. (5.16)
6) Wondrous Words, Soft Rain Falling from the Sky, and the Benefit of Visiting the Ewam Retreat at Karing Monastery (270–272)	
མི་འཇིགས་བཞི་ལྡན་དྲི་མེད་ནོར་གྱིས་གཏམས།། དམ་པའི་རྒྱབས་སྤེང་ཚོས་ཀྱི་གཟེགས་མས་ཕྱུག། རྒྱ་ཆེན་ཡོན་ཏན་གཏེར་དཔག་དགའ་བའི་རྒྱོང་།། བསྟན་པའི་མཚོ་ཆེན་གང་དེ་བདག་གི་སྐྱབས།།	Filled with pure jewels possessing the Four Fearlessnesses,[39] Replete with drops of Dharma, a series of waves of sacredness, I find refuge in the unfathomable depth of extensive virtues, the great ocean of the Dharma: Jigme Damchö Gyatso. (6.2).
དེ་ལྟ་ན་ཡང་བརྩེ་མེད་དྲས་ཀྱི་སྲིན།། ཁྲོས་པའི་ཟ་བྱེད་གནམ་ས་གདངས་པའི་ཁྱོན།། མཆེ་བའི་མཚོན་ཆ་གཅོགས་པའི་གཅོང་ནོང་དུ།། བརློག་མེད་ཧམས་ཟའི་ཚུལ་དེ་ཡ་རེ་ང་།། འཇིགས་རུང་གི་ཉམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱན།།	Despite this, the monster of the era of cruelty, Opened its wrathful mouth as wide as the space between the earth and sky, Between this gap--its teeth, weapons of fangs, Ate irrevocably and ferociously! Terrifying! (6.9) Laden with the affective state of fear (*bhayāna-karasavat*)

39. The Four Fearlessnesses are: (1) realization, (2) relinquishment, (3) teaching the overcoming of obstacles and (4) teaching the path of renunciation. Jamgon Kongtrul 2007, 345, n. 479.

སྐུ་ཡི་མཚན་དུའེ་མཇལ་བས་མི་ངོམས་ཤིང་།། གསུང་གི་རྒྱུད་མངས་ཉན་པས་མི་ཚོམ་པ།། འདི་འདྲའི་དགའ་སྟོན་ཁོད་མིན་སུ་ཡིས་སྤྱིན།། དུ་དུང་ཡང་ཡང་སྤྱོན་དང་ཐུགས་རྗེའི་གཏེར།།	Not satiated by seeing the marks of your Buddha body; Not contented with listening to the sitar's sound of your speech; Such a feast as this can only be provided by you O Treasure of Compassion, please, come, again and again! (6.19)
ཉེ་བཅས་ཀྱི་དགའ་བའི་རྒྱན།	An affectionate utterance with hope (*preyas alaṃkāra)*
7) **Wondrous Words on Traveling to Gyashu at the Invitation of the Common People and the Community of Dentik Monastery, the First Sacred Place in Amdo**	
གང་ཆེ་ལང་ཚོ་ཡོལ་བའི་ཁྲུར་གྱིས་མནན།། མཐྱིན་པའི་ཁུ་བྱག་མོན་གྱི་ནགས་སུ་ཡིབ།། དེ་ལྟ་ན་ཡང་དད་གདུང་ཤུགས་དྲག་བློས།། གསོལ་འདེབས་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་རོལ་མོ་བདག་གིས་དཀྲོལ།།	When pressed down by the burden of my passing youth, The cuckoo bird of my throat hid in the Mon Forests; However, by my mind, faith, and strong yearning, I performed this melodious instrument for dedication prayers. (7.26)
ཚ་ཤས་གཟུགས་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱན།	Metaphor of attributes (*avayava rūpaka*)
དེ་ནས་སྐབས་བབ་ཡིད་ལ་བརྟགས་པའི་འཕྲས།། ཚོག་གི་ལོ་འདབ་སྡུག་པོས་མ་བསྒྲིབས་པར།། གང་ཞུས་གསན་དགོངས་མཛད་པའི་དགའ་སྟོན་གྱིས།། སྐལ་བཟང་ཡིད་ལ་དད་གུས་ཐོབ་པའི་མཐར།།	After that, the moment befell when the fruits of what was on my mind were reported without obscuring these thoughts thick with vines of words. With a feast of listening and reflecting, the fortunate obtained faith and veneration in their minds, and then said: (7.28)
བསྟན་པ་རིན་ཆེན་ཉིན་མོའི་མགོན་ལྟར་གསལ།། འཇོ་བའི་བདེ་སྐྱིད་པད་ཚལ་ལྟར་རྒྱས་སྤྲད།། སྣང་བ་མཐའ་ཡས་པཊ་ཆེན་ཐམས་ཅད་མཁྱེན།། སྐུ་ཚེ་ཞབས་པད་བསྐལ་བརྒྱར་བརྟན་པར་སྨོན།།	"For the sake of enriching the lotus grove, all sentient beings, and the precious Dharma, luminous as the sun, Boundless Light, Amitābha, the exalted Panchen, may your lotus feet remain for hundreds of eons!" (7.29)

ཞེས་པའི་དང་སྒོང་བདེན་ཚོག་གྲུབ་པའི་ངག། གཉིའི་སྒྲ་དབྱངས་རྣས་འཕོས་མདུན་བསུས་ནས།། དུས་བཞི་པྲི་མའི་གསང་ཆེན་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་དུ།། རྗེས་འཛིན་ཞལ་བཞེས་སྩོལ་བར་གསོལ་བ་བཏབ།།	Uttering this, speech that manifests the truth of a sage's words, and then with a welcoming melody similar to the sounds of the *gandhi* woodblock, I supplicated you to bestow the promise to guide us as the Vajrayāna Mandala in the Fourth Era.[40] (7.30)
དེ་ཚེ་ཀུན་གཟིགས་ཆེན་པོས་ལེགས་སོའི་དབྱངས།། བཀའ་སྩལ་གསུང་གིས་བསྟགས་བརྗོད་མཛད་དང་ ལྡན།། སྐེ་ཚན་ས་ལ་རེག་པའི་ལྟ་སོས་ཀྱིས།། བདག་མཐིན་བཀྲན་པའི་བཀའ་དྲིན་ཆད་བྱང་ཐོབ།།	Then the All-Seeing One melodiously proclaimed, "Of course!" Along with words of praise, He adorned my neck with a *katag*[41] so long its ends touched the ground, and I received a marvelous kindness. (7.31)
ཕན་བདེ་འབྱུང་གནས་རྒྱལ་བསྟན་འཕེལ་ཕྱིར་དང་།། ཡངས་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁམས་དགའ་བདེས་འཚོ་བའི་སླད།། ཐུགས་དང་མཚམས་སུ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་མེ་ཏོག་ཚར།། ཤེ་དགར་འབབ་པའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཡིད་བཞིན་གྲུབ།།	In order to spread Buddhist teachings, the source of benefit and happiness, and for the sake of expanding joy and happiness for the entire country, the serendipitous, wish-fulfilling moment finished with auspicious flowers of summer rain in all directions! (7.32)

40. The editors of *Ingots of Gold* note that in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," "the fourth era" refers to the periods of the Shambhala Kings. The Panchen Lamas are understood to be emanations of the Shambala Kings. They remain for a total of one thousand eight hundred years, and each time period is split into four sets of four hundred and fifty years, each time has its own name. The "fourth era" is the name of the final time period. Blo bzang chos grags and Bsod nams rtse mo 1988, 2197, n. 49.

41. A white ceremonial scarf frequently made of silk. The longer the scarf the more respect conveyed.

8) **Wondrous Words on Visiting the Family Residence of Jikmé Rigpai Lodrö, a Buddhist monk**	
སྐས་ཀྱང་མ་བསྐུལ་བྱ་མོའི་གན་དུ་བྱོན།། གནས་བབ་མ་ཞུས་གསུང་གིས་དབུགས་དབྱང་མཛད་དུ།། གནང་བར་མ་གསོལ་འཕྲོར་འབྲུ་གཙུག་ཏུ་བགོད།། འདི་ཕྱིར་དགེ་བའི་ཕྱག་དབང་བཀའ་དྲིན་བསྟལ།།	Without anyone asking, he approached the girl, Without describing the situation, his voice soothed her, Without being asked to bestow it, he placed blessed-barley on her crown. A blessing, for the benefit of this and future lives, was graciously granted. (8.14)
གང་འདི་རང་གིས་དངོས་སུ་མཐོང་མ་གཏོགས།། བརྒྱད་དེ་སྨས་པས་སུ་ཞིག་ཡིད་ཆོན་བྱེད།། འཕགས་ཆེན་མཛད་སྤྲོད་ཕྲ་མོ་འདི་ཙམ་ཡང་།། མངོན་སུམ་ལ་མཐལ་བདག་ཅག་སྣལ་བ་སྦོམ།།	This occurrence, unless personally witnessed who would believe it, if this was told by someone else? With this small act of great being, we are fortunate to see this in person. (8.15)

Anti-Colonial Translation Practice: Theorizing Good Taste as a Capacity

Whether one finds "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" aesthetically pleasing or not can be said to be a matter of taste. The problem inherent in reading a Tibetan literary epic poem in translation, such as "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," might be framed in a simple way: how can we use the English language to think outside American-English literary discourse? Consider, for example, the challenge of comprehending the opening verse of our translation:

> As all Buddhas with their characteristic marks
> voluntarily left this land of the sal tree,
> you alone, Matchless Treasure of Compassion,
> transcend kindness by looking upon us! (1.5)

What is meant by "all Buddhas" and why did they leave? Where is this land of a sal tree? Who is the Matchless Treasure of Compassion? Such queries point to the epistemic discursive structures within which Tibetan language practices are embedded. This verse like others in the

first section of *"Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" sets the stage for the rest of the poem. Based on this context, "Matchless Treasure of Compassion" becomes an epithet for The Tenth Panchen Lama who stayed in Tibet to "look upon" those who had remained after "all Buddhas," a reference to Buddhist teachers such as the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, left "the land of the Sal tree," a moniker for Tibet, as refugees. The writing style employed throughout "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," is called *nyen-ngak* in Tibetan, which literally means "mellifluous words" or "sweet-sounding expressions." Due to its reliance on literary forms and specific cultural references, some scholars have devalued Tibetan poetics as distasteful.

In approaching "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," we suggest removing objective values from taste because such evaluations thwart efforts to develop a capacity for understanding the aesthetic theories and epistemic systems which undergird literary masterpieces written in this style. Indebted to insights from Indigenous poets and scholars to decolonize the field of world literature, we give attention to culturally specific references and uses of Tibetan language. Before diving into those, we begin our analysis by building on a theory of good taste as a capacity in order to open up discursive space for Tibetan Indigenous aesthetic and epistemic values.

The Tibetan term *nyen-ngak* (*snyan ngag*) is the translation of the Sanskrit term *kāvya.* In the Tibetan context, the term connotes both "poetry" and "poetics."[42] Although on the Indian subcontinent there were many texts and fervent debates on the parameters of literary aesthetics, one Sanskrit treatise, *The Mirror of Poetry* (Skt.: *Kāvyadarśa*, Tib. *Snyan ngag me long*) by Indian pundit Daṇḍin (fl. 8th century) came to dominate Tibetan literary discourse. Tibetan translations and commentaries thereof, such as Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's *A General Commentary on Poetics* (*Snyan ngag spyi don*), follow the three-chapter structure of Daṇḍin's *The Mirror of Poetry*. The first chapter focuses on literary criticism by defining *kāvya* and aesthetic principles on what constitutes tasteful or beautiful writing. The next two chapters provide descriptions and examples of Sanskrit literary devices—some of which Alak Tséten Zhabdrung identifies in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers." The general moniker for these literary devices is "embellishment" or "ornamentation" (Skt. *alaṃkāra*, Tib. *rgyan*). Daṇḍin's second chapter describes and provides examples of literary "embellishments" or rhetorical figures (*arthālaṃkāra*, *don rgyan*). The final chapter elaborates on

42. The pioneering work by Yigal Bronner, David Shulman, Gary Tubb (2014) has shown how robust *kāvya* literature is in varying cultural contexts. This points to a need for a history of *kāvya* in the Tibetan context. For example, Janet Gyatso and Pema Bhum (2022 forthcoming) highlight the didactic importance of example "dpe brjod" texts in teaching *kāvya* in Tibet. In the South Asian context, Pollock (2016, xvii–iii) views *kāvya* in two ways—as a superordinate term "literature" or "belles-lettres" and as a subordinate term "poetry." Pollock uses the term "rasa theory" to discuss literary aesthetics encompassing a variety of issues from reader-response theory to philosophical theories on aesthetics and linguistic techniques in poetry and literature. More research needs to be done on this in the Tibetan context in order to evaluate the degree of influence that Daṇḍin's *rasa* theory had vis-a-vis intellectual and philosophical developments of Buddhism; cf. Gold 2007, 120–130; Martin 2014. It is the point of view of the authors that it would be categorically incorrect to interpret Tibetan *kāvya* poetics as unoriginal or simply derivative of the Indic model.

phonetically-based literary devices (*śabdālaṃkāra*, *sgra rgyan*). "Embellishment" or "ornamentation" was the key element to Daṇḍin's aesthetic theory on the literary arts, i.e., poets should adorn poetry with literary devices as one would decorate the body with jewelry—to make it more beautiful.[43] Whether a reader perceives this style of writing as beautiful can be said to be a matter of taste.

Because the metaphor of "taste" for aesthetic sensibility can be found across cultures in treatises by Hume, Daṇḍin, and Tséten Zhabdrung alike,[44] it can help to make sense of what is experienced when reading *kāvya*-style writing in a poem, such as that found in *"Avadāna* of Silver Flowers." For Alak Tséten Zhabdrung "taste" makes a poem particularly exceptional,[45] and this involves the proper use of literary figures as we detail below. We dedicate much of this essay to show how his poem *"Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" exemplifies the cultivation of literary "taste" (*nyams*) through the skillful application of literary figures.

In the philosophy of aesthetics Alan Goldman decouples objective values from aesthetic principles as he argues: "[Good] taste as a capacity develops through its exercise, as do other capacities."[46] For Goldman, bad taste is not developed as a capacity. This hermeneutic places "taste" within concepts of agency and suggests that a person develops good taste through its practice. Goldman's research lies within Euro-American philosophy of aesthetics, and therefore does not address how aesthetic principles within knowledge regimes from other cultures might be cultivated.[47]

In western academic discourse, particularly in the fields of Buddhist Studies and Tibetan Studies, a common negative evaluation of *nyen-ngak* style is that it is artificial.[48] One western critic of *nyen-ngak* was Rolf Alfred Stein, a German-born French Tibetologist, who as Dan Martin points out, assessed Tibetan *kāvya* as follows: "Numerous works ... are written in an ornate, flowery style, modeled on the Indian *alaṃkāra*. Although this style certainly strikes us as turgid, and its ponderous tone and lengthy sentences are the translator's despair, it possesses a stylistic refinement which is undoubtedly much appreciated by Tibetans."[49] It seems since Stein's judgements nearly fifty years ago, assessments of Tibetan *kāvya*-writings have not changed much in the Academy.

Nancy Lin reflected on such evaluations of *kāvya* in a roundtable discussion on decolonizing the field of Tibetan Studies: "I noted the neglect of *snyan ngag* in western language scholarship, as well as expressions of distaste colleagues have shared with me: that it is contrived, artificial,

43. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 11; Eppling 1989, 333–335.
44. Although Hume doesn't seem to be the first to use the analogy of taste, he leans heavily upon this analogy. Cf. Singer and Dunn 2000, 94–96; Pollock 2016,–43; Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 15–16.
45. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 22.
46. Goldman 2019, 14.
47. For a critic thereof, see van Norden 2017, 6.
48. See also Lin forthcoming.
49. Cited in Martin 2014, 568.

baroque, pedantic."[50] Similar to Lin, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and postcolonial Indigenous scholars and poets underscore structural systemic biases,[51] especially those in academia, that treat Indigenous forms of literature and knowledge as inferior by ignoring them or misrepresenting them. For example, Cree poet Neal McLeod charges that academia continues to commit narrative violence against Indigenous epistemologies.[52] In the case of Tibetan poetry, Lin suggests that there is a tendency in western scholarship to favor the tastes of the Songs by the Sixth Dalai Lama or those of Milarepa that align with the sensibilities of English poetry, such as the "valorization of subjectivity, naturalness, and freedom from formal verse conventions."[53] Evaluations such as these underscore the ethics of decoupling objective values from notions of taste.

We suggest, that "to let every language sing" as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o intones, involves appreciating the diversity of cultural and linguistic particularities as articulated in *Decolonising the Mind*:

> Culture transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through the spoken and the written language, that is through a specific language. In other words, the capacity to speak, the capacity to order sounds in a manner that makes for mutual comprehension between human beings is universal. This is the universality of language, a quality specific to human beings. It corresponds to the universality of the struggle against nature and that between human beings. But the particularity of the sounds, the words, the word order into phrases and sentences, and the specific manner, or laws, of their ordering is what distinguishes one language from another. Thus a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries.[54]

Cree poet and scholar Neal McLeod similarly advocates for embracing a more inclusive and wider understanding of poetics in English literature: "By drawing upon the epic and traditional narratives of our [Cree] people, we can ground ourselves in cultural-specific references and linguistic anchors, allowing us, in turn, to resist the onslaught of modernity and colonialism, which, while

50. Lin 2021, 144. See also Lin forthcoming. I am grateful to Nancy Lin for sharing this draft.
51. McLeod 2014, 89. Cf. Comelo (2018) notes the epistemic violence against indigenous peoples of Columbia and articulates that "Indigenous language practices involve an ethical and political aesthetic; their beauty is not simply in the beauty of the words, but more importantly, in the beauty of thinking and acting according to a set of values" (196).
52. McLeod 2014, 89–90.
53. Lin 2021, 144–145. See also Lin forthcoming.
54. Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986, 15.

related, are not the same."[55] We propose that by paying attention to the "cultural-specific references" and "linguistic anchors," we can develop an appreciation of the literary aesthetic theories and knowledge systems that lie at the foundation of literary works, such as "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers". This happens by decoupling evaluative judgements from aesthetic principles. Through our translation and analysis of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," we aim to sharpen our senses to develop capacities to value this literary style in its cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts. We now turn to examine some of these.

Reclaiming Tibetan Ways of Knowing in Post-Mao China

By marshalling the Indo-Tibetan literary heritage of *kāvya* and *avadāna* in this composition, "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" imagines a poetic landscape in which Buddhist authority reigns. In the context of 1980s China, this serves both to flout state propaganda on the backwardness of Tibetan culture and to reinscribe territory scarred by socialist collectivism with a mandala of Buddhist sanctity necessary for a revival of Tibetan Buddhist practices. At the center of this literary mandala is the Panchen Lama, a key figure involved in the revival process. The first section of *"Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" sets the stage for the Tenth Panchen Lama's journey through the "South-North" region and also reminds readers of India, the home of *kāvya*, *avadāna*, and Buddhism. The poet invokes the Indic god, Brahmā, and his daughter, Sarasvatī, the goddess of literature and song, to announce the poem's genre*:* "It is not the jibber jabber of indiscriminate noise, but an *avadāna* about a great holy being" (1.10). By maintaining the Sanskrit term "*avadāna"* in our translation, we draw attention to the Sanskrit roots of this literary form, which became thoroughly integrated into Tibetan literary discourse over a millennium. At the end of the second couplet, we find the first example of the author's annotation of a literary figure at the end of a stanza: "[This poem] is not boasting with fine exaggerations; but is replete with topics pouring out the truth! (Metaphor of concealing reality)" (1.10). Poetic flow is interrupted by the insertion of the name of a literary figure i.e., "metaphor of concealing reality" (*bsnyon dor gzugs can gyi rgyan; Skt.: tattvāpahnava rūpaka).* The poet annotates the type of the literary figure after the stanza, but does not provide the Sanskrit terminology. We identified the Sanskrit term by comparing Tséten Zhabdrung's *A General Commentary on Poetics* with translations of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*. We added the Sanskrit to our translation to highlight the Indic origins of this literary art form. The poet's *A General Commentary on Poetics* is key to our analysis of specific literary figures in the final section of this essay.

Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's choice of the *avadāna* genre connects the Panchen Lama's tour of this area of eastern Tibet in summer 1980 with a form of biographical literature that recounts

55. McLeod 2014, 91.

the lives of the Buddha and his disciples or major historical figures, such as the emperor Aśoka.[56] Based on the Pali and Sanskrit recensions of the *Aśokāvadāna,* John Strong describes *avadāna* literature as a "[...] narrative of the religious deeds of an individual and is primarily intended to illustrate the workings of karma and the values of faith and devotion."[57] *Avadāna* literature is considered one of the "twelve branches of exalted speech" (Tib. *gsung rab yan lag bcu gnyis*).[58] The Dergé (Sde dge) edition of the Tibetan Buddhist canon contains around fourteen titles across the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* located in different sections. Some texts are found in the section devoted to past lives of the Buddha or *jātaka* (*skyes rabs*), while others are in the sutra (*mdo sde*) section. The Tibetan term *rtogs pa brjod pa* appears as early as the late 8th - early 9th century in Zhang Yeshé Dé's (Zhang ye shes sde) translation of *Sukarikāvadāna-nāma-sūtra* (*Phag mo'i rtogs pa brjod pa*) and in the 10th century in the *Kuṇalāvadāna* (*Ku na' la'i rtogs pa brjod pa*) by Rinchen Sangpo (Rin chen bzang po). This is around the same time that the Tibetan term for *kāvya* was coined by the learned translators.[59] Based on early Tibetan translations of eulogies to Sarasvatī, Dan Martin points out that the influence of *kāvya* had started prior to the Tibetan translation of Daṇḍin's *The Mirror of Poetry.*[60]

"Avadāna of Silver Flowers" draws attention to the historical prestige of this literary genre and the elite writing style of *nyen-ngak* among educated monastics. The prominence of Indic forms and styles increased after the Indian system of categorizing knowledge known as *rikné* (*rig gnas*, Skt: *pañcavidyāsthāna*) was introduced into Tibet in the twelfth century. The most important domain of knowledge in Tibet was the "inner science" of Buddhism, one of the five major *rikné*.[61] The literary arts dominates the five types of minor *rikné*: *kāvya* poetics (*snyan ngag*), composition (*sdeb sbyor*), kennings (*mngon brjod*), drama (*zlos gar*), and astrology (*skar rtsis*). In the twelfth century, Sanskrit literary culture became intertwined with scholarly ideals of moral and intellectual refinement that "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" revives in the twentieth century.[62]

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56. Quintman 2014, 6–7.
57. Strong 1983, 22.
58. The Twelve Branches of Excellent Speech (*gsung rab yan lag bcu gnyis*) are: 1) condensed,Tib. *mdo sde*, Skt. *sūtra*; 2) melodious, *dbyang kyis bsnyad pa*, *geya* ; 3) prophetic, *lung du bstan pa*, *vyākaraōa;* 4) verse, *tshigs su bcad* pa, *gātā;* 5) spoken with purpose, *chad du brjod pa*, *udāna*; 6) conversatory, *gleng gzhi*, *nidāna*; 7) biographical or expessing realization, *rtogs pa brjod pa*, *avadāna*; 8) historical, *de lta bu byung ba*, *itivṛittaka;* 9) concerning past lives, *skyes pa rabs*, *jatāka* 10) very detailed, *shin tu rgyas pa*, *vaipulya;* 11) marvelous, *rmad du byung ba*, *adbhutadharma*; 12) establishing a truth, *gtan la phab pa, upadeśa*. In O rgyan 'Jigs med chos kyi dbang po (Patrul Rinpoche) 1998, 438.
59. Kapstein (2003, 758) notes both the term for *kavi* (*snyan ngag mkhan*) and *kāvya* (*snyan dngags*) were coined at this time. Dan Martin (2014) cites Kapstein and also highlights the change in the spelling of *kāvya* in Tibetan to *snyan ngag*.
60. Martin 2014, 573.
61. The five major fields of knowledge are logic (*gtan tshigs kyi rig pa*), medicine (*gso ba'i rig pa*), visual arts (*bzo gnas rig pa*), grammar (*sgra'i rig pa*), and inner knowledge (*nang gyi rig pa*), which refers to Buddhism, Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, 1900.
62. Kapstein 2003, 777.

Poetic excellence as integral to the life of a scholar (*mkhas pa*) traces back to the influence of Sakya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) who introduced *rikné* and the ideals that it carried to Tibetans in his *Gateway to Learning* (*Mkhas pa rnams 'jug pa'i sgo*).[63] Another text, *Complete Knowledge of Rikné* (*Rig gnas kun shes*) written by Taktsang Lotsawa Sherab Rinchen (Stag tshang lo tsa wa shes rab rin chen) and dated to 1477 argues that the five minor *rikné* were not found in Tibet until Sakya Paṇḍita (Sapan).[64] Drawing upon Sapan's biographical information, Taktsang Lotsawa explains that Sakya Paṇḍita was twenty-three when his father passed away and he went to Kyangtur (Rkyang thur) to make offerings to the monks for performing the funerary rites. On the way, he met the Kashmiri scholar Śākyaśrībhadra and nine other Indian pundits, who instructed him in *rikné*. Some of these scholars stayed longer in Tibet and became fluent in Tibetan language. One of these scholars, Danasila, has about 25 texts credited to him for his translations in the Tibetan canon.[65] Sakya Paṇḍita also introduced Daṇḍin's *The Mirror of Poetry* to Tibetan scholars in his lifetime, but it was about two decades after his death that the translation was complete.

It was during this time that a cultural renaissance took place in Tibet due in part to the creative impulse brought about by translations of texts from India.[66] Susan Bassnett observes: "If we consider literary history in broad sweeps, then what becomes obvious straightaway is the central significance of translation in the movement of writing from one context to another. Great periods of innovation and change in writing are always linked to translation in some way."[67] In the realm of *kāvya* literary theory in Tibet, Tibetan scholars acknowledge the efforts of the translators Shongtön Dorjé Gyaltsen (Shong ston rdo rje rgyal mtshan, 1235?–1280?) and Pang Lodro Tenpa (Dpang blo gros brtan pa, 1276–1342) for bringing this art form to Tibet, as Alak Tséten Zhabdrung argues "their translation [of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyadarśa*] gradually led to a great development in the art of poetics [in Tibet]."[68] Shongtön Dorjé Gyaltsen also translated Kṣemendra's *Wish-Fulfilling Vine of Bodhisattva Avadānas* (Skt: *Avadānakalpalatā,* Tib. *Byang chub sems dpa'i rtogs pa brjod pa dpag bsam 'khri shing*) around 1270.[69]

For much of Tibet's literary history, *nyen-ngak* was an elite form of writing associated with

63. Cf. Gold 2007.
64. *Stag tshang lo tsa ba she rab rin chen gyi gsung 'bum* 2007, 1: 11. Cf. Gedun Rabsal 2015.
65. Taktsang Lotsawa provides detailed information on the education that Sapan received, including which texts he studied with each Indian Pandit. Taktsang Lotsawa's sources included Sapan's own letter to Chag lo chos rje dpal (1197–1263/4). Among the teachers, he studied texts on the literary arts of the five minor fields of knowledge with Sugatasri, Sanghasri and Danasila. See also Sa paN kun dga' rgyal mtshan gyi gsung 'bum, 1992, 3: 535–557.
66. For more on the role of complex political and social history of Buddhist rulers during this period of time, see Kapstein 2006, 84–123.
67. Bassnett 2011, 33.
68. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 24.
69. Cf. Lin 2011; Schaeffer 2009, 89–90.

the prestige of *lotsāwa*, translators of the Buddhist canon, and monastic scholars. Alak Tséten Zhabdrung recognizes that polymaths in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism used *nyen-ngak*, but he particularly praised scholars within his own Geluk tradition as "masters of speech." Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), posthumously considered the founder of the Geluk,[70] wrote two famous *avadāna* in *kāvya*-style writing including: *The Wish-fulling Tree of Poetics: An Avadāna of the Perpetually Crying Bodhisattva* (*Byang chub sems dpa' rtag ngu'i rtogs brjod snyan dngags dpag bsam gyi ljon pa)* and *A Mountain of Poetic Blessings: An Avadāna of Bodhisattva Drakpa Jangchup* (1356–1386) (*Spyan snga grags pa byang chub dpal bzang po'i rtogs brjod snyan dngags byin rlabs kyi lhun po*). Other famous works of *avadāna* written in *kāvya* include: Rinpungpa Ngawang Jigdrak's (Rin spungs pa ngag dbang 'jig grags, 1482–1595?) *Auspicious Path in the Fortunate Eon*: *An Avadāna of Sakya Pandita* (*Sa paN rtogs brjod bskal legs lam*) and Dokharwa Tséring Wangyal's (Mdo mkhar ba tshe ring dbang rgyal, 1697–1763) *Biography of Polhané Miwang Sonam Topgyal* (*Dpal mi'i dbang po'i rtogs pa brjod pa 'jig rten kun tu dga' ba'i gtam*)."[71] This short list of Tibetan literary masterpieces indicates some of the prestige that *avadāna* and *kāvya* enjoyed among Tibet's Buddhist monastic elite.[72] "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" taps into this poetic fount of Buddhist knowledge and literary prestige.

In the first section of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" after elliptically lamenting the loss of Buddhist teachers in Tibet, the author reiterates the genre invoking the goddess of poetry and song—Sarasvatī:

> For this darting flash, ribbon lightning of a taste-organ to be purposeful,
> on the strings of Sarasvatī's lute, I play
> a little *avadāna* song to the Omniscient One.
> Faithful ones, prick your ears up! (1.11)

In this stanza, the implied subject, the act of poetic composition, is expressed through the metaphor of playing the lute of Sarasvatī. The Indian goddess of poetry and knowledge orients the reader toward India, the origin of *kāvya, avadāna*, and Buddhism. This stanza also showcases another type of literary technique that emerged in Tibetan discourse around the same time as the first translations of *avadāna*: the use of *ngön jö* (*mngon brjod*) or "kennings," one of the minor fields of learning. Also found in ancient Nordic poetry, kennings use circumlocution so that, for example, a compound noun expressed in figurative language represents something else, such as "rain-holder" (*chu 'dzin*) for "cloud". The kenning "taste-organ" (*ro 'dzin*) is another word for

70. Cf. Lopez 1997, 28; Dreyfus 2003, 25–29.
71. See also Gyatso 1998, 6.
72. Martin (2014, 570–571) points out some scholars were ambivalent about *kāvya* on doctrinal grounds so much so that Daṇḍin who was synonymous with this writing style was re-imagined as a Buddhist by some scholars.

"tongue." This verse seems to indicate that this *avadāna* should be sung like a song accompanying the lute, as if a degree of orality was involved in the poem's composition—perhaps a voicing of the written verses. The first section of the poem sets the stage, introduces the subject and genre, and also addresses potential audience of this text, Buddhists familiar with Indo-Tibetan literary conventions.

The content of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" creates a literary mandala surrounding the shared birthplace of Panchen Lama and the poet. The perimeter is set by mountains, the topic of five stanzas of section two. Each stanza begins with a compass direction followed by depictions of a particular peak or mountain range in that location. The compass points are relative to the Panchen Lama's birthplace at the center of Amdo, one of the three *cholka* (chol kha) (2.1) of the Tibetan cultural realm. Tongri (Stong-ri) Mountain Range lies to the east (2.3) and the craggy Trabchen (Khrab-chen) Mountain is to the south (2.4). The holy Tsongkha Mountain Range rests in the west (2.5) and Dentik Mountain and retreat center is in the north (2.6). Within the mandala, sections three and four highlight the Buddhist history of this area and how Tibetans came to live here. Alak Tséten Zhabdrung poetically explains how *Bho ta*, a Tibetanized Sanskrit rendering of "Tibetan," "were sent as border guards at the time of our ancestral Dharma Kings" (4.8). These stanzas create a sacred literary space for meeting "the glorious golden mountain, the holy body," of the Panchen Lama at his birthplace in Bīdo Monastery in section five. In section six, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung and the Panchen Lama travel to Ewam Retreat at Karing Monastery, the former monastic center of Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's guru, Marnang Dorjé chang Jigme Damchö Gyatso (Mar nang Rdo rje 'chang 'Jig med dam chos rgya mtsho) who had passed away in 1946.

Reoccurring motifs of beautiful objects, such as flowers and jewels, become literary offerings to show veneration of the Buddha, Dharma, sangha, and the guru. Oceans serve as representations of the expansive knowledge of the guru, the author's teachers—a prominent theme throughout the poem. *Kāvya* wordplay creates the Buddhist landscape in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," a literary and cultural world that wouldn't have been possible without acts of translation. As Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's commentary on Daṇḍin's classic argues, "before the *Kāvyādarśa* was translated into Tibetan, it was as difficult as embroidering silk on to coarsely-woven Tibetan flannel to apply literary devices such as puns and caesura in Tibetan-language."[73] The poet draws upon phonetic word play to show his veneration toward his guru. By placing dots under the syllables of his teacher's name Jik-mé-dam-chö-gya-tso ('Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho), he poetically underscores Buddhist values embodied by his teacher. Our translation underlines the English word which corresponds to the syllables of his name in Tibetan and includes the phonetic transcription of his name at the end of the stanza.

73. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 24.

Filled with pure jewels possessing the Four Fearlessnesses,
Replete with drops of Dharma, a series of waves of sacredness,
I find refuge in the unfathomable depth of extensive virtues,
the great ocean of the Dharma, Jigme Damchö Gyatso. (6.2).

The choice in genre, topic, writing style, and intended audience of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" all underscore the prestige of Tibetan Buddhist literary history.

The narrative of the Panchen Lama's journey throughout the sacred Buddhist landscape of Amdo is interrupted by a brief reminder of the real political situation in section six, when a monster "opened its wrathful mouth as wide as the space between the earth and sky" and "its teeth, weapons of fangs, ate irrevocably and ferociously!" (6.9).

This stanza reminds us that Alak Tséten Zhabdrung and the Tenth Panchen Lama were among the few of the educated monastic elite to survive relentless political campaigns of the Maoist era. Prior to their reunion in the summer of 1980, they had last shared each other's company approximately twenty years earlier, in 1961, when the Panchen Lama had last toured the area around his birthplace. At that time, he found people starving—a tragic result of the failed socialist policies of 1958. After detailing these findings to Mao Zedong and other Chinese Communist Party leaders in his 70,000 Character Petition, the Panchen Lama was purged, defrocked, and publicly humiliated in struggle sessions in Beijing and then disappeared.[74] During the high point of Maoism, only Mao Zedong's works in Tibetan were permitted to be published. Countless sacred texts were destroyed and all Tibetan language works were labeled as "poisonous weeds," as something to be discarded.[75] The Panchen Lama was released in October 1977. Alak Tséten Zhabdrung met a similar fate; he was jailed at Nantan Prison in the provincial capital of Xining from 1965 until 1976, when he was released for medical parole. After they each physically recovered from illnesses due to imprisonment and were rehabilitated politically, they like a few other living lamas became beacons of hope that Tibetan culture could and would survive in the People's Republic of China—even though the terms of this survival were contested and would remain so long after their deaths.[76] By the summer of 1980, the two Buddhist lamas could meet again even though outer displays of religious life were still controlled.

In the 1980s, The Panchen Lama himself was a key figure in supporting the revival of Tibetan literature and language arts. The visceral tone of a 1988 speech exemplifies how he dismisses the rhetoric of "backwardness" and advocates taking pride in Tibetan traditional epistemologies:[77]

74. Cf. Barnett 1997, i–10.
75. Cf. Pema Bhum 2001.
76. Cf. Makley 2007.
77. Cf. Tsering Shakya 2004, for how ethnic-national pride becomes a major theme in modern Tibetan literature.

> Tibetan written language was developed about 1,300 years ago. From then to 1959—whether we remained backward or made mistakes—we managed our life on the world's highest plateau by using only Tibetan. Whether the Tibetan written language is adequate or not, we had everything written in our own language, be it Buddhism, crafts, astronomy, astrology, poems, logic. All administrative works were also done in Tibetan.[78]

In the same year a volume dedicated to Tibetan literature, *Ingots of Gold* (1988), published "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" in full alongside annotations. Its editors call out those scholars who claim that there is no such thing as Tibetan literature:

> Under these circumstances, there have been some immature intellectuals, narrow in their learning and prejudiced, who have said that the Tibetan nationality has no traditions of literary composition. And some others have said that the literary traditions of the Tibetan nationality are limited to the aphorisms of Sakya Paṇḍita, the Vetala stories, or perhaps some historical tales.[79]

"*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" exemplifies the revival of Indic-Tibetan forms of literature in the post-Mao era and how Buddhist lamas rekindled the remaining ashes of the Dharma to begin the *yang dar* era, a period of the re-diffusion of the Dharma.[80] In the final section of this essay, we closely examine particular examples of *kāvya* literary figures in *Avadāna* of Silver Flowers."

The Ethics of Literary Translation in Tibetan Studies

Above we presented a bilingual translation of sections of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers." We also recognized that it may be a challenging text to understand for Tibetan and Anglophone readers alike. As part of a larger effort to implement anti-colonial practices in world literature, we suggested decoupling objective values from aesthetic principles and that "good taste" is a capacity that develops with practice. This can serve to open up discursive pathways to highlight and appreciate Tibetan Indigenous aesthetic and epistemic values on their own terms. In this case, translation becomes the gateway to develop sensory appreciation of Tibetan *kāvya* style poetry. Encompass-

78. Panchen Lama, "Tibetan religion and culture should be the foundation of Tibetology," in DIIR 2003, 72.
79. Translated and cited in Kapstein 2003, 790.
80. Willock 2021, 66-68; Makley 2018, 60–61.

ing complex and creative processes, literary translation provides the means by which to access often fruitful exchanges of ideas and systems of knowledge.[81]

A unique and fascinating translation opportunity presents itself due to the degree of intertextuality found within "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers." Although this poem is modeled after "*Avadāna* of Golden Flowers," and they are similar in terms of style, subject matter, and genre, there is also a stark difference between them. Unlike its literary model, the poetic flow of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" is occasionally interrupted with the annotation of a particular literary embellishment used within the stanza. By providing this detail, the poet thereby alludes to his *A General Commentary on Poetics* (*Snyan ngag spyi don*), a commentary and textbook on Daṇḍin's classic.[82] The point of this deliberate intertextuality seems to showcase Tibetan literary aesthetics for a readership that was unfamiliar with these techniques, that is the generation of students whom the poet himself educated in *nyen-ngak* at universities in China.[83]

This literary intertextuality provides us translators with a valuable tool that can be used to highlight the particular uses of language in those stanzas. This is significant because most *kāvya* masters will use a variety of figures within a composition without explicitly identifying them. The one type of text that explicitly shows and mentions these types of literary figures is a genre called "expressions of examples" (*dper brjod*), which is known for its didactic purpose.[84]. The insertion of the literary figures within "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" indicates that the poet has a didactic purpose. This is also helpful for our translation practice because by drawing upon Tséten Zhabdrung's explanation of these literary figures in *A General Commentary on Poetics,* we are able to hone our translation in a way that highlights the particular attributes of the literary figure that might otherwise go undetected. Dawa Lodrö, the head editor of *Light Rain* literary magazine described his experience of learning about these literary figures from Tséten Zhabdrung as follows: "It was like suddenly being awoken from a deep sleep. These *śloka* [couplets in his *A Commentary on Poetics*] were like keys. Once you had the key in your hands, then you could open any lock."[85] Our translation of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers," particularly the stanzas with intertextual insertions of literary figures, hands us translators these keys. In other words, as an ethical imperative, we consciously approach our translation practice with a focus on the particular linguistic features of Tibetan language. These include interesting uses of familiar poetic techniques such as metaphor and similes as well as other literary techniques not found in English poetics, some of which are easily understood in the English language.

"*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" features two of twenty different types of metaphor (*rūpaka*

81. Cf. Venuti 2017; Bassnett 2011; Bellos 2011.
82. Willock 2021, 29–30.
83. Willock 2021, 211–216.
84. Pema Bhum and Janet Gyatso 2022. I am grateful to Janet Gyatso for sharing a draft of this with me.
85. Cited in Willock 2021, 215–216.

alaṃkāra, gzugs rgyan).[86] A metaphor in Tibetan discourse consists of two basic parts: a "tenor" (*upameya*, *dpe can*), which is a technical term for the subject of the metaphor that can be either explicitly mentioned or implied; and a "vehicle" (*upamāna*, *dpe*), which is the technical term for the way to illustrate the metaphor and usually can't be taken literally. Often in English we refer to the vehicle and metaphor synonymously; however, in Tibetan language usage, the relationship between the tenor and the vehicle is crucial to understanding the differences between types of metaphors.

As noted above, the first example of literary intertextuality in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" is a "metaphor of concealing reality" (tattvāpahnava rūpaka, *bsnyon dor gzugs can gyi rgyan*). This type of metaphor switches the anticipated role between tenor and the vehicle for emphasis as it changes perspective on the subject. The following example from an English translation of Daṇḍin's treatise illustrates this well: "A face is not a face, but is a lotus."[87] In this type of metaphor, the expected tenor, "a face," is deliberately denied, and instead a vehicle that often is used to illustrate the tenor, e.g., a "lotus" becomes the tenor. Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's textbook provides another example:

> This is not your body, but a lotus grove;
> it is not your voice, but the songs of *gandharvas*;
> it is not your primordial wisdom, but the vastness of the sky;
> it is not a common person, but an emanation of a deva.[88]

The verse in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" uses the metaphor of concealing reality to shift the focus from the poem to the power of speech. The usual vehicles to describe poetry such as Lord Brahmā's vocals or the Lotus-born goddess Sarasvatī's melody become tenors:

> This is not some happy, naive lyrical song,
> but is the reverberations of Lord Brahmā's vocals.
> It is not an artificial mumbo jumbo rambling of words,
> but is the Lotus-born goddess'[89] joyous melody.
> It is not the jibber jabber of indiscriminate noise,
> but is an avadāna about a great holy being.
> It is not boasting with fine exaggerations,

86. This enumeration is found in Tseten Zhabdrung's *A General Commentary on Poetics.* Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 71–75.
87. Eppling (1989, 667) explains "the actuality of an object serving as a *upameya* is denied" and "its conceived *upamāna* is explicitly confirmed," e.g., "a face is not a face, but a lotus."
88. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 75: འདི་ནི་ཁྱོད་ལུས་མ་ཡིན་པདྨའི་ལྷོན།། ངག་གི་སྒྲ་གདངས་མ་ཡིན་དྲི་ཟའི་སྒྲ། ཤེསས་ཀྱི་རིག་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནམ་མཁའི་ཀློང་།། སོ་སྐྱེ་ཚལ་བ་མ་ཡིན་ལྷའི་རྣལ་བ།།
89. An epithet for Sarasvatī, the goddess of literature and music. She is called Yangchenma in Tibetan.

but is replete with topics pouring out the truth! (1.10)
Metaphor that conceals reality (*tattvāpahnava rūpaka)*.

In this way, Lord Brahmā and his daughter, the Lotus-born goddess, Sarasvatī lend their voices to give this *avadāna* the spiritual power to pour out the truth.

"*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" crescendos in the longest part of the poem, "section seven: the Wondrous Words on Traveling to Gyashu at the Invitation of the Common People and the Community of Dentik Monastery, the First Sacred Place in Amdo." Many of these verses are not "thick with vines of words" (7.28), that is they lack the literary flourishes that otherwise pepper "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers." These verses are written in a straightforward way to describe the poignancy of the Buddhist ceremonies held at Gyashu, the birthplace of Gongpa Rabsel (Dgong pa rab gsal, fl. 10th century), a key figure in the Buddhist renaissance.[90] In the lead-up to this ritual, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung uses a "metaphor of attributes" (*cha shas gzugs can gyi rgyan*):[91]

When pressed down by the burden of my passing youth,
The cuckoo bird of my throat hid in the Mon forest;[92]
However, by my mind, faith, and strong yearning,
I played the melodious instrument for dedication prayers. (7.26)
(Metaphor of attributes (Skt. *avayava rūpaka*).)

In this literary figure, the actual tenor of the metaphor is implied based on parallel characteristics. "My throat" is an attribute of the implied tenor of the metaphor, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung's aging body. Similar to how the cuckoo bird is hidden far-away in the forest of Mon in southern Tibet, and therefore cannot be heard clearly, his voice is not as clear and resonant as it once was in his youth. Nonetheless, motivated by his faith and the desire to see his guru, he finds the strength to use his voice, a melodious instrument, for reciting prayers before the Panchen Lama—the high-point of this poem.

Section two, as noted above, creates the literary mandala around the Panchen Lama's birthplace. Three different literary figures are featured in this section of the poem to describe this sacred landscape. One of these is called an "illuminator," which Tséten Zhabdrung defines as "a word or phrase, which is either a genus, action, attribute, or substance, so that when connected to the

90. Davidson 2005, 88–89.
91. Eppling (1989) explains that according to Daṇḍin's treatise this type of metaphor uses "parallels that invoke attributes of an unexpressed *upamāna*" (613).
92. Here Mon Forests indicates that his voice is no longer strong.

remaining phrases illuminates or clarifies the entire stanza. The illuminator, the word or phrase that clarifies, can be located in any position: the beginning, middle, or end of a line."[93] Our translation follows Tibetan syntax closely:

> Exquisitely made are:
> the "South-North" expanse of mother-earth[94]
> in the lap of Great Brahmā's paradise, the Wisdom Mirror,[95]
> and likewise, springtime in the glorious gardens of the heavenly realm,
> the essence of mother-earth's "South-North" in Dokham (2.8)
> (Illuminator of action in the initial foot)

This beautiful landscape north and south of the Machu River replete with enduring Buddhist traditions is compared using two phrases. The first describes the heavenly realm of the deity Brahmā and the second refers to the springtime gardens in heaven. "Exquisitely made..." serves as the verbal "illuminator" that ties the two other incomplete ideas together in a stanza. Here is another example of a verbal illuminator in the first foot:

> Expanding are:
> thick vines of moonflowers
> by the dripping of the moon's cooling rays;
> discriminating awareness of all intelligent people
> by the key of your good teachings.[96]

This figure connects two different ideas through a common verbal action, which is placed in the first line to clarify two other ideas in the stanza. Bringing them together serves to enhance the

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93. Tshe tan Zhabs drung 2005, 75–76; Cf. Eppling (1989, 672) explains *dīpaka* in Daṇḍin's *Kāvyadarśa*, as "this is a word or phrase that completes or illuminates or connects a series of incomplete parallel thoughts." Understanding the "genus" (Skt. *jāti*, Tib. *rigs*), "action" (*kriya, bya ba*), "attribute" (*guṇa*, *yon tan*) or "substance" (*dravya*, *rdzas*) quadripartite division of objects for comparison is a key component of Daṇḍin's *kāvya* theory. Tshe tan zhabs drung (2005, 38–41) explains these in the section on "*rang bzhin brjod pa'i rgyan*" (Skt. *svabhāvokti alaṃkāra*), which translates as "expressing inherent nature [of the referent/tenor]."

94. "lho byang" is the region "south" (lho) and north (byang) of the Ma Chu (River). Xunhua lies on the southern banks of the Ma Chu.

95. see note 37.

96. Tshe tan Zhabs drung 2005, 76: རྒྱས་པར་བྱས་སོ་ཀུན་དའི་ནུགས་ཀྱང་ཆེ།། བསིལ་བའི་ཟེར་བཆུ་འཛོག་པའི་ཟླ་བས་ཏེ།། བློ་གསལ་ཀུན་གྱི་ནོར་པར་དཔྱོད་པ་ཡང་།། ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་ལེགས་པར་བཤད་པའི་ལྡེར་མས་སོ།།

appreciation of the main topic, the mandala of sacred space that is the shared birthplace of the Panchen Lama and Tséten Zhabdrung.

The next type of literary annotation involves a pair of similes describing this mandala as a heavenly realm. The first stanza is written with the "simile expressing doubt" (*saṃśaya upamā*, *the tshom gyi dpe*) and the second is penned with the "simile expressing decisiveness" (*nirṇaya upamā*, *gtan 'bebs kyi dpe*). The first type of simile creates confusion, which is then clarified by the decisiveness of the second:

> What's this? Have we climbed the ladder
> to higher realms—to the land of Indra, Lord of the Triple World,
> or have we opened the gateway to the gardens
> in the city of the Nāga?
> My mind sways to and fro like a palanquin. (2.12)
> (Simile expressing doubt)
>
> Since in this place, the sun causes heat of the day,
> and the moon bestows coolness at night,
> I neither saw the realms of Gods nor Nāga, so
> This certainly is the land south of the Machu. (2.13)
> (Simile expressing decisiveness)

By comparing the landscape with a heavenly realm, he creates a sense of wonder in the first stanza. The second stanza brings this divine land to earth as the Panchen Lama's birthplace south of the Machu (Rma klung, a branch of the Yellow River). Tséten Zhabdrung's textbook also presents these two similes as a pair:

> This movement--flashes uninterruptedly,
> Is not lightning since it's on the ground,
> Since handwriting appears in flashing traces,
> It must be your fingertips moving.[97]

The first simile identifies and denies a possible topic—it can't be lightning. The second simile decisively clarifies the actual subject—the flashing pen of a writer.

Section six of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" features two intertextual literary figures. According

97. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 52–53.མ་ཇོཁས་འཚུག་པའི་རྣམ་འགྱུར་འདི།། ས་ན་ཡོད་ཕྱིར་གློག་འཁས་མིན།། འཚུགས་ཤུལ་ཡིག་རིས་འཆར་བས་ན།། ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་མཛུབ་རྩེ་བསྒྱིད་པར་རེས།།

to *The Mirror of Poetry,* they are part of a trinity of literary embellishments that Daṇḍin argues "display excellent intensity."[98] These three are: "affectionate utterance," "rasa-laden statement," and "haughty declaration."[99] Two literary figures of this trio are found in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers": "affectionate utterance" (*preyas*, *'dga ba'i rgyan*) and "laden with affective states" (*rasavat*, *nyams ldan*). Both serve to intensify emotions or psychological states according to Daṇḍin's treatise.

As noted above, the narrative flow with its focus on the Buddhist landscape is interrupted by a stanza in section six that indirectly addresses the Maoist years using the metaphor of a monster. Alak Tséten Zhabdrung however does not identify the literary figure at work in this stanza as a type of metaphor. After the stanza "on the monster of the era of cruelty" (6.9), he inserts that this is a literary figure that is "laden with a *rasa* of fear" (Tib. *'jigs rung gi nyams kyi rgyan*). This is one of eight different types of *rasavat* or "rasa-laden" literary figures. Daṇḍin was an early theorist of the magnificent *rasa* aesthetic tradition in classical India.[100] Tséten Zhabdrung's *A General Commentary on Poetics* follows Daṇḍin's treatment of *rasa* as related to the "eight dramatic rasas." Emotions are intensified when that state of mind is made manifest through either a verbal or physical reaction. Each affective statement has a corresponding physical reaction so the emotion of fear will manifest as gestures of timidity or fear in the body or speech.[101] The physical reaction to that inner emotion becomes the 'taste' of the aesthetic experience. Tséten Zhabdrung describes this as "when the body and speech can't help but expressing those emotions through erratic breathing, smiling automatically, or crinkling one's brow."[102] The use of the "fear-laden" literary figure may remind readers of the corporeal fear caused by the violence of the Maoist era.

"*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" features another type of literary embellishment that heightens emotion called "affectionate utterance" (*preyas alaṃkāra*, *dga' ba'i rgyan*).[103] *A General Commentary on Poetics* describes this as "through the expression of an extraordinary joy, this figure of speech makes its meaning understood or known."[104] Two subtypes of "affectionate utterances" are

98. Eppling 1989, 1089.
99. The third member of this trio: the embellishment of "the haughty declaration" (Skt.: *ūrjasvin*) is not mentioned in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers." Cf. Pollock 2016, 59; Eppling 1989, 1147.
100. More research is needed to determine how and if rasa theory developed further beyond Daṇḍin's interpretation in Tibet. Pollock (2016, 59) explains that Daṇḍin *uses* rasa in "three largely unrelated senses: as a general term for 'tasteful' or sweet, poetic style; second, as a term referring to any 'sophisticated' turn of phrase, both usages being part of a broader literary theory of poetic language; third, as a technical term |...|." This technical term is *rasavat*, "rasa-laden" (Pollock 2016, 61); this is the poetic example given in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers."
101. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 15–16.
102. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 15.
103. Translation by Pollock 2014, 61.
104. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 87.

identified: one with hope (*re ba dang bcas pa'i dga' ba*) and one without (*re ba med pa'i dga' ba*). Tséten Zhabdrung's example similar to "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" expresses the joy of a reunion:

> Merely a glimpse lets loose a joyful smile and
> prior karmic ties of a close friend are restored instantly.
> My friend, it is hard to find another example to match this
> joy of your arrival before me.[105]

Utmost delight in this stanza is intensified[106] when he writes he can't find another example of joy that compares with that experienced by the arrival of his friend. In this type of literary figure comparisons are exaggerated to highlight that nothing else compares to the feast before his eyes—the magnificent grace offered by the presence of His Holiness Panchen Rinpoche:

> Not satiated by seeing the marks of your Buddha body;
> Not contented with listening to the Sitar's sound of your speech;
> Such a feast as this can only be provided by you
> O Treasure of Compassion, please, come, again and again! (6.19)

This affectionate utterance serves to intensify the joy of seeing the Treasure of Compassion, the Panchen Lama. As noted above, for Alak Tséten Zhabdrung when a poem effectively evokes a physical sensation associated with an emotion, then a poem "has taste" (*nyams dang ldan pa*) and by increasing "taste" (*nyams*) poetry becomes particularly exceptional."[107]

Other examples of intertextuality found in "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" are not so easily conveyed through translation. These include allusions to sutra (*mdo*) from the great treasures of Buddhist literature in the Tibetan cultural world. Consider for example, this stanza on Dentik Monastery:

> North of the Machu, young prince Döndrup
> accomplished the Perfection of Generosity at
> Dentik, the Crystal Mountain, the sacred place of siddhas,
> where forms of fearsome yakṣa appear naturally. (2.5)

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105. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 87.
106. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to make any real comparisons between the reception of Daṇḍin's work in India and that in Tibet, it is interesting that Ratnashrijnana's commentary mentions that the comparative suffix is used to denote intensity (Pollock 2016, 61). Both of the Tibetan examples also use comparison, but there is no comparative suffix in Tibetan language.
107. Tshe tan zhabs drung 2005, 22: སྨྲན་ངག་གི་ཉམས་ཆེས་ཕྱིད་པར་དུ་འཕགས་པར་འགྱུར།

The Young Bodhisattva Döndrup refers to a previous life of the Siddhartha Gautama in the *Sutra on Bodhisattva Arthasiddhi.*[108] This is one version of the famous *jātaka* tales or rebirth stories which center on Vessantara as the main protagonist. Here Vessantara/Prince Döndrup was exiled to Dentik Monastery for his excessive largesse in giving away his father's entire kingdom. This act was necessary to prove that he mastered generosity, one of the Six Perfections. Tséten Zhabdrung's personal residence at Dentik Monastery is built in front of the Prince's Cave (*raja phug*), where the monks of Dentik believe that Prince Döndrup achieved the meditative accomplishments preparing the bodhisattva for the future birth where he would attain enlightenment. In fact a copy of this sūtra in a Tibetan manuscript from Dunhuang (IOL Tib J 76) attests to the fact that this story and the occurrence of the name of Dentik (Dantig) in it was known in the tenth century.[109]

The final section of "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" also has intertextual references that are not easily translated. We find in this section allusions to the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*Mdo mdzangs blun*). Stanley Frye points out in his introduction to the translation of the Tibetan version that these narratives highlight the karma created by a misdeed in a former life. Frye states, "The theme of each narrative is the same: the tragedy of the human condition, the reason for this tragedy, and the possibility of transcending it."[110] Alak Tséten Zhabdrung makes comparisons between the story of "Vajra, the Daughter of King Prasenjit" (*Rgyal po gsal rgyal gyi bu mo do rje ma*) and the visit of Panchen Rinpoche to his family residence (8.10–8.15). In the *jātaka*, Vajra calls to the Buddha in order to realize her past karma. By having faith, she is graced with insight into a past life, which we learn had to do with her negative speech about the body of *pratyekabuddha*. Upon having insight into her former sins, she is transformed into a beautiful woman. A female familial member of Tséten Zhabdrung's, perhaps his sister or cousin, who was born with a physical disability, is compared to Vajra. The Panchen Lama similarly acts compassionately toward her:

> This occurrence, unless personally witnessed
> who would believe it, if this was told through someone else?
> With this small act of great being,
> we are fortunate to see this in person.(8.15)

After acknowledging the preciousness of the moment of seeing the Panchen Lama's compassion in person, "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" concludes with prayers for the long-life of Panchen Lama (8.16–18). These later two examples are allusions to stories in the Tibetan Buddhist cannon and highlight how cultural references present a different kind of difficulty for translators. Nonethe-

108. Tib. "'Phags pa rgyal bu don grub kyi mdo" in *Bka' 'gyur (sde dge par phud)*, mdo sde, volume aH (76). BDRC W22084.
109. Galabos and van Schaik 2015, 479–481.
110. Stanley Frye 1981, vii.

less, by giving attention to cultural references and particular literary figures found in these verses, the rich literary world of Tibet becomes more accessible to Anglophone readers.

Concluding Remarks

Continuing a long tradition of poetic excellence for Buddhist monastic scholars, "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" is one of the earliest examples of the revival of Tibetan literature in the post-Mao era. Situated at once within an elite discursive lineage, "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" also lies on the margins of a nation-state discourse which disparaged literary Tibetan traditions as feudal and backward.

The decade after it was written saw renewed activity of Tibetan language publishing houses and an emphasis on the language arts of five minor *rikné*. "Kāvya, as it turns out," Matthew Kapstein emphasizes, "has been one of the areas in which Tibetan cultural confrontation with the Tibetan past and with the challenges of modernity has been keenly felt."[111] Tibetan intellectuals who were the first to graduate with degrees in Tibetan Studies and had received formal training in the Tibetan language from the great scholars of the previous generation (such as Tséten Zhabdrung, Dungkar Losang Trinley, and Mugé Samten, among others) also began to debate the parameters of "literature" vis-à-vis *kāvya* at this time. Lauran Hartley's brilliant dissertation details the key figures and debates in the discursive formation of "literature" (*rtsom yig*) in Tibetan language discourse.[112] As Tibetan intellectuals debated on how to reassess the parameters of literature and culture in the post-Mao era, they also had to constantly legitimize their efforts within state-sanctioned discourse. By elevating Tibetan literary aesthetics embedded within the epistemic system of *rikné*, "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" was one of the earliest texts to glorify Tibetan civilization at this time, and thereby flout the Chinese state's rhetoric on the backwardness of Tibet. Tibetans are not alone in their resistance to the hegemony of colonialism.

We view the example "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" as part of a larger discourse on decolonization because this foregrounds Indigenous epistemologies of literary aesthetics. We are indebted to insights from *Decolonising the Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and from an argument in philosophy of aesthetics that decouples objective values from aesthetic principles, which help us open up discursive space for Tibetan Indigenous aesthetic and epistemic values in English translation. In the post-Mao era, Alak Tséten Zhabdrung and the Panchen Lama, among other Tibetan Buddhist elites, rekindled the remaining ashes of the Dharma to usher in a new Buddhist era, the re-diffu-

111. Kapstein 2003, 788.

112. Hartley 2003, 276–310.

sion of the Dharma. "*Avadāna* of Silver Flowers" recreates the enduring Buddhist landscape with the Panchen Lama at the center of this literary mandala to reclaim Tibetan territory.

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How to Read Like a Dead Horse Listens: Audience and Affect in "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang"

Brandon Dotson

Abstract "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang," a 9th- or 10th-century Tibetan ritual text recovered from Dunhuang, is a work of both simplicity and of extraordinary richness. This article offers a guided reading through this performative text, and describes its use of various poetic devices common to the genre of ritual antecedent tales. It also teases out some intriguing structural parallels and reversals in the plot of the narrative, and in the relationship it imagines between horses and humans. An application of Peter Rabinowitz's typology of four audiences reveals how the tale operates on different levels, simultaneously appealing to an ideal narrative audience of equine listeners, an ideal human audience that takes the world of this tale as real, a literary/performative audience that is familiar with the genre of ritual antecedent tales, and an actual audience of readers and listeners ranging from those who are ignorant of these tales and their genre to those who know them well. Considering also the plot's arc and the role of affect in the bodies of the tale's listeners, the article offers suggestions for how such tales impacted their various audiences.

How does one read a text that was meant to be heard?[1] Or a performer's notes that mix snatches of a tale with shorthand performance notes? One can cite many perceptive answers to such questions from the field of oral literature studies, which equip one to read textualized oral performances and other related genres of "oral literature" with sensitivity to their putative settings and to their poetics. But what if the text that one reads, besides being an "oral text," is addressed to a deceased listener? How can one speak of reception or emotional arc when the explicit target audience is the dead? And how does one account both for the intended deceased audience and the incidental living listeners and readers? To complicate matters one step further, beyond the divides of oral/written and living/dead, what if the intended audience - or at least part of the intended audience - is a dead horse, such that one also crosses the boundaries of species and of language? These are the questions explored here through a guided reading of "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang," a 9th- or

1. I am grateful to the article's anonymous reviewer for their perceptive comments to an earlier draft of this article. I am also grateful to Gergely Orosz for multiple insightful discussions of this text during his time in Munich.

10th-century Tibetan ritual text recovered from Dunhuang. The tale is addressed in part to one or more horses that are about to be, or already have been, slaughtered in order to guide a dead human to the "Land of Happiness and Bliss" (Dga' dang skyid pa'i yul) that is, to the "Land of the Dead" (Gshin yul), as it was known within certain early Tibetan cosmologies. The guided reading introduces many of the features of early Tibetan ritual literature so that the reader may better appreciate this and other ritual narratives. It then borrows Peter Rabinowitz's articulation of a fourfold audience and applies this to the tale in order to lay bare, among other things, its rhetorical operations.

Ritual Antecedent Tales

"The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang" is part of a body of textualized ritual narratives that complemented, coincided with, and constituted non-Buddhist ritual practices in early Tibet. These interrelated tales, called *rab* (rabs), are found in over a dozen manuscripts dating to approximately the ninth century, recovered from Cave 17 in Dunhuang, and now kept in the British Library and in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. It is also a genre of ritual literature that can be found in later texts and in living Himalayan ritual traditions, as documented in Toni Huber's recent work in Eastern Bhutan.[2] The most detailed study of ritual antecedent tales from Dunhuang remains Stein's masterful "Du récit au rituel dans les manuscrits tibétains de Touen-houang," and they have been studied more recently by Samten Karmay, Chabgak Tamdrin (Chab 'gag rta mgrin), John Vincent Bellezza, Daniel Berounsky, myself, and others.[3] Here I offer a brief overview of the genre and its assumptions in order to inform a guided reading of "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang."

The majority of the Dunhuang ritual narratives concern death and the proper performance of funerals, though some also pertain to healing, exorcism, and other ritual aims. The tales are set in remote antiquity, and their *dramatis personae* are mythical kings, gods, demons, and priests. After a formulaic opening that introduces time and place, and the main protagonists, a ritual antecedent tale inevitably turns towards death. A character's death typically comes about in a stereotyped fashion, usually through one of five standard tropes: marriage, hunting, possession by a demon, competition in a race or other physical challenge, or breaking an interdiction, such as by turning a cooking pot upside down.[4] As a result of this death, priests must be summoned, and a funeral must be performed, at which animals, including horses and sheep, must be killed. The ritual success of

2. Huber 2020.
3. Stein 1971; Karmay 2010; Chab 'gag rta mgrin 2009, 34–73; Bellezza 2008, 496–542; Berounsky 2017; Dotson 2008, 2016; Cantwell and Mayer 2008.
4. Stein 1971, 492–93; Dotson 2016, 81–82.

the funeral for its mythico-literary protagonist is then applied to the present, and to a possibly mimetic ritual for the deceased.

In addition to their evocation of a ritual-spatial universe set in a heroic past, early Tibetan ritual narratives are also notable for their use of a specific, formalized register of language. It can be distinguished from prose such as we find in Tibet's chronicle-epic, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle,* by its specialized lexicon and by its use of noun pairs, and also by the extension of the principles of repetition and parallelism, by which synonymous terms or phrases occur in apposition. Thus at the beginning of a ritual antecedent tale, characters are typically introduced in a "family scene" as, e.g., "the children and offspring of the father and patriarch So-and-So, conceived and begat with the mother and matriarch Such-and-Such..." This form of parallelism, or at least the use of noun pairs, is a defining characteristic of ritual registers used by Tibeto-Burman groups in the Himalayas, and is a common form of both ritual and poetic speech cross-culturally.[5] As for the question of the larger significance of paired speech, one might venture that in this context form and content align to signal a larger thematic parallel between antecedent ritual success and present, consequent ritual success.

In a single Dunhuang manuscript, one often finds one tale after another, typically with the first one given in full, and the others contracted. In such cases, there are often meta-textual performance notes after the first tale, which give instructions on how to fill in the abbreviated tales that follow. The latter often appear to be little more than lists of people and places. This is relevant to Marcelle Lalou's initial treatment of such texts as "catalogues of principalities."[6] In a more detailed study of early Tibetan ritual literature, I have clarified that these are closer to what John Charlot refers to as "redactional outlines," which include the bare minimum of information necessary—usually names of characters and names of places—that a performer needs by way of notes in order to fill in the tale.[7] The meta-textual instructions, which may be as simple as "proceed as in the above tale," bear witness to an oral tradition, or at least to oral, ritual performances for which these manuscripts likely served as props or notes.[8] The interrelationship between the tales is therefore such that one

5. See, for example, Gaenszle 2002, 47; Oppitz 2010, 111–21; Blackburn 2008, 159–60; and Fox 1988.
6. Lalou 1965.
7. Charlot 1977, 491; Dotson 2016, 84–89.
8. Dotson 2013; 2016, 83. See Huber's perceptive remarks on "text-reading shamans" in an Eastern Bhutanese context, which offers some examples of how such oral traditions become textualized; Huber 2020 vol. 1, 229–38. There is an interesting hint about the textualization of Old Tibetan ritual antecedent tales in a note at the end of a tale, also concerning funerary horses, that immediately precedes "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang." It reads, "this is the (ritual) section concerning the types [of sacrificial animals(?)]. It should be taught to others; I've just written down a little bit of it" (*cho smos pha'i le'u lagste gzhan nI lobs lagso 'dir ni gzhug chung zhig briso /*; IOL Tib J 731, r37–38). On the meaning of *cho* as type or species, often indicating parentage, see Stein 1971, 539–43. Note that *le'u*—understood in a written context as "chapter"—may here refer to a section, or be a genre designation similar to *rabs*, but that in other contexts it can refer to a "unit of ritual activity," and there are ritual specialists in Northwest Gansu known as *le'u pa*, who perform apotropaic rites drawn from the *Gnyan 'bum*; Huber 2020 vol. 2, 9; Gyatso 2016; Berounsky 2020, 28–40.

tale illuminates another. This is also true across a body of manuscripts that all include ritual antecedent tales that participate in a shared set of narrative and ritual assumptions, cosmologies, *dramatis personae*, topographies, topoi, storylines, scenes, and formulae. This relationship between the tales is not textual, as in one writer's awareness of another text, but performative, such that one must view each textual artefact in light of the entire performative tradition of which it is a uniquely fossilized instantiation. It is apt, therefore, to speak of shared formulae, topoi, story types, and so forth not as instances of intertextuality but of what Richard Martin calls "metaperformativity."[9]

One tale might expand a topos, e.g., of dying after challenging one's maternal relatives, or a formula, e.g., describing the funerary structures, that is contracted or garbled in another tale. Or one formula, e.g., the description of a corpse turning as white as silk, might be present in one tale and absent in another. Reading through this entire body of interrelated tales, one therefore gets an idea of the rhythms of oral performance, or at least of the options that were open to the performers in the course of their tellings. One learns to notice where a tale could expand, where it could contract, and where it might allude to another tale. An experienced listener (or reader), for example, need only hear the place name Jangka Namgyé (Byang ka snam brgyad) to know that a character in the tale is soon to die. Similarly, one hears or reads a princess's lament and knows that this portends her suicide.[10] More generally, one also learns to recognize that stepmothers in these tales are usually wicked, and that maternal relatives are often dangerous. Absent their intended audience, or absent an approximation of that audience in the form of modern readers who have acquired "traditional literacy" in the form of familiarity with such topoi, the tales lose their richness and their resonance, and—though this remains an open, and possibly unproductive question—perhaps also the ritual efficacy that was their *raison d'être*. The question of intended and actual audience(s) is complex, however, and will be explored below after a guided reading of "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang."

The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang

The tale has been translated and studied before, first by F.W. Thomas (1957), then by Rolf Stein (1971), John Vincent Bellezza (2008), Chab 'gag rta mgrin (2009), and myself (Dotson 2018). While it is beyond the scope of the present contribution, one should point out that some of the basic outlines of the tale can be found in folktales about horses, and that some basic plot elements, such as one of the three horse brothers being killed by a yak, are found in later Buddhist ritual texts performed on behalf of horses (*rta glud*). One conclusion to draw from this would be that, not unlike the genesis of some *Jātaka* tales in India, various Tibetan ritual traditions have drawn on

9. Martin 1997.
10. See Dotson 2013, which compares the lament of Sad mar kar in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and other laments in Old Tibetan ritual literature with the lament of Andromache in the *Iliad* as analyzed in Foley 1999.

popular narratives—including "international folktales"—in constructing their ritual antecedent tales.

In what follows, I have smoothed over some of the rough edges, as when a character's name is given in variant orthographies. I have also taken the liberty of correcting small mistakes, as when the tale mixes up the names of two formulaic pastureland settings. Such interventions are familiar to students of oral performance and popular ritual texts, and one may in any case check my "corrections" against the original text. I have tried to capture some of the poetics of the original, particularly with regard to its use of noun pairs and appositional synonymous phrases. In order to make the tale more accessible, I have elided the few short phrases that escape my comprehension by using ellipses, rather than giving the offending words or sentences in transliteration, which distract the specialist with enticing philological conundrums but simply puzzle the non-specialist. In order to better point out the tales' various poetic and rhetorical devices, I have also chosen to interrupt the narrative here and there with a running commentary, such that the following is a guided reading.

First, a list of the principal *dramatis personae* and settings may be helpful for following the tale. One might also think of this as a tale in three acts: a first act in the heavens involving the horse mother; a second act on the plains with the three horse brothers; and a third act involving the youngest horse Khukrön Mangdar and his partnership with the human Mabu Damshé. There is also a coda, which relates the tale to a present ritual act.

Principal characters:

Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön: mother of the three horse brothers
Lhaza Gungtsün: Goddess who detains then drives away Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön
Yiki Dangcham: the eldest horse brother
Kyangrön Ngoktra: the middle horse brother
Khukrön Mangdar: the youngest horse brother
Drongyak Karwa: the yak in Jangka Namgyé who kills eldest horse brother Yiki Dangcham
Mabu Damshé: the human with whom youngest horse brother Khukrön Mangdar makes a pact
Shenrab Miwo and Durshen Mada: priests who perform Mabu Damshé's funeral

Settings:

Nam/Gung: the sky/the heavens, birthplace of Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön
Lhayül Gungtang: the land of gods to which Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön first descends

Jilung Dangwa: the land of wind to which Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön next descends
Jangka Namgyé: the land to which the eldest horse brother Yiki Dangcham goes
Chidrok Gyégong: the land to which the middle horse brother Kyangrön Ngoktra goes
Drokchi Tangsum: the land to which the youngest horse brother Khukrön Mangdar goes
Miyül Kyiting and Mayül Tagyé: the land of humans and of the man Mabu Damshé

> The tale of the separation of horse and kiang.
>
> It was before the ancient times, the days of old... but after the deluge of the Tempest, and after the shifting of the Quake. The name of the horse's father and patriarch was Father Kharté Yelwa. With the mother Sangté Chöma, the child that the two conceived and begat was born as Taza Lungdranggi Chamarön. The horse resided, she resided in the sky. The steed resided, she resided in the heavens. There was no grass for her wide mouth. There was no water for her wide throat.[11]

Not every tale begins or ends with a title, and many are fragmentary such that we are missing the beginning and/or end of the text due to damage to the manuscript. Here we have the stated title, which conveys to us not only that it is a ritual antecedent tale (*rabs*), but that it belongs to a specific subgenre of "tales of separation" (*dbye ba'i rabs*). Such tales often include etiological myths involving the splitting of an originary ur-species or chimera into two separate species, and can be found in later compilations of Tibetan ritual literature, including the *Nyen bum* (*Gnyan 'bum*).[12] Here the original species that branches out into horse and kiang (*equus kiang*) is referred to as a horse, but should probably be regarded as an "ur-horse."

Following the title is the standard opening for ritual antecedent tales. They are all set in a remote antiquity characterized by phrases that, like the rough equivalent "once upon a time," invite the listener into narrative (and ritual) time and space. The antiquity of these tales is not monolithic. Its dividing line, not unlike that in the Old Testament, is a cataclysm referred to as the *kyintang*, which literally means something like "hailstorm," but might be captured more figuratively, given its cataclysmic nature, as "tempest or deluge." This is the same word that is used for the cataclysm that, in Tibetan apocalyptic prayers, will bring an end to the Evil Age and inaugurate the return of the Good Age in a cyclical model of world ages relevant to early Tibetan "rebirth eschatologies."[13]

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11. *rta rgyang dbye ba'i rabs la / / gan khar rga gzhe dgu ga dgu ga dgu gsang ga gsang pyo ga / / na skyin dang bab kyi 'og rman dang g.yos kyi 'og / na' / / rta'i pha dang yab kyI mtshani pha khar rta 'i yal ba dang / / ma gsang rta'i pyod ma gnyis bshos dang nams kyi sras / rta za lung brang gyI bya ma ron du ldam te / rta bzhugs ni gnam la bzhug rmang bzhugs ni dgung la [bzhugs?] na' kha yangs kyI ran ma mchis / / mgrIn yangs kyI chab ma mchIste* (IOL Tib J 731r38–42).
12. I am indebted to Gergely Orosz for this observation.
13. For analyses of these apocalyptic texts, see Stein 2010, 171–76; and Ishikawa 2007. On rebirth eschatologies and their

The use of noun pairs and appositional synonymous phrases, already introduced above, also brings the listener into the sensibilities of the tales and into their ritual-spatial universe. The mare *Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön* is thus both a "horse" (*rta*) and a "steed" (*rmang*), and she resides in the "sky" (*gnam*) and in "heaven" (*dgung*). Pairs of synonyms, one common and the other rare or archaic, characterize the language of these tales and set them apart as a distinct, heightened register. This is also true of actions, like "conceived and begat" (*bshos dang nam*), as if each action must be ratified. It reminds one again of oral performance and the use of an "echo singer," or of various conventions for prolonging and embellishing each verse.[14]

After the introduction of the temporal setting, the tale begins with a "family scene": a mother and a father have child. In narrating this act, the tale makes ample use of noun pairs and parallel phrases. This very fundamental aspect of opening a tale with the introduction of a family through the birth of a child or children to a mother and father may also be read on a rhetorical, or even psychological level. It may be, as Martha Nussbaum contends, that this invokes childhood, and a setting in which one was told the first tales that helped to shaped one's experience of the world.[15] One also notes that stories with talking animals are often among the first that children hear. In the passage above, the mother and father play no role in the story; their role is simply to bring this protagonist of the tale's first act into existence.

In a manner characteristic of so many fairytales analyzed by Vladimir Propp, the tale is finally set into motion by the search for something that is lacking, in this case food and water.[16]

> The horse descended, she descended from the sky. The steed descended, she descended from the heavens. As for where she descended, she descended in the land of Lhayül Gungtang. As for whose property she became, she descended as the property and possession of Lhaza Gungtsün. [Lhaza Gungtsün] put her inside of an earthen house. She gave her shoots of grain, fed her sweet barley flour, and poured her molasses-sweetened water. Being made property and possession, the horse was very rebellious, the steed was very angry. When the goddess tried to feed Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön in the morning, she could not feed her. When she tried to catch her in the evening, she could not catch her. Lhaza Gungtsün punished her, and removed her from the earthen dwelling. When she drove her

generally amoral perspective versus karmic eschatologies in Indic, comparative, and theoretical contexts, see Obeyesekere 2002.

14. For instructive examples of how what is orally performed differs from the text that the performer is using, as well as the presence of echo singers, see Huber 2020 vol. 1, 238, 401-402; vol. 2, 269–74.
15. Nussbaum 1998, 233–35.
16. Propp 1968, 34–36.

away, she descended.[17]

This continues the mare's descent through various celestial realms before we move to the tale's second act and the birth of her three sons. This first act is in a sense a prologue that prefigures some of the themes of the rest of the tale. Here we have a goddess trying to tame a female horse and failing to do so; in the third act a male horse willingly comes to be tamed by a human man. These entail reversals both of volition and of gender. The motif of domestication involved in corralling and feeding the horse appears in other ritual antecedent tales in which horses are pursued, captured, and persuaded to serve as psychopomp guides to the Land of the Dead, and it is intimately connected to the notionally inverse rite of passage by a human to the Land of the Dead.[18]

> As to where she descended, she descended in the land of Jilung Dangwa ("Land of Wind"). She met Ji Charchur ("Rushing Wind"), and the offspring that they conceived and begat were born as three horse brothers, three steed brethren. The elder brother, the eldest, was Elder Brother Yiki Dangcham; the younger brother, the middle, was called Kyangrön Ngoktra; the younger brother, the last, was called Khukrön Mangdar. In the land of Jilung Dangwa there was no grass for their wide mouths, there was no water for their wide throats. The elder brother, the eldest, Yiki Dangcham, went to the land of Jangka Namgyé and searched for water for his wide mouth, searched for grass for his wide throat. Kyangrön Ngoktra went to the land of Chidrok Gyégong and searched for grass for his wide mouth, searched for water for his wide throat. Khukrön Mangdar went to the land of Drokchi Tangsum and searched for clumps of waving grass and...[19]

The tale has now shifted from its first act, involving the horse mother, to the second act involving

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17. *rta bab ni gnam nas bab ~~rma~~ rmang ba+b / dgung nas bab / / te bab gang du bab na yul/ ~~rji lugng dang ba 'I nang ba ru bab te rji ba phyar phyur dang 'tshos~~ lha yul gung dang gyi nang du bab te dkor su 'i dkor na lha za gung tshun gyI dkor dang dad du / bab ste / sa khyIm khang mo'i nang du nI stsald / 'bras kyI lcang pa ni / stsald / sngo mo ngar phye ni / bsgams / bu ram rnyung chu ni blud / dkor dang dad du bgyis na / rta la log pa che rmang la / mkhrIs pa che / rta za lung brang gI bye ma ron / nang glan ran na glan du ma btub nub gzung ran na / gzung du ma btub / lha [---] gung mo tsun bkyon / nas / sa khyim pug mo'i nang nas ni pyung ste / bskrad na / bab*; r42–48.

18. Dotson 2018, 277–78.

19. *gang du ba[b] na yul rjI lung dang ba 'i nang du bab nas rjI pyar pyur dang mjald te bshos dang nams kyi bu / rta ni spun gsuM rmang mched gsuM / du ~~btu~~ btam / phu bo gchen lo ni phu yid kyi gdang pyam nu bo 'bring po ni / rkyang ron ~~rmang~~ rngog bkra zhe 'o / nu bo tha chungs ni / khug ron gyi rmang dar zhe 'o / yul rjI lung dang ba'i nang / kha yangs kyi ~~rtsva ma~~ ran ma mchis / ~~mying yangs~~ mgrin ya[ngs] kyi ni chab ma mchis / ~~yu~~ pu bo gchen po ~~g~~yi kyi gdang pyam ni / yul byang ka snam rgyad du gshe[gs] te kha yangs kyi ni chab 'tshal mgrin yangs kyi rtsi 'tshal / rkyang ron rngog bkra ni / yul ~~pyi~~ 'brog brgyad gong du kha yangs kyi ni rtsi 'tshal / mgrin yangs kyi ni chab 'tshalo / khug ron rmang dar ni / yul pyi 'brog pyi gtang sum na / 'brog rtsi phyor ba pang pung ni 'tshal / bre mo ne'u kol ni 'phung / zhing mchiso / ~~da~~/*; r48–57.

her three sons. In a poetic evocation of horses' speed, their father is the Rushing Wind. Among the brothers' names, that of the middle brother, Kyangrön Ngoktra, advertises that he will be the one who becomes the ancestor of the kiang. Immediately these three brothers' parents disappear from the action in the second act of the tale, just as Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön's parents were incidental to her adventures in the first act. Also in parallel to their mother, the three brothers descend from the land of their birth to search for food and water. Each goes to a separate, formulaically named pastureland. The first of these, Jangka Namgyé is a frequent setting for hunting trips in these ritual antecedent tales, which, as noted above, nearly always end in death. The knowledgeable audience therefore has a hint of what is coming for the elder brother who descends to Jangka Namgyé.

> Then, after some time, in the land Jangka Namgyé, the elder brother Yiki Dangcham met the wild yak, Father Drongyak Karwa. Drongyak Karwa said, "Last year and in the years before, high above the sky, up on the top of the heavens, Lord Yabla Dakdruk the ancestral god commanded it: the land of the horse should be the pasture; the land of the yak should be the north [Jang, as in Jangka Namgyé]. This being so, elder brother Yiki Dangcham, go elsewhere."
>
> Elder brother Yiki Dangcham said, "Lord Yabla Dakdrug the ancestral god commanded it, and indeed it is true that the land of the horse is the pasture; indeed it is true that the land of the yak is the north. So, today, looking to tomorrow, the horse and the yak have nothing to fight about. The horse will eat the grass first, and the yak drink water while he waits. Or, yak, eat the grass first, and [I] the horse will drink water while I wait!"
>
> Drongyak Karwa did not...and he took him with his right horn, and gored him with his left horn, and thus he killed elder brother Yiki Dangcham. His flesh was eaten by birds, tearing, tearing. His blood was drunk by the earth, sucking, sucking. His bones were chewed by beasts, cracking, cracking. The hair of his head was carried off by the wind, wailing, wailing. Thus he killed the elder brother Yiki Dangcham.[20]

20. *da re shig re shig / na / yul byang ka snam brgyad na / pu yid kyi gdang pyam da+ng / pha 'brong g.yag skar ba gnyis mjald nas / 'brong ~~ya~~ g.yag / skar ba'i mchid nas / na ni gzhe ning snga / gnam gyi ya bla dgung gi ya stengs ~~ba~~ nas rje ~~b~~yab bla bdag ~~b~~drug / mgon tshun pyvas / 'is bskoste / rta yul ni 'brog yin ba'i rigs g.yag yul ni / byang ~~yu~~ yin ba'i rigs na / phu yid kyi gdang pyam ga la gar bzhud ches mchi na / / ~~pa~~ phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi zhal nas / rje ya bla bdag drug mgon tshun phyvas bskoste / rta yul 'brog yin gyang bden g.yag yul pyang yi[n] gyang bden / na / da de ring sang lta na / rta dang / g.yag ~~g.ya~~ gnyis shang myi 'thab 'o / rta snga ba ni rtsva la za 'o / g.yag 'pyi ba ni chu 'thung shig / g.yag snga ni rtsva zo shig rta 'pyi na ni / chu 'thung shig / ches gsung nas / 'brong g.yag skar ba ma bgrings te / 'brong gi phyi phyogs kyis / rba g.yas kyis ni blangs / rba g.yon kyis ni bzar te phu yid kyi gdang pyam ni de ru bkrongso / / sha bya za nI rhal rhal khrag sa 'thung ni cib cig / rus pa gle 'cha ni khrum krum mgo spu rjis khyer ni / ban ban / / phu ~~yu~~ yid ~~pu~~ kyi gdang pyam ni de ru bkrongso*; 148–69.

The rhetoric of argumentation between the horse and the yak alludes knowingly to that of ritual narratives themselves, and their duality of ancient antecedent and contemporary ritual performance. Ritual antecedent tales begin, as seen here, with their temporal setting, and they end by relating what happened in that setting long ago to the present day. One of the most common formulae relevant to the beginning is "last year, and in the years before" (*na ning ni gzhe ning snga*) which is spoken here by the yak. In doing so, the yak collapses the logic of antecedent into a succinct statement: "in the past, the god said this, so... now get lost." Except in this case, the yak does not formally complete the rhetorical syllogism with the statement of present relevance, "today, looking to tomorrow..." This phrase is instead left hanging, as it were, and is seized by the horse, who accepts the yak's premise and the god's command, but proposes that an entirely different set of consequences should follow from it. These same rhetorical devices are employed in a flyting exchange between two councilors in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, both of whom, like the horse and the yak, use the pairs "last year, and in the years before" and "today, looking to tomorrow," in order to make competing arguments over the division of spoils following Yarlung's conquest of Ngépo.[21] Rather than flyting councilors, here we have a horse and a yak, and their argument leads to violence and death.

The corpse of the elder brother horse Yiki Dangcham is described using a formula for the pitiful state of a corpse, found in other ritual antecedent tales. It makes use of duplication and onomatopoeia ("sucking" is *cib cig*), both easily recognizable and highly prized elements of traditional Tibetan poetics.

> After a while, the younger brothers Kyangrön Ngoktra and Khukrön Mangdar both whinnied in horse language, "tser tser," in steed language "tser tser." The elder brother Yiki Dangcham's response did not come. Khukrön Mangdar and Kyangrön Ngoktra both went to the land of Jangka Namgyé as younger brothers searching for their lost elder brother. They did not meet with the bright, living face of elder brother Yiki Dangcham. They met with his dead corpse.[22]

This is a very touching scene, with a mixture of equine features, e.g., the whinnying of the horses, with formulae that would be more commonly associated with the sadness of humans encountering their dead. This passage trades on one's family obligations— typically imagined as either fraternal or filial—to find a family member who is lost, and to see to their funeral when they die. This is

21. Bacot et al. 1940-1946, 140–43.

22. *da re shig na / nu rkyang ron rngog bkra dang / khug ron rmang dar gnyis kyi / rta skad ni tsher tsher rmang skad ni tsher tsher zhe 'o / phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi gsung ma mchiste / khug ron rmang dar rkyang ron rngog bkra gnyis yul byang ka snaM brgyad du phu rlag nu yis tshol du mchi mchi na / phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi bshos kyi zhal dang dang ni ma mjal / nongs kyi spur dang mjald / nas*; 169–72.

one of the most deeply felt obligations in early Tibetan culture, and animates not only ritual literature, but the famous myth of Drigum Tsenpo in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. It is also voiced by the exemplary priest Shenrab Miwo in another ritual antecedent tale from Dunhuang: "I perform the funeral rite for the deceased. I search for the lost."[23] In the absence of family, these obligations can be created through a pact of "blood brotherhood" (*shag rag*), as in another Old Tibetan ritual antecedent tale.[24] What follows concerns a related, archetypically though not exclusively fraternal obligation, namely revenge. The application of these obligations to horses is central to the tale, and, besides the obvious circumstances of their talking and emoting, this also pertains to how humans are here imagining horses in their own likeness.

> The younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, "If the flesh of the elder brother is not avenged by his younger brothers, if the nape of the neck is not looked after by the throat, if the despised heart is not cut out and if love is not repaid, if it is given up, if we do not drink the blood of his dead chest, then the throat does not look after the flesh of the nape, and thirst dries out our mouths—such would be a shame! The younger brothers shall avenge the elder brother's flesh. Khukrön Mangdar and Kyangrön Ngoktra shall see to the flesh of Yiki Dangcham! We shall cut out the despised heart! We shall cut out the heart of Drongyak Karwa! We shall repay [our brother's] love. We shall repay our elder brother Yiki Dangcham!"
>
> To this Kyangrön Ngoktra replied, "Our elder brother Yiki Dangcham was fast among horses and skilled among steeds. If he could not defeat Drongyak Karwa, then you and I, though we chase him, shall not catch him, though we try to escape, shall not get away, and though we fight him, shall not win. Therefore the younger brothers shall not avenge the flesh of the elder brother, and shall not drink the blood from [the yak's] dead chest." He said, "I am going to the land of Chidrok Gyégong[25] to eat grass for my wide mouth and drink water for my wide throat."
>
> When he said this, the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, "You are a coward among horses! You are a coward among steeds! As for you, younger brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, from now on we will have separate lands when liv-

23. *shI ni bdur rlag ni tshol*; Pelliot tibétain 1289, l. 613; Stein 1971, 501, n. 63.
24. This is what I've called the "Tale of Blood Brotherhood," and it is the first of two tales contained in the scroll Pelliot tibétain 1136. It has been studied by Stein (1971) and more recently by Ishikawa (2021).
25. The text here reads Drokchi Tangsum, which was the land to which Khukrön Mangdar, not Kyangrön Ngoktra, initially went. Presumably this is an error, born of the fact that the names of pasturelands in these tales are, like most of the place names, made up of highly generic and often interchangeable terms. When the two meet face to face once more when Kyangrön Ngoktra passes through Khukrön Mangdar's land on the way to defeat the yak, it is again Chidrok Gyégong.

ing, and separate graves when dead." He said, "I am going to the land of Miyül Kyiting ('Land of Men')."[26]

Here begins a second dialogue that ends in a rupture. The first, between the yak and the eldest horse brother, led to the latter's death. This dialogue leads to a permanent break between the remaining two brothers. In appealing to his elder brother to avenge their eldest brother's death, Khukrön Mangdar adopts the familiar idiom of proverbial speech, one of the most ubiquitous Tibetan codes of persuasion. Proverbs are used to make points in philosophical texts, in oratory, and in legal settings, and their skillful use is among the principal arts of Tibetan rhetoric. These tend to appeal to immutable customs, applying "the way things always have been" to "the way things should be."[27] In this, their logic is similar to that of the ritual antecedent tale. The appeal to repaying kindness and love is a particularly strongly felt sentiment in Tibetan culture. It is the inverse—and in this case the justification—of paying back hatred in the form of revenge.

The image of cutting or stabbing the heart of one's reviled enemy recurs in Old Tibetan dice divination texts: one auspicious oracular response declares, "you killed your hated enemy without even having to worship the gods...Gather your beloved relatives and strike your enemy's heart with a dagger."[28] Here, the motif of revenge is adapted to horses, so no daggers come into play, but we instead find the arresting image of a horse drinking the yak's blood.

The manner in which Khukrön Mangdar insults his elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra as a coward also warrants comment, since its language alludes to the role that horses play in funerals. In carrying the deceased over mountain passes on the path to the Beyond, a horse must show "great courage" (*chu gang che*). Khukrön Mangdar calls his brother a coward by saying that he has "little courage" (*chu gang chung*), a point that in a way prefigures the difference between them, since Khukrön Mangdar, when he becomes the domesticated horse, will be characterized by his pos-

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26. *nu khug ron rmang dar gyi mchid nas / phu sha ni nu yis ma blan~~s~~ / ltag sha '~~mcha~~ mjIng gis ma gnyer bas / sdang gi ni snying myi chod byams kyi ni lan ~~myi~~ ma ~~lo~~ glon na gtang du snying re na / / ro khrag khung du ma 'thungs na / ltag sha mjing du ma gnyer / bas skom kha ru skams na 'di ji nongs / phu sha nu yis glano / yid kyi gdang pyam gyi sha khug ron rmang dar dang rkyang ron rngog bkras gnyero / sdang gi snying gchado 'prong ~~ga~~ g.yag skar / ba'i snying gchado byams kyi lan glan no / phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi lan glan no / / zhes gsung na / rkyang ron rngog bkra'i zhal nas / phu yid kyi gdang pyam ni rta la ni gang mgyogs rmang la ni rtsal che bas 'brong g.yag skar ba / ma thub na / khyod dang nga gnyis kyis kyang snyag na ni myi slebs 'bros na ni myi thar rgal na ni myi thub ~~m~~gyis phu sha nu 'is myi lon ro khrag khong du myi 'thungs shes mchi ~~na~~ te / / yul 'brog / phyi ldang gsum du kha yangs kyi ni rtsi za mgrin yangs kyi ni chu 'thung du 'dongo zhes gsung na' nu khug ron rmang dar 'i mchid nas / / rta la chab gang chung rmang la chab gang chung na nu ~~rgyang~~ rkhyang ron / rngog bkra khyodo / / da pyi slan chadu / so na ni yul 'bye 'o / shi na ni dur 'bye'o / zhes mchi na+s / yul myi yul skyi mthing du mchi 'o zhes mchi na' /*; r73–87.

27. Sørensen 2010.

28. *sku bla ni ma gsol bar / stang gyi ni dgra zhig guM...byaMs gyi ni gnyen bsogs shing/ dgra snying ni phur gyis btab /*; IOL Tib J 739, ll. 16v1–7; Dotson 2019, 15.

session of "great courage" in his capacity to carry deceased humans across mountain passes to the Land of the Dead.

Khukrön Mangdar's proverbial image of codependence and consanguinity likens the relationship between brothers to that between the throat and the nape of the neck. It is all the more alarming, therefore, that the two brothers' disagreement leads to a vow to graze in separate lands when living and rest in separate tombs when dead. This is functionally the opposite of the pact of blood brotherhood that binds a friend to look for you when you're lost and to see to your funeral when you die: it is the severance of kin ties and obligations.

> The elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra replied, "Younger brother Khukrön Mangdar, when you go to the land of Miyül Kyiting, and befriend man, then tomorrow and forever on may you, horse, be harnessed by a bit in your mouth and develop sores around your mouth! May your back be loaded with a pack and saddle and may you have load [sores] on your back. May your lungs be constricted by a saddle girth, and may the heart in your chest grow weak."
>
> To this the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar replied, "As for you, elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, when you roam the land of Chidrok Gyégong,[29] though there be no one to ride you, may you be ridden by the stars in the heavens and may your back be stricken by insects and pustules. Though there be no man to harness you with a bit, may your mouth be surrounded by sores as if from a bit, caused by eating the rough grass of the pasturelands. Though there be no men to chase you, may you be pursued by swift hunting dogs. Though there be no men to catch you, may you be shot at by swift archers."[30]

Their dispute now beyond repair, the two brothers rain down curses on one another, in turns calling into existence the plight of the domesticated horse and that of the wild kiang, and authoring the conditions for each other's misfortune. Both sets of maladies are specific and come from acute observations of both horses and kiangs. The poetic image of being ridden by the stars appears to allude to astrological lore about the malefic influences of certain stars and constellations.

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29. The text here reads Drokchi Tangsum; see fn. 25.

30. *pu rkhyang ron rngog bkhra 'i mchid nas / nu khug ron rngog bkhra khyod ni yul myi yul skyi mthing du mchiste myi dang bsen bgyis pas sang nam nam zha chig na / / rta khyod ni khar srab gyis srabste kha drung shu bab 'khor chig rgyab du sgas stade rgyab du sgal byung shig glo glos mnan te khong na snying nyams par shog shig ches gsung na' / / nu khug ron rmang dar 'i zhal nas / khu rkhyang ron rngog bkra khyod ni yul pyI 'brog ltang gsum du song na bzhon gyi myi myed kyang skar ma g.yen gyis bzhon te rgyab bya 'bras dang tshag ma / tshig par shog shig / srab gyI myi myed na 'brog rtsI pyor bas rang du sras te kha drung shu bab 'khor bar shog shig snyag gyi myi myed na mgyogs sha khyis snyogs shig 'dzin gyi myi myen na mgyogs / gzhi khyen gyis / 'pongs shig ches mchi nas*; 187–95.

This essentially ends the second act of the tale, and marks the transition to the third act, concerning the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar's partnership with man.

> The elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra went to Chidrok Gyégong.[31] He went to seek grass for his wide mouth and to seek water for his wide throat.
>
> The younger brother Khukrön Mangdar went to the land of Miyül Kyiting and Mayül Tagyé. He went to the man Mabu Damshé in his stronghold Sakar Kyawo. The horse Mangdar said, "Today, looking to tomorrow, the horse is weak, the steed is impaired. You man, Mabu Damshé, can you act bravely at the mountain pass or not? Can you bear expansively over the ford or not? Acting bravely at the pass and bearing expansively at the ford, today, looking to tomorrow, when you are alive I will carry your body for 100 years, and when you die and depart as leader of the 700,000, I will establish you as lord." The man Mabu Damshé and the horse Mangdar both drew their agreement in the dirt. They separated horses from mules, and entrusted [roles for] each. They swore an oath..., made an agreement... When living, he will carry his body, and when dead, he will establish him as lord.[32]

Unlike his mother, who was captured by a goddess who would domesticate her, Khukrön Mangdar comes willingly to be domesticated by the man Mabu Damshé. He states that he is weak, alluding to his inability to kill the yak. He then reveals how he can compensate for some of man's own weaknesses by carrying him across the passes and fords to the Land of the Dead. Crucially, this mutually beneficial pact in which each compensates for the other's weakness, is proposed not by the man but by the horse. It is, as it were, the "horse's idea" to serve as mount to the Land of the Dead. The pact that they make parallels the rupture of the horse brothers in that it concerns their relationship to one another in both life and in death. Here horse and human communicate plainly, but their agreement is not only oral and verbal. The pact must be solemnized with writing, however pictographic and rudimentary, and also by oaths. The agreement also includes practical matters: the horse will not be doing work that is proper to a mule.

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31. The text here reads "Drokchi Tangsum"; see fn. 25.

32. *pu rgyang ron rngog bkhra ni 'brog phyi ldang sum du mchiso / / kha yangs gyi ni rtsi 'tshal ~~br~~ mgrin yangs gyi ni chab 'tshal du ma / mchiso / / nu khu gron rmang dar ni yul myi yul skyi mthing smra yul thag rgyad du mchi / te / mkhar sa mkhar skya bo'i nang na myi rma bu ldam shar gyi gan du mchiste / / rta rmang dar 'i / mchid nas / / de ring sang lda na rta la ni nyam nyes rmang la ni yang thag gyis myed na / / myi rma bu ldam shad / khyod chab gang la ru bgyi 'am myi bgyi yang ba rab du sbog gam myi sbog / / chab gang la ru bgyis / la yang ba rab du sbogs na / / de ring sang lda na ni bshos tshe lo brgya la ni ring bkhuro / / nongs tshe bdun bum gyi bdag du gshegsna ni rje gdabo / zhes mchi nas / / myi rma bu ldam shad dang rta rmang dar gnyis tha / tshIgs ni skam la bchas dre'u rta ni dbye la stad te mna bchad mtho bchade bchad gyi mtheb li gong / tha bgyIs tshIgs bgyIs te gnyI dro thab mo gor te / bshos na ni ring bkur nongsna ni rdze gdab phar bgyiste /*; 197–104.

Like everyone else in this story, the man has a very formulaic name, as does his geographical setting. Most of these names have lexical meanings, and Mabu Damshé is no exception: he is "Son of Man, Storyteller."[33] He may as well be named "archetypal man." There are two places given as his land, Miyül Kyiting and Mayül Tagyé. Within the ritual-spatial universe of these tales, these are the names of the land of humans, as opposed to, say, the land of gods, demons, etc. The existence of various places on the Tibetan plateau with these names is probably a secondary development, in which this important site in the ritual spatial universe was mapped onto the physical landscape.[34] Elsewhere, the ritual and the physical landscapes are coterminous insofar as many of the geographical settings for ritual antecedent tales are sites along the course of the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) River, imagined or re-membered within these tales as ancient kingdoms, some with claims to prehistoric existence.[35]

The language describing the oaths makes use of the poetic device of hyperbaton, where words, or parts of a word, that naturally go together are separated in such a way that their meaning can still be comprehended, as in the expression "un-bloody-likely."[36] Thus the term *mna' mtho bcad*, "to make an oath," is divided into *mna' bcad mtho bcad*, where the repetition of the verb *bcad* hints at the fact that the two nouns preceding are separated halves of a compound. The same is done for the phrase "made an agreement," *tha tshigs bgyis*, which is similarly arrived at by hyperbaton in the phrase *tha bgyis tshigs bgyis*. This is one of the more obscure and lesser known poetic devices in Tibetan ritual literature, and one that has confounded those translators who have proceeded literally, word-by-word. It is conceivable that this type of hyperbaton derives from conventions of oral performance that draw out and repeat and vary a given line.[37]

> The man Mabu Damshé mounted the horse Khukrön Mangdar, and lashed his tiger skin quiver and his leopard skin quiver... The rider squeezed his sides, and when they arrived at the land Chidrok Gyégong, the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, "I will be ashamed before my elder brother, I will be ashamed be-

33. Though the orthographies differ, the preferred reading is probably *Ltam shad* rather than *Ldam shad*. *Ltam* means words or stories, whereas *ldam* means mud or dirty water. *Shad* is a straight punctuation mark, but in the name *Ltam shad*, one can easily surmise that the labial prefix *b*, following the labial suffix *m*, has been elided, such that the "correct" spelling of his name is **Ltam bshad*, which means "speaks words or stories," a most fitting name for the only human in a tale full of horses.
34. Blezer 2011.
35. Dotson 2012, 170–71; Hazod 2019.
36. Smyth 1920, 679.
37. Take this example from the *spos rabs* from Lawa, recorded by Huber, where the syllables *ay* and *way* are added to a line to break it up in a pattern repeated for the other lines:
    stag shar gnyis kyis spos 'tshal phyin /
    way stag shar gnyis kyis spos 'tshal phyin /
    ay spos 'tshal ay phyin /
    ay stag shar gnyis; Huber 2020 vol. 1, 238.

fore Kyangrön Ngoktra. Cover this horse's face, cover this steed's face." The man Mabu Damshé covered the horse's face, covered the steed's visage.

When they arrived at the land of Jangka Namgyé, they met the wild yak, Father Drongyak Karwa there. [A description of the battle with the yak, with some details of the melee]... and thus he killed Drongyak Karwa.

The younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, "The elder brother's love is repaid. Yiki Dangcham's love is repaid. The despised heart is cut out. Drongyak Karwa's despised heart is cut out. The younger brother has avenged the flesh of the elder brother horse. I have drunk the blood from the chest. The throat takes care of the flesh of the nape. Now, cut the yak's flesh into pieces. Cut the yak's hide for clothing. Attach its tail to this horse's mane. Now, I'll show off to the elder brother, show off to Kyangrön Ngoktra." The man Mabu Damshé cut the yak's flesh into pieces, and cut its hide for clothing. He attached the tail to the mane of the horse Khukrön Mangdar.[38]

In this part of the tale, man holds up his end of the bargain by killing the yak that Kukrön Mangdar is unable to kill on his own. There is a reversal here reflecting the change in status between the two former brothers before and after Kukrön Mangdar's successful avenging of their elder brother's death. Before this is done, Kukrön Mangdar feels shame (*ngo tsha*) at the idea of Kyangrön Ngoktra seeing him ridden by a man—basically a fulfillment of his earlier curse. Once the man has helped him kill the yak, though, he glories in its death, has a trophy tied to his mane, and wants to show off (*ngom*) his victory to his elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, essentially to shame him for his cowardice.

This episode is also notable for the sharing of the yak's carcass between horse and human, constituting something not unlike a sacrificial feast.[39]

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38. *rta / khug ron rmang dar la myi rma bu ltam shad bchibste / stag ral gzig ral ni skyes gyi ring la dregs / / rta bo ni brang mnan te / / yul phyi 'brog rgyad gosu byon na / nu khug ron rmang dar 'i mchid nas phu bo ngo tsha na rgyang ron rngog bkhra la ngo tsha 'is rta'i ngo khob shig rmang gi ngo khob shig ches mchi na / / myi rma bu lda[m] shad gyIs rta'i ngo bkhab rmang gyi zhal bkab te / / yul pyang kha smam brgyadu mchis na / / pha 'br[ong] g.yag skar ba dang de ru mjalo / / myi rma bu ldam shad gyis / khu lo ni sbyangs gyIs mdzad / dbya[-] dkar ni pongs la bkhrol te sngun na chi thud thud na 'brong g.yag skar ba thud thud pyi na ci breng [---] na nu khug ron rmang dar breng breng / myi rma bu ldan shar gyis mchog gar ni dra bkhug glu dmar [ni] ldang bzar te dad ~~du~~ dgu g.yasu bab na nam mdzong g.yon du pyung dad dgu g.yon du bab na nam mtshong g.yosn du byung ~~ni~~ te 'brong g.yag skar ba ni de ru bkhum mo / / nu khug ron rmang dar 'i mchid nas / / pu byams kyi ni lan lono yid ke gdang phyam byams gyi lan lon / / stang gi snying chodo / 'brong g.yag skar ba stang gyI snying chodo / / rta pu sha ni nus lono ro khrag ni khong du 'thungso ldag sha ni [mching] gyIs gnyero / da g.yag sha ni lhu ru gshogs shIg g.yag lgo ni rasu dros shIg / rnga ma ban [---] nI rta kho bo'i rngog la thogs shig / / da pu la ngom gdab na rgyang ron rngog bgra la ngom [---] zhes mchi nas / / myi rma bu ldam shad gyis g.yag sha ni lhu ru bkrald g.yag lko ni [rasu] draste / rnga ma ban chig rta khug ro rmang dar 'i rngog la bthags te /*; 1104–119.

39. I've avoided the word "sacrifice" to describe the horse's slaughter in these funerals because, as I've argued elsewhere, in

> Having cut out the despised heart and having repaid the love of the elder brother, they went to the land Miyul Kyiting, Mayul Tagyé. Then, after some time, as for the man Mabu Damshé, *dü* demons came down from the sky and cut .... *si* demons rose from the earth and...cut... the *sin* demons loosened the fastenings. The virile lord died, the excellent turquoise crumbled. The lord died, he died from... The turquoise crumbled, it crumbled from his head. The virile lord died, the beloved was lost, and he was no more.[40]

This marks the decisive turn, and the full transformation of what might otherwise be an etiological myth of horse domestication into a ritual antecedent tale about the role of horses in funerals. On balance, the third act of the tale, which concerns the partnership between horse and human, emphasizes the man Mabu Damshé's side of the pact, which results in the killing of the yak and the resolution of tension created in the second act. Only here at the end does it turn to the horse Kukrön Mangdar's duties toward the man Mabu Damshé, which can only be discharged upon the man's death. His death is described using a formula for death found in ritual antecedent tales and oracular responses, in which the *dü (bdud)* demons descend from above while the *si (sri)* demons rise from below. It also employs another recurring formula that pairs a dying lord and a crumbling or broken turquoise in a poetic evocation of death and loss that emphasizes the importance of this type of stone and its connection with vital forces. The pairing of loss and death also goes back to the fundamental obligations of family members to search for their lost and to bury their dead.

The tale now shifts to the end of its third act and to its coda.

> *Pha*[41] Shenrab Miwo and Durshen Mada built [the various funerary structures and arranged them properly]... As the beloved companion, the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar was courageous in crossing the passes and broad in crossing the fords. He established the lord in a high place, and they grazed on northern grass alike and...together.
>
> In ancient times, it was excellent, and now it shall be successful. Today, look-

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this tale "the horse occupies the place paradigmatically held by the gods. If there is a sacrificial animal in this tale it is undoubtedly the yak, which the man kills and then offers to the horse. To wit, the yak's body is divided according to the horse's commands, and the horse requests and receives a choice part, while the man cuts the meat into pieces, presumably to eat"; Dotson 2018, 286.

40. *stang gyi ni snying bchad byams gyi [ni lan] blan / / yul myi yul skyi mthing smra yul thag rgyad du mchiso/ / da re shig re shig na [myi [rma bu ldam] shad ni gnam nas ni bdud [4 syllables possibly rubbed out] / nas bchad / / sa las sri lag+ng ste chags / sgrogs ni srin gyis bkhro~~n~~l te rje ni dpan te nongs g.yu ni bzang grugs rje grongs ni g[---] las grongs g.yu grugs ni dbu las grugs / rje dphan te ni nongs sdug ste ni rlag gyi [---] myed nas /*; 1119–24.
41. While *pha* is usually translated with "father," it is also known to refer to a class of ritual specialists; see Huber 2020 vol.2, 11–12.

ing to tomorrow, you the beloved companions and dear mounts, also be like that! Courage—show it at the pass! Breadth—show it when crossing the ford![42]

The end of the tale resolves its third act, with the horse Khukrön Mangdar carrying the man Mabu Damshé to the Land of the Dead. Just as these two are exemplars or even archetypes of the partnership between horses and humans, so too the priests who are summoned to perform the funeral are also exemplary priests for those who perform these rites.

The end of the tale further glorifies the horse by stating that horse and human will enjoy the same station in the afterlife, and graze on grass together. This point is even more explicit in other ritual antecedent tales, where the image of the grass-grazing man in the Land of the Dead uses the trope of the wild, the strange, and of reverse domestication as a succinct, iconic statement of the unknowability of death.[43] This clear assertion of posthumous equality for horse and human is the closing image of the tale prior to the statement of relevance, and it crowns the horse in glory for its role as man's "beloved companion."

The tale closes with a coda including the formula that applies its events to the present ritual situation for which it is intended and of which it is a part. This also includes a shift in voice to the second person hortative, "you." The "you" directly addressed in this way are the horses that are killed in order to serve as mounts to the Beyond for the human deceased as part of a funeral rite. One may read this as indicating that the entire tale has been explicitly told to these horses. As we will see, however, the tale operates on different levels and for different audiences, only some of which include horses.

The last two and a half lines of the manuscript are covered in conservators' gauze and tape, making it difficult to discern the tale's full ending.[44] Our tale has come to an end more or less satisfactorily, however, with the statement of relevance applying the ancient antecedent to the present context of its telling.

Audiences Living and Dead, Human and Equine

42. *pha gshen rabs myi bo dad dur gshen rma dad bas la ni rgyal skos lung du [---] bchas / ste gshin ste nyer bu ni bchas rtan bang rtan khod mo ni bkhod de bzang ni se la b[---] sa ni gral du dngar te / / do ma snying dags su nu khu rmang dar 'is chab gang ni la ru b[---] ba ni rab~~s~~ du ~~b~~sbogste / / rje gral ni mtho g~~.~~nyer byang rtsI ni gad mnabs mtshungs [---] mtshungs mnyams dang ni mnyamso / / gna 'I ni pul pyungo da 'i ~~la~~ ni la bsagso / / de [ring ni] sang lda na phyugs spo ma nyedu do ma snying dags khyed rna+ms ~~nam~~ khyang da de dang 'dra de dang [---] gyIs / chab grang ni la ru mdzod chig yang ba ni rab du sbogs shig /*; r124–30.

43. Dotson 2018, 284–85.

44. These lines are as follows: *stan pha ngag ni na shi[---] nyen chig dro dpyid nyi ring pho nang nas nub 'chug shig / gzha ring [---] [---] [mjalo] gsa[-] [---] [phabag] bdag [---] [---] ['tshal] dang da mjalo / / / ya[-] [---]*; r130–33.

The fascinating contents of this text, not least with regard to the relationship between horse and human, and with respect to the ontology of death for each, are relevant to a literary and rhetorical analysis. In particular, the intended or explicit listeners addressed at the end of the tale are horses that will be, or already have been, slaughtered in order to carry the deceased over the passes and fords that separate the land of the living from the Land of the Dead. The performative setting for this tale would have most likely been a funeral in which the deceased and his or her family members were present, along with ritual performers and their assistants. Here one would also expect living or dead horses, and other animals such as sheep, which also play a role in the journey to the Land of the Dead. Reading or listening from the perspective of this explicit audience would therefore be to adopt the perspective either of a horse or of a dead horse. In more practical terms, however, it is to read or listen from the perspectives of humans addressing horses through cultural-and-genre-specific codes of persuasion during a time when such rituals were performed, that is, in eighth- to tenth-century Tibet.

In fact, one can be more precise about this tale's various audiences with recourse to a typology of audiences outlined by Peter Rabinowitz. Rabinowitz developed this typology in order to analyze fictional works, but he also applied it to music, and it is adaptable to ritual and historiographical genres as well. Here I will introduce the four audiences before adapting them with relevance to "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang." The first of Rabinowitz's four audiences is the "actual audience." In his context, these are the flesh-and-blood people who have the author's book in their laps. Rabinowitz's second audience is the "authorial audience," about whose beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions the author has made certain assumptions.[45] Rabinowitz observes that "[s]ince the structure of a novel is designed for the author's hypothetical audience (which I call the authorial audience), we must, as we read, come to share, in some measure, the characteristics of this audience if we are to understand the text."[46] Some authors—Rabinowitz singles out Joyce and Nabokov—write for an authorial audience that is out of reach of nearly all of their readers. More relevant to our context, "historically or culturally distant texts are hard to understand...because we do not possess the knowledge required to join the authorial audience."[47] This pertains to my remarks above about attaining an approximation of "traditional literacy" in order to appreciate ritual antecedent tales. Rabinowitz's third audience is the "narrative audience," a fictional construct for whom the novel, its world, and its assumptions are *real*. To determine the narrative audience one might ask, "[w]hat sort of person would I have to pretend to be—what would I have to know and believe—if I wanted to take this work of fiction as real?"[48] The narrative audience of *Cinderella*, for instance, believes in fairy godmothers, and this distinguishes it from

45. Rabinowitz 1977, 126.
46. Rabinowitz 1977, 126.
47. Rabinowitz 1977, 127.
48. Rabinowitz 1977, 128.

the second audience (the authorial audience), which recognizes a fairy godmother as a fairy tale topos and not as someone one meets in one's daily life.[49] The fourth audience is the "ideal narrative audience," another fictional construct that "believes the narrator, accepts his judgments, sympathizes with his plight, laughs at his jokes even when they are bad."[50] It differs from the narrative audience in that the latter, while also taking the world of the novel as real, may not go along with all of the narrator's judgements. We shall see an instance of this difference below when we use this typology to sort, among other things, the equine audience from the human audience.

Adapting Rabinowitz's four types of audience to a textualized oral performance that is directed at an audience that comprises both horses and humans, as well as living and dead listeners, some adjustments must naturally be made. The concept of author, for one, is to be replaced by that of performer, or even that of the tale, which would here stand for the collective performative tradition rather than the individual genius of a given performer. Working backwards through the four audiences, the ideal narrative audience of "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang" is the living or dead horses to whom the tale's closing exhortations are directed. It is they who accept this tale as real, who feel pride in the account of their divine genealogy and their ancestor's descent from the heavens, who lament the death of the elder brother, relive the traumatic feud with the brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, and celebrate along with the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar when the yak is killed. It is they who accept the irreversible nature of the break between brothers, leading to the speciation of horses and kiangs. Parallel to this, or just following it in a sleight of hand that will be explored below, the horses also accept the irreversible and binding nature of the pact with the man Mabu Damshé, as a result of which they willingly die to serve as "beloved companions" for his human descendants.

If the tale's ideal narrative audience is equine and perhaps dead, its other imaginary audience - the narrative audience - is human. Both of these audiences know the world of the tales, from its vertical topography of heavens to its horizontal geography of plains, pasturelands, lands of humans, and lands of various types of demons. They also know its gods, kings, healers, villains, and priests, as well as the various formulae and topoi. Whereas the tale caters to the ideal equine audience by its being mainly about horses, and through its very title, the human narrative audience is more concerned with the final part of the tale. One might even say that for the human narrative audience the bulk of tale, up to the killing of the yak, is subordinate to, or in the service of, explaining how horses came to serve as "beloved companions" in the context of slaughtering horses at a funeral. The tale's title would for them be something like a misnomer in the sense that while the tale does include the etiological tale of how one ur-species split into horse and kiang, this is not what the tale is *about*. In this sense, just as the pact between Khukrön Mangdar and Mabu

49. Rabinowitz 1977, 129.
50. Rabinowitz 1977, 134.

Damshé has two sides and two sets of obligations, so too the tale's audiences include the two constituencies - equine and human - of this pact, each with their own interests and concerns. Also, keeping in mind Rabinowitz's observation that the narrative audience need not go along with all of the author's judgments, the tale's human narrative audience might dissent from the statement that horse and human will be established as equals in the Land of the Dead. For them, this may well be viewed as pablum intended for the ideal narrative audience of horses.[51]

The authorial audience (Rabinowitz's second type of audience) is, for the performer, comprised of human listeners who are familiar with the genre of ritual antecedent tales (*rabs*), and therefore know their ritual-spatial universe, their topoi, and their formulae in much the same way as the human narrative audience knows them. One difference is that the authorial audience is aware of this tale as a tale, and this reflexivity or self-consciousness is where we may perceive something of "the literary." This authorial audience might be aware, in fact, of the myth of the speciation of horse and kiang as a free-floating folktale that has been repurposed as a ritual antecedent tale with the addition of the horse's pact with man. The authorial audience would also be well aware of the gap between their own experiences, in which horses do not converse with them, and the world of these tales. This authorial audience may also perceive the tale's dual focus on both horses and humans and understand the tale to be "winking" at them, in the sense that they perceive that the tale isn't so much about the speciation of horses and kiangs as it is meant to persuade horses to lay down their lives for the sake of humans.

The actual audience of people and animals assembled for the tale's performance and for the funeral rite would run a gamut. Some would ably join the authorial audience by their familiarity with the genre. Others might even try to cross over into the narrative audience insofar as they find that doing so might be necessary for reasons of ritual efficacy. (In a literary context, one might call this a "strong reading.") Many would presumably be ignorant of the topoi and formulae. Some might find the horse Khukrön Mangdar to be tragic or gullible. Others, similarly to Rabinowitz's example of the readers of *Lolita* who, failing to join the authorial audience, look up Humbert Humbert's murder trial in a newspaper, might propose dates for when the horse brothers and the man Mabu Damshé actually lived.[52]

On the topic of actual audiences, we have the benefit of recent ethnographic examples of eastern Bhutanese audiences of ritual antecedent tales. Toni Huber observes that audience and performer often have divergent understandings of the meanings of passages in the tales, but quickly cautions

51. This is not, I should add, to contradict my earlier analysis of this image as an instance of the "iconography of the strange," that points to the incommensurability of the state of being alive with the state of being dead. It is rather to recognize that audiences would not be univocal in their understanding of this arresting image.

52. These are the same readers, incidentally, who react to the royal *gshegs rabs* by proposing dates for the "first Tibetan king" Nyatri Tsenpo (gnya' khri btsan po). The formative role that ritual antecedent tales played in the formation of Tibetan historiography has been discussed in Dotson 2016, 79, 105–107.

that "[m]eaning can often be overrated by outside observers." The point, he states, is not what the tale means, or even how it is performed, but that it is performed by an authorized performer—in his example, a "*bon* shaman."[53] This is an important observation that should temper any assertion that the audience need necessarily identify with or "embody" the figures in the tales.[54] That being said, I will now turn precisely to bodies and affect, but will do so at the level of the bodies of the ideal equine narrative audience and the human narrative audience, both of which are themselves imaginary constructs called into existence by the assumptions of the tale.

Real and Imagined Audiences and Bodies

The proximity of these different types of audiences reveals something about the nature of a given work. If the actual audience and the authorial audience are virtually identical, then this should mean that a work is accessible and easily understood; if the authorial audience and the narrative audience are almost the same, then this indicates that a work is realistic rather than fantastical; and if the ideal narrative audience differs markedly from the narrative audience, then this may be an indication of irony or a similar device whereby the ideal narrative audience believes something in the tale that the narrative audience knows to be false. It is in the distance between these latter two audiences, outlined above as equine and human, respectively, that we find the creative tension in this tale. I think it would be a mistake, however, to view this as irony, or as a bald assertion of humans' guile and horses' gullibility. While such sentiments are not totally absent, these are outweighed or at least tempered by the story's emotional arc.

Emotion, of course, is felt in the bodies of actual listeners, and the conceit of this tale is that it is meant to pull at the heartstrings of the ideal narrative audience, which is comprised of dead or soon to be dead horses, while it in fact (or also) elicits an emotional response from the human (narrative, authorial/ "performative," and actual) audiences. Appeal to emotion can be seen here as a code of persuasion, and one that involves a narrative sleight of hand as the tale moves from its first three acts to its resolution at the end of the third act and its turn toward the funerary in the coda. David Velleman's observations on body and emotion are relevant here to this emotional code of persuasion. He writes that a story "enables its audience to assimilate events, not to familiar patterns of *how things happen,* but rather to familiar patterns of *how things feel.*"[55] Among the emotional scenes that create this visceral understanding are Kukrön Mangdar's heartfelt desire to

53. Huber 2020 vol. 1, 235–36.

54. The prospect of "identification" or "embodiment" in such cases is something that I have mentioned in the past, in the context of looking at these ritual practices as being possibly aligned with, or in conversation with, tantric Buddhist practices; Dotson 2008, 46.

55. Velleman 2003, 19.

avenge his brother to "pay back his love," the disappointment and anger in the irrevocable split between the two horse brothers, and the exultation at the killing of the murderous yak. These episodes, marked out by dialogues, create an emotional arc that Velleman sees as essential to fostering a sense of understanding and of closure.

> Having made subjective sense of historical events, by arriving at a stable attitude toward them, the audience is liable to feel that it has made objective sense of them, by understanding how they came about. Having sorted out its feelings towards events, the audience mistakenly feels that it has sorted out the events themselves: it mistakes emotional closure for intellectual closure.[56]

Velleman's observations here apply to the emotional arc of the ostensive feelings of the horses who are this tale's ideal narrative audience (those who, in Rabinowitz's words, laugh at all the author's jokes). The satisfying emotional arc of defeating the hated yak, fulfilling one's duty to one's brother, and being established as man's equal in the Land of the Dead all signify or even create in the imagined equine listener a parallel satisfaction with his/her exalted fate. The emotional response to the resolution to the third act (the horse's revenge), in other words, spills over into the coda (the horse being willingly slaughtered as part of the horse-human partnership).

This is the logic of how narrative persuades the horse that its slaughter at a human funeral is not a grudging fulfilment of the horse's pact, but a preordained exultation initiated not by humans, but by the heroic horse ancestor Khukrön Mangdar. Turning to the human narrative audience—which is also imaginary—the same logic that persuades the ideal narrative audience of horses doubles as the logic by which the human narrative audience is emotionally satisfied with the story's resolution and emotional arc. They, as a result, accept the utility of the pact between horse and human and the necessity of slaughtering horses in these funeral rites. It is thus through the animal's persuasion, or more precisely the human imagining of the horse's being persuaded, that humans are also persuaded. A major difference here is that the human narrative audience is not persuaded to be willingly slaughtered, but rather to accept the horse's (or horses') slaughter as a necessary part of preparations for the post-mortem journey. Here one should recall that animal sacrifice in funerals was a major point of contention as Buddhism gained ground in Tibet toward the end of the eighth century.

Conclusions

56. Velleman 2003, 20.

The "Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang" is a work of both simplicity and of extraordinary richness. This guided reading has pointed out its use of various poetic devices common to the genre of ritual antecedent tales. It has also teased out some intriguing structural parallels and reversals. The vertical descent and the horizontal journeys of the horses, and of the middle horse brother in particular, are like an ancestral or royal *shekrap* (gshegs rabs)—a specific type of Tibetan etiological myth best represented in the myth of the descent of the first Tibetan king. This equine descent is something like the inverse of the man Mabu Damshé's journey at the end of the tale across fords and passes to the Land of the Dead. There is also the obvious contrast between the mare mother's unwillingness to be seized and tamed by the goddess and the younger horse brother volunteering to be domesticated by the man Mabu Damshé in exchange for his help. Additionally, there is the inverse nature of the pact between horse and human wherein the man Mabu Damshé offers death (of the yak Drongyak Karwa) and the horse Khukrön Mangdar offers life (in the Land of the Dead). In a further contrastive parallel, the curses that Khukrön Mangdar exchanges with his brother Kyangrön Ngoktra lead to a rupture of not only their brotherhood but of their "species-hood," whereas the pact between Khukrön Mangdar and the man Mabu Damshé transforms the horse into a "beloved companion" (*do ma snying dags*). This is not far removed from the ritual of "blood brotherhood" (*shag rag*) through which one's friend may take on the duties—finding one when one is lost, attending to one's funeral when one dies—that are customarily the province of blood relatives. It is a further testament to the intimacy of the relationship between horses and humans in early Tibet.

An application of Peter Rabinowitz's typology of four audiences reveals how the tale operates on different levels, simultaneously appealing to an ideal narrative audience of equine listeners, an ideal human audience that takes the world of this tale as real, a literary/performative audience that is familiar with the genre of ritual antecedent tales, and an actual audience of readers and listeners ranging from those who are ignorant of these tales and their genre to those who know them well. At one extreme, the imaginary equine audience is persuaded by the story's emotional logic, and agree to be slaughtered in order to serve as "beloved companions." At another extreme, some in the actual audience might pay no attention to the tale, or might be opposed to the slaughter of horses in funerals. Another actual audience—you who are just now finishing this article—is by now better equipped to understand the other audiences for whom this tale was performed. What you take from this, whether it be skepticism, horror, acceptance, or indifference, aligns you also with the older actual audiences of listeners—both human and equine—whose responses would run their own gamut.

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Studies in the Life and Thought of Mkhas grub rje II: Notes on Poetry, Poetics and Other Things in Mkhas grub rje's Oeuvre*

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Abstract The poetic oeuvre of many Tibetan writers still remains relatively unexplored. The present essay deals with several pertinent aspects of the poetic oeuvre of Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang po (1385–1438). It focuses *inter alia* on an ode (*bstod*) he had written to his teacher Tsong kha pa on which the early nineteenth century Mongol scholar Ngag dbang bstan dar [or Bstan dar Lha rams pa] of A la sha had written a commentary. Apart from a segue into Mkhas grub's whereabouts from 1407 to 1431 and his troubled relations with the ruling house of Rgyal mkhar rtse, the essay points out that while there is plenty of evidence in his poetic oeuvre that Mkhas grub had studied the Tibetan translation of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa / Snyan ngag me long*, the fundamental treatise for Tibetan poetics and poetic theory, no mention of this is made in his extant biographies, short as they are. It closes with remarks on Ngag dbang bstan dar's contributions to poetry and poetics.

*/ **blo bzang** mkhyen pa'i gting mtha' mi mngon zhing /*
*/ **grags pa'i** rlabs phreng rol pa'i 'jug ngogs las /*
*/ **dpal** ldan yon tan chu yi thigs pa zhig /*
/ gzung phyir 'di ni dad pa'i 'bab stegs lags / [1]

The depth and extent of a **good mind's** understanding is not visible,
from the shore of the rolling waves of **fame**;
so as to take a drop of water having a **brilliant** quality,
this work is a mooring for confidence.

* With this essay, I happily return to my studies of Mkhas grub rje that have laid dormant, albeit not altogether abandoned, for so many years, the first installment of which was published in van der Kuijp 1985.

1. Mkhas grub 1980–1982[a], 472.

Embedding names of individuals in verses that play on their meaning is an old Indo-Tibetan tradition that was codified most notably for the Tibetan intellectual in the Tibetan translations of Daṇḍin's (7th–8th c.) *Kāvyādarśa*, the *Snyan ngag me long*, possibly under the rubric of the paranomasia (Tib. *sbyar ba'i dpe,* Skt. *śleṣopamā*).[2] And we thus see Khedrup Gelek Pal Sangpo (Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang po 1385–1438) composing an obvious *sbyar ba'i dpe* in this second verse of his ode (*bstod pa*) in which he joined the name in religion of his beloved master Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa), Losang Drakpai Pal (Blo bzang grags pa'i dpal, 1359–1417), to the meaning of its component parts.[3] In this verse, he sets forth the aim and purpose (*rtsom pa dam bca' ba*) of this little, undated poetic work. Its imposing title is *Rgyal ba thams cad kyi mkhyen brtse gcig tu bsdus pa'i jo bo rje btsun bla ma chos kyi rgyal po tsong kha pa chen po'i yon tan rmad du byung ba la mdor bsdus par bstod pa'i rab tu byed pa dad pa'i rol mtsho*. But the short title of this tract (*rab tu byed pa*), a *summa* of Tsongkhapa's marvelous qualities, is thus *Dad pa'i rol mtsho* or *The Groundswell of Faith*, which is by no means an uncommon title. A typical Tibetan trope, we encounter the expression *rol mtsho* in many other Tibetan literary sources and, as a matter of fact, the use of aquatic terminology is common in Tibetan poetry, and one might argue that it is a tad tedious precisely because of its ubiquity. Samsara is likened to a sea/ocean (*rgya mtsho*) and it is not an accident that many monasteries and individuals, especially treasure-teachers (*gter ston*), have "isle" (*gling* [*pa*]) in their names, suggesting that these and they are places of repose, places where or in whom one can take refuge from samsara's chaotic turbulence. We thus have the following aquatic terms in this verse of the *Ode*:

1. *gting mtha'*.....depth and extent
2. *rlabs phreng rol pa*.....rolling waves
3. *'jug ngogs*.....*gru gzings gtong sa*, place from where a boat departs.
4. *yon tan*.....implied is *chu yon tan brgyad*, eight qualities of water
5. *chu yi thigs pa*.....drop of water
6. *'bab stegs*.....*rkang pa mar 'bab pa dang yar stegs pa*, mooring.

Khedrup informs us in his colophon that he had written the *Ode* at the behest of Shar Gyalmo Rongpa Lama Tsakhowa Palden Chökyi Drakpa (Shar Rgyal mo rong pa Bla ma Tsha kho/go ba Dpal ldan chos kyi grags pa) while he resided in Lhenjeling (Lhan bye gling) Monastery, an insti-

2. Dimitrov 2002 easily supersedes all previous studies of the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the *Kāvyādarśa*, *Mirror of Poetry-Poetics*, in general, and of its first chapter. For the *sbyar ba'i dpe* poetic figure, see Gerow 1971, 166 *ad Kāvyādarśa* II: 28. For the *Kāvyādarśa*, I use the bilingual edition that is listed in the bibliography under Daṇḍin and / or Dimitrov 2002 and 2011.
3. The identification of a name buried in a work's introductory verses can lead, with careful sleuthing, to the identification of the author of a work whose authorship was unclear. See in this connection Stoltz 2020, 59–60.

tution that I am unable to locate but which should most probably be found somewhere in Central Tibet. This Palden Chökyi Drakpa is of course not identical to Domepa Tsago Bönpo Ngawang Drakpa (Mdo smad pa Tsha go/kho *dbon po* Ngag dbang grags pa), who headed a party of some four monks when they requested Khedrup for teachings anent the deity Yamāntaka / Vajrabhairava.[4] I do not know whose nephew (*dbon po*) this Ngawang Drakpa may have been. The colophon of the undated little work that Khedrup wrote in response to their request also mentions that this man was indebted to Tsongkhapa for this instruction and that Khedrup had composed it in Drangsong Sinpo Ri (Drang srong srin po ri) Monastery, which is located to the southwest of Lhasa. To be sure, a certain Tsakhowa Ngawang Drakpa is known as one of Tsongkhapa's earliest disciples. The A la[gs] shan (< Ch. 阿拉善) Sog po-Mongol scholar Ngawang Tendar (Ngag dbang bstan dar, 1759–after August 1, 1840)[5] surmises (*yin 'dra snyam*!) in his 1808 commentary to Khedrup's *Ode* that Palden Chökyi Drakpa might be identified as *his* nephew (*tsha bo*)[6] — I will briefly return to Ngawang Tendar's commentary below. At the request of his nephew Palden Chökyi Drakpa, Khedrup also wrote an ode to Ngawang Drakpa while in Ganden (Dga' ldan), the monastery Tsongkhapa had founded in 1409.[7] Ngawang Drakpa appears to have been quite influential in Kham (Khams) where, so we are told, he built some five monasteries.

Of course, it goes without saying that Tibetan poetry has a very long and varied history. We have a limited dossier of poems that are autochthonous, and the few that have come down to us are found in the Tibetan Dunhuang documents that predate the beginning of the eleventh century. There is also the enormous variety of poetic forms that are based on Indic *kāvya*/*snyan ngag*/*dngags*[8] models, all of which we encounter in the roughly ninth to eleventh century translations of Buddhist sutras and treatises that were ultimately deposited in collections known as the Kangyur and Tengyur. The indigenous poetry is written in a rather free and breezy style and is relatively easily understandable. It is different with those of *kāvya*-Indic origin. These are often dressed in the purple cloth of the *purpureus pannus* variety, are highly ornate and turgid, and almost invari-

4. Mkhas grub 1980–1982[b], 8 * and a different version of the first in 1980–1982c, 28*. Both texts were added to the Lhasa Zhol edition from the Bkra shis lhun po xylograph of his collected works.
5. For him, see his biographical sketch in Powers and Thakchoe 2013 and the remarks in van der Kuijp 2019. For the full dates that occur in this essay, I am indebted to the *Tabellen* of Schuh 1973.
6. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 59; 2008[[a], 483. Tibetan *tsha bo* and *dbon po* are often used interchangeably; see Benedict 1942, 321–22, 330. I owe the lexicographic notes on the above verse to his explanation in Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[b], 13; 2008[b], 455. Not surprisingly, this Ngag dbang grags pa is mentioned *inter alia* in what is arguably the best study of Tsong kha pa's life that was written by 'Brug Rgyal dbang Chos kyi rje Blo bzang 'phrin las rnam rgyal (19th c.) in 1845; see 'Brug Rgyal dbang 1981, 616 — the xylograph for this work is found in vol. 1 of bdrc no. W3CN22297. For a Chinese translation, see Guo 1988, 492.
7. Mkhas grub 1980–82[d].
8. The expression *snyan dngags* seems to be an older form for *snyan ngag*. Unless *snyan dngags* occurs in quotations, I will henceforth use *snyan ngag*.

ably make use of a precious vocabulary of synonyms (*abhidhāna*, *mngon brjod*) that limits the uninitiated ready access to what is intended. To be a poet of this genre or to be a connoisseur who can appreciate this kind of poetry one must foremost be steeped in the lexicography of synonyms and the various nuances of the terms in question, a formidable task if there ever was one.[9] This is indeed one of the prerequisites of becoming a poet (*kavi*, *snyan ngag mkhan*)! But this is only one aspect of learning for one to be called a poet! In Tibet, so much of *snyan ngag* is inspired by typically Indic motifs and Indic flora and fauna rather than by their Tibetan counterparts. Hence, another ingredient that goes into the making of a *snyan ngag mkhan* is that he or she should not be averse to being inspired by a healthy dose of exoticism. Indeed, so very much of *snyan ngag* deals with a subject matter about which the *snyan ngag mkhan* would never have been in the position to have had first-hand knowledge. Just think of elephant herds and mango groves! Maybe this was never seen as an issue since the "inculturation" of the Indic had penetrated so deeply into the Tibetan psyche that so much of it had become second nature. In his valuable survey of "the Indian Literary Identity in Tibet", M. Kapstein has written at length about the "Indianness" of much of Tibetan *belles lettres*, without losing sight of the fact that a good deal of Tibetan writing does not betray any Indian influence and must to all intents and purposes be considered as indigenous literary productions.[10]

It is now a truism that the second half of the thirteenth century was a major inflection point in the development of Tibetan poetry and poetics for the Tibetan intellectual who began to take the Indic *Kāvyādarśa* as his point of departure. From this point on, the translations of the *Snyan ngag me long* by Shongton Lotsawa Dorjé Gyaltsen (Shong ston Lo tsā ba Rdo rje rgyal mtshan, ca.1225–ca.1280) and Pang Lotsawa Lodrö Tenpa (Dpang Lo tsā ba Blo gros brtan pa, 1276–1342) began to exert a major influence on Tibetan poetry, poetics and even on the ways in which Tibetans wrote and titled their treatises. The *Kāvyādarśa* is a work on the characteristics of two main Indic schools of poetics and poetic diction and includes a detailed calculus of a large variety of poetic figures (*alaṃkāra, rgyan*) that are classified into those that primarily operate on a semantic level (*arthālaṃkāra, don rgyan*) —these are dealt with in its second chapter — and those that are primarily based on the phonology of the words used (*śabdālaṃkāra, sgra rgyan*) — these are discussed in its third chapter. For example, the simile (*upamālaṃkāra, dpe rgyan*) and the metaphor (*rūpālaṃkāra, gzugs kyi rgyan*) are *don rgyan*, but different kinds of alliteration (*yamaka, zung ldan*) are classified under *sgra rgyan*. The Tibetan translation of the *Kāvyādarśa* was at first a significant object of study on the part of members of the Sakyapa (Sa skya pa) school, but its importance was quickly recognized so that it soon spread to the institutions of other Tibetan Buddhist schools. Among fourteenth-century writers who belonged to these other schools, we

9. An indispensable dictionary of the *mngon brjod* genre is Dpa' ris Sangs rgyas and Nor bu kun grub 2010.
10. Kapstein 2003.

have the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé (Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, 1284–1339) and Longchen Rabjampa (Klong chen Rab 'byams pa, 1309–64) both of whom composed a good number of poetic works that followed patterns that were established by the *Snyan ngag me long*. But we must single out once again their junior contemporary the second Shamar Khachö Wangpo (Zhwa dmar Mkha' spyod dbang po, 1350–1405), whose large body of various kinds of poetic compositions still cry out for close study and appreciation. The earliest of the numerous Tibetan imitations of the poetic figures in the sequence of the *Snyan ngag me long*'s second chapter may have been the work by the elusive Sanskritist-translator (*lo tsā ba*) with the surprising name Chokden Lekpai Lodrö Pungyen Dzepai Metok (Mchog ldan legs pa'i blo gros dpung rgyan mdzes pa'i me tog, ca. 1255–ca. 1310), a manuscript of which I saw in the early 1990s while working in the Nationalities Library of the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing.[11] To be sure, it goes without saying that the most obvious places for the use of poetry and poetic imagery are the countless odes, reverential petitions, and salutations that we find scattered in the collected writings of so many earlier and later Tibetan intellectuals and spiritual leaders that are sometimes consciously based on the poetic figures of the *Snyan ngag me long* and sometimes not. It is well to bear in mind that the meaning of *kāvya*/*snyan ngag* is not solely confined to what we might generally understand by poetry as a text set in verse. Speaking of the form or body (*śarīra*, *lus*) in which it can appear, *Kāvyādarśa* I: 10–11 has it that *kāvya* can indicate poetry as in a text set in verse (*padya, tshigs bcad*), prose (*gadya*, *lhug pa*), as well to a literary composition in which both are mixed (*miśra*, *spel ma*).[12]

Druk Gyalwang ('Brug Rgyal dbang) reports that in late 1380 or early 1381, Tsongkhapa had worked through Daṇḍin's work with Redawa Shonu Lodrö (Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros, 1349–1413) and the Sanskrit scholar Lotsāwa Namkha Sangpopa (Lo tsā ba Nam mkha' bzang po, 14th–?15th c.) while in Bodong E (Bo dong E) Monastery.[13] He then suggests that the dossier on Tsongkhapa's life offers several different scenarios for his subsequent studies of that work with the Lo tsā ba in conjunction with his studies of Sanskrit. It appears that this may have taken place as late as 1385 when his erstwhile teacher, the precocious Chenga Drakpa Jangchup Pal Sangpo (Spyan snga Grags pa byang chub dpal bzang po, 1356–86)[14] had invited them to Densa Thil (Gdan

11. Dpang Lo tsā ba, the great Sanskrit scholar and influential commentator of the *Snyan ngag me long*, pays his respects to this man in the colophon of his commentary and acknowledges his great debt to him for his own understanding of the language arts (*tha snyad kyi gtsug lag rnams*); see Dpang Lo tsā ba 1981, 501 and No date, 286[pdf]; cf. also Dimitrov 2011, 453. He characterizes him as the best intimate disciple (*thugs kyi sras mchog*) of Shong ston Lo tsā ba. That said, he only acknowledges the latter in the opening verse of his commentary in the sense of having been the *Kāvyādarśa*'s translator. A curiosity is that the manuscript of Dpang Lo tsā ba's work, marked here as "No date," is unpaginated! This manuscript was not available to Dimitrov when he wrote his brilliant studies of the first and third chapters of Daṇḍin's work.
12. See also Khams sprul IV Bstan 'dzin chos kyi nyi ma (1730–79) who offers a discussion of the body in Khams sprul IV 1976, 71 ff.
13. For what follows, see 'Brug Rgyal dbang 1981, 148 and 163–64; see also Guo 1988, 135, 148–49.
14. Tsong kha pa 1978–79[a], 447 and 474 dates him 1356 to 1386.

sa mthil) Monastery. Of course, Tsongkhapa's deep appreciation of the *Snyan ngag me long*'s poetics is obvious at almost every turn in his oeuvre, especially when we take note of his countless odes, etc., as well as his poetic narratives (*avadāna, rtogs pa brjod pa*) of the life of the Chenga, which he completed at the behest of the Pakmodru (Phag mo gru) ruler Drakpa Gyaltsen (Grags pa rgyal mtshan, 1374–1432), and of the phantastic life of the bodhisattva Taktu Nguwa (Rtag tu rngu ba [Sadaprarudita]).[15] Two verses towards the end of the former were evidently written by a very satisfied Tsongkhapa who does not hesitate to compare himself to Dpa' bo —here probably Āryaśūra or even Aśvaghoṣa—and call himself "the unique poet of the range of snowy mountains" (*gangs ri'i khrod kyi snyan dngags mkhan gcig po*).[16] And at the very end, he underscores that he is "the poet who was born at the outer marches of the snowy land" (*yul gangs can phyi mthar skyes pa'i snyan dngags mkhan*), which is an apt description of the Tsongkha area.[17]

Tsongkhapa's formal instruction in the poetics of the *Snyan ngag me long*, and in Sanskrit, stands in sharp contrast with his major disciple Khedrup. None of the early or later biographical sketches of Khedrup's life with which I am familiar, nor his record of teachings received relate any information from whom he may have learned the poetics of the *Snyan ngag me long*. One therefore comes away with the impression that he was an autodidact in this area.

The particulars of Khedrup's life and aspects of his oeuvre have been sketched in several places and thus need not detain us very much in this relatively short essay.[18] Yet, I think it useful to add a few considerations that I believe deserve further reflection. To be sure, central to his intellectual and spiritual life was his first encounter with Tsongkhapa which took place during the summer retreat (*dbyar gnas*, *vārṣika*) of 1407, when he was in his early twenties.[19] It was no doubt a trans-

15. Tsong kha pa 1978–79[a] and [b]. He calls the scribe of the second, Tsha kha [= Tsha kho ba] Ngag dbang grags pa, a poet (*snyan dngags mkhan*). This work was translated in Gyatso and Bailey 2008. English renditions of several poetic pieces by Tsong kha pa are contained in Kilty 2001.

16. Tsong kha pa 1978–79[a], 482. Tsong kha pa 1978–79[c] and [d] are additional poetic pieces dedicated to the Spyan snga. The latter is a type of acrostic poem with additional flourishes which, as he writes in an allusion to *Kāvyādarśa* III: 3c, is a difficult composition (*bya dka'*, *duṣkara*) — see also below.

17. Of his numerous odes, Tsong kha pa 2010 contains his so-called "four great odes" *(bstod chen bzhi*), that is, [1] his philosophical ode to dependent co-arising with Lcang skya III Rol pa'i rdo rje's (1717–86) commentary, [2] his ode to Maitreya with Zhang ston Bstan pa rgya mtsho's (1825–97) commentary, [3] his ode to Mañjughoṣa with Dalai Lama VII Bskal bzang rgya mtsho's (1708-57) commentary — the Dalai Lama's poetic name was 'Jam dbyangs sgeg pa'i lang tsho dbyangs can dgyes pa'i rdo rje, and [4] his ode to Uṣṇīṣavijaya with Co ne Grags pa shes sgrub's (1675–1748) commentary.

18. Ary 2015, 39–66, 107–49, and the literature cited therein, and most recently Sha bo Klu rgyal and Dpa' Mkhar skyid, 2021, which is deeply annotated translation of his biography that Yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713–93) compiled for his study of the biographies of the main protagonists of the "stages of the path" (*lam rim*) tradition; see Yongs 'dzin 2011a, 365–405. Not disputed by the translators is the Yongs 'dzin's wrong presumption that Mkhas grub had studied with Bla ma dam Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1312–75) which is of course not possible.

19. Curiously, Mkhas grub's undated biography of Tsong kha pa is all but silent about this ever so fateful event; see Mkhas grub 1978–79, 90–2. The same holds for his brief work on the visionary experiences of his master, for which see Mkhas

formative event as far as the precocious and exceptionally gifted Khedrup was concerned and, indeed, this meeting ultimately had a ripple effect in the world of Tibetan Buddhism that can still be detected to this day. In sum, Khedrup is unthinkable without Tsongkhapa. Their first meeting took place in Sera Chöding (Se ra chos sdings), a locale that is not far from what is now Sera Monastery, where young Khedrup had traveled from Tsang, probably from Jangam Ling (Byang Ngam ring [? Dga' ldan byams pa gling]) Monastery, to continue his *grwa skor* "examinations" in Ü (Dbus) with the aim of receiving the scholarly accolade of *dka' [or: bka'] bcu pa*.[20] It was not long after this meeting that he became one of Tsongkhapa's most trusted disciples and interpreters of his ideas. Oddly, we do not know how long he stayed with the master. His undated biography of Tsongkhapa, perhaps the very first in a long sequence of such studies, tells us naught about when or where they may have met again (and again). Since the voluminous literature on Tsongkhapa's life informs us that he did not venture beyond Ü from 1407 to his passing on 1419, we must surmise that Khedrup had made repeated visits to him in Ü during those twelve years. Khedrup's writings are almost as a rule not dated, but some help is afforded by their colophons since many do relate *where* they were written. For example, the colophon of his Tsongkhapa biography states that he had written it in Nyangtö (Nyang stod) in Tsang at a "place that is a source of knowledge" (*gtsang nyang stod rig pa'i 'byung gnas kyi sa'i cha*). The latter description is identical to the one he had given elsewhere for his monastery of Changra Pembar Lekshé Ddrokpé Tsel (Lcang ra Dpal 'bar legs bshad sgrog pa'i tshal) as well as for Gyalkhar Tsé's (Rgyal mkhar rtse) monumental Palkhor Dechen (Dpal 'khor sde chen)—see below. Since the biography mentions Tsongkhapa's passing in 1419, it means that he must have written it after that time. His collected oeuvre also contains several notes (*zin bris*) and memoranda (*brjed byang*) of Tsongkhapa's lectures on Puṇḍarīka's (early 11th c.) *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Laghukālacakratantra* and the chapter on perception of Dharmakīrti's (7th c.) *Pramāṇavārttika*, but none of these shed light on when or where he was holding up. But he does sign himself as a *dka' bcu pa* in one of these.[21]

All that having been said, we do know that during these twelve years, from 1407 to 1419, Khedrup was also busy making a career for himself in Tsang. For example, we learn from the anonymous biography of Situ (< Ch. *situ* 司徒) Rabten Kunsang Phak (Rab brtan kun bzang 'phags, 1389–1442) that, in 1413, he had invited him—Khedrup is here called "Dge legs dpal ba"— from Jangam Ring Monastery to become the main instructor (*chos dpon*) of the monastery that this ruler of Gyalkhar Tsé and its landed interests had newly built in Jangra.[22] The biography also tells

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grub 1980–82[e]. There the meeting is briefly mentioned where, however, the author also signals the dream Mkhas grub had of Tsong kha pa just prior to their meeting; see 'Brug Rgyal dbang 1981, 290–94 and Guo 1988, 251–54.

20. For this degree, see Jackson 2007, 346–350.

21. Mkhas grub 1980–82[f], 793.

22. Anonymous 1978, 77 and Anonymous 1987, 46–7; the corresponding passage in Anonymous No date, 23b is not entirely illegible. Lcang ra is located not far from Rgyal mkhar rtse. The author states that his main teacher was 'Jam dbyangs

us that Khedrup [or Si tu?] apparently claimed (*bzhed*) that he [or Khedrup?] was the re-embodiment (*sku'i skye ba*) of the great Khedrup Lhai Wangpo (Mkhas grub Lha'i dbang po). Who was this man? I think the answer *may* be found in Khedrup's record of teachings received, his *gsan yig*, where he notes a Khedrup Lha Wangpo (Mkhas grub Lha dbang blo < Lha'i dbang po blo gros) as one of Buddhaśrī's (1339–1419) mentors.[23] The latter was in turn one of his teachers of the Sakya school's take on the *Hevajratantra* and the lamdré (lam 'bras) precepts, as he wrote in his highly spirited response to a letter addressed to him by "the great see's overall great spiritual friend, the Empowering National Preceptor (< Ch. *guanding guoshi* 灌顶国师)".[24] The great see (*gdan sa chen po*) in question was most probably Sakya Monastery, but the identity of this National Preceptor is not entirely clear. The *Guanding guoshi* had apparently taken him to task for having criticized Ngorchen Kunga Sangpo (Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po, 1382–1456). Undated, we learn that he had sent the letter to Gyalkhar Ttsé, which *in theory* could mean that it was sent sometime between 1413 and 1430. Khedrup nowhere hints at his name in this important document in which he highlights intra-Sakyapa school debates about many doctrinal issues, including the part he played in them. Long ago, I suggested that Thekchen Chökyi Gyalpo Kunga Tashi (Theg chen Chos kyi rgyal po Kun dga' bkra shis, 1340–1425) of Sakya's Lhakhang (Lha khang) Residence might have been the sender because he would have been among the most prominent of the see's overall great spiritual friends.[25] But, of course, he was never her abbot and there was no record of him ever having received the *guanding guoshi* title, and, indeed, I no longer believe this to have been the case. The abbots of Sakya during this time were Lodrö Gyaltsen (Blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1366–1420) and Jamyang Namkha Gyaltsen ('Jam dbyangs Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, 1398–1472).

Dkon mchog bzang po (1398–1475) who was the author of the biography of Grub chen Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po (1365–1443), While anonymous, I suspect the biography was written by Dkon mchog [gsum gyi] 'bangs, alias Gzhon nu rgyal mchog, the great commentator on Atiśa's (982–1054) *Bodhipathapradīpa*.

23. Mkhas grub 1980–82[g], 59. Anonymous 1987, 33

24. Mkhas grub 1980–82[h], 803–4, where we read that he counted four Sa skya pa masters as his main sources of inspiration as far as the Sa skya pa's path-and-result (*lam 'bras*) precepts were concerned; these are, with the epithets he prefixed to their names: Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po Lam 'bras pa Ye shes dpal ba, Mnyam med Rje btsun Red mda' pa chen po [Gzhon nu blo gros], Dpal ldan bla ma Bud dha shrī, and Rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po Kun dga' rgyal mtshan from whom he learned all the slightly different claims of Nam za pa [= ? Ri khrod pa Blo gros brtan pa (1316–58)], Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa [Bsod nams rgyal mtshan], Gzungs pa [= Gzungs kyi dpal ba (1306–89)], and Bla ma dam pa Dpal ldan tshul khrims (1333–99). In a reply to Sangs rgyas rin chen, Mkhas grub acknowledges that he had more than fifty teachers, but that three were his most important ones; these were: Rin po che 'Jam dpal rdo rje snying po with whom he studied for thirteen years when he was a very young man, Lam 'bras pa Ye shes dpal, and Red mda' pa; see Mkhas grub[i], 122–24. Since Tsong kha pa is not mentioned anywhere in this work, it was evidently composed before he began to occupy a dominant place in Mkhas grub's spiritual life. Lastly, the dates often given for Ye shes dpal ba, 1281–1365, can obviously not be correct. Mkhas grub's *Gsan yig* reports that one of Ye shes dpal ba's teachers was Na bza' ba [Brag phug pa Bsod nams dpal (1277–1346)], so that his dates may have been roughly 1329–1413; see Mkhas grub 1980–82[g], 109–10, 117.

25. Van der Kuijp 1985, 34.

Without giving his source, E. Ary simply stated that the *guangding guoshi* was Namkha Sangpo, whereas J. Heimbel specified that he was Namkha Sangpo of Sakya's Nyidé (Nyi lde/sde) Residence (*bla brang*).[26] As Heimbel noted, the identification of Namkha Sangpo as the author of a document that had called Khedrup to task is found in the much later history of Buddhism in Amdo by Drakgön Shapdrung Könchok Tenpa Rapgyé (Brag dgon Zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, 1801–after 1867), where he is called *kwan ting ku shri* (= *guanding guoshi*) Namkha Sangpo.[27] At the same time, Drakgön Shapdrung appears to distinguish him from the Chöjé Nyidewa (Chos rje Nyi lde ba) who was the author of a study of Sakya's ruling family.

Now the extremely valuable history of Sakya's ruling families and of the see itself that Musepa (Mus srad pa) or Tsangpa Jampa Dorjé Gyaltsan (Gtsang pa Byams pa rdo rje rgyal mtshan, 1424–98) completed in 1475 contains what is to date a unique genealogy of the male members of the Nyi lde/sde Residence. And the following genealogy can be distilled from it[28]:

> Dkon mchog 'byung gnas [student of Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251)
>
> [two nephews by his sister (*snag dbon*)]
>
> Gug shrī (< Ch. *guoshi*) Shes rab dpal (ca. 1300)
> Bla ma Rin chen 'od
>
> [His/their nephews by his/their sister]
> Kun spangs Kun dga' rgyal mtshan
> Kun spangs Chos skyong dpal
> Gug shrī Nam mkha' seng ge – [note in ms.: he founded the Nyi sde Residence]
> Gug shrī Tshul khrims grub
>
> Layman 1 (*mi skya*); son[s] of the oldest *mi skya*:

Here the manuscript has:

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26. Ary 2015, 128 and Heimbel 2017, 229–39, n. 328 and 232, n. 95. A slight correction: Ary took the phrase ...*bka' 'bum na gsal* in the relevant passage of Se ra Rje btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan's (1469–1544) undated "secret biography" of Mkhas grub to be a reference to Tsong kha pa's collected writings (see Se ra Rje btsun 1980-82, 434), and Dachille 2015, 12 rightly noted that she found nothing in the latter. Indeed, the *bka' bum* in question is that of Mkhas grub.
27. Brag dgon Zhabs drung 1982, 6.
28. Mus srad pa No date, 67a and 2017, 96. I examine this work's rather original history of the Mongol imperial family in a forthcoming study.

Bsod nams seng ge
Ngag dbang bzang po [his son:]

Kun dga' dpal, also called Nyi bde/lde Rgyal po [his sons:]

Kun ting gug shri Nam mkha' bzang po [his son:]

Ngag dbang grags pa
Nam mkha' grags pa

Ta'i dbyen ju (< Ch. *dayuan*大元?) Bsod nams rgyal mtshan

Layman 2 (*mi skya*)

The printed text has:

Layman 1 [his son:]

Ngag dbang bzang po [his son:]

Kun dga' dpal, also called Nyi lde Rgyal po [his sons:]

Kun ting gu shri Nam mkha' dpal bzang po [his sons?[a]]

Ngag dbang grags pa

Nam mkha' grags pa

Ta'i dben ju Bsod nams rgyal mtshan

[a] The text has: Nam mkha' bzang po!

The fact that several members of this family had been awarded the National Preceptor title suggests that they had close connections with the Mongol court in China, and this was evidently the case with Shes rab dpal who visited the court and was apparently a friend of Imperial Preceptor (*ti shrī* < Ch. *dishi* 帝师) Grags pa 'od zer (r. 1291–1303). The genealogy would then have the *Guanding guoshi* roughly flourish around the year 1420. A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams

(1597–1659) cites a Nyi lde ba, a Nyi lde ba Nam mkha' bzang po, and a Chos rje Nyi lde ba—these appear to refer to the same person—as an author of a history of Sakya's ruling family several times in his 1629 history of Sakya and its affiliated families. In the records of teachings received by Amezhap (A mes zhabs) and fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Losang Gyatso (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–82), a *guoshi* or a *guanding guoshi* Nam mkha' bzang po often occurs as having received teachings from Thekchen Chöjé (Theg chen Chos rje) and having transmitted these either directly to Gyakar Sherap Gyaltsan (Rgya dkar Shes rab rgyal mtshan, 1436–94) of the Rin chen sgang Residence or to him via Nyidewa Ngawang Drakpa (Nyi lde ba Ngag dbang grags pa). Given this, we might roughly date *guangding guoshi* Nam mkha' bzang po from 1390 to 1450.

Much later in the Situ's biography an interlinear gloss informs the reader in staccato fashion of the following sequence of events that pertain to Khedrup's life[29]:

> [*chos*] *rje mkhas grub pa / lcang ra chos sder chu mo* [*pho*] *sbrul la phebs nas lcags pho byi lo phan lo brgyad / lcags mo glang gi dgun chos thog*[*s*] *nas bzung / lo drug chos sde 'di'i mkhan thog tu bzhugs / de nas lo bzhi'i* [460] *bar rdo rje gdan sogs ci bder bzhugs rjes / lcags pho khyi lo dpyid chos rjes la dge ldan gyi gdan sa la thegs* [*thags*] *par 'dug*.
>
> The religious lord Khedrup pa went to the religious institution of Lcang ra in 1413; the year 1420, eight years of benefit; began the winter teaching session of 1421; occupied the abbacy of this religious institution for six years; then, he stayed as he liked up to four years in Rdo rje gdan etc.; in the spring of 1430 the Chos rje left for the Dge ldan [= Dga' ldan] see.

It thus appears that Khedrup was associated with the great monastery of Palkhor Chödé from 1420 to 1426. It is at this monastery, also characterized by him like he did with Changra, as a *gtsang nyang stod rig pa'i 'byung gnas kyi sa'i cha* and a *legs bshad sgrog pa'i tshal*, where he had written his long study of the *bskyed rim* practice of the *Guhyasamājatantra* according to the Phakpa ('Phags pa) [the pseudo-Nāgārjuna] tradition. Due to a serious fall-out with the Situ, Khedrup was dismissed from his official post, stayed in various places such as Ri bo mdangs can and Rdo rje gdan, ultimately to land on his feet when, in 1431, he was appointed abbot of Ganden Monastery at the instigation of his senior colleague and teacher Gyaltsap Darma Rinchen (Rgyal tshab Dar

29. Anonymous 1978, 459–60 and Anonymous 1987, 226; the corresponding passage in Anonymous No date, 101b is mostly illegible. The text goes on to state that a certain Blo gros rgya mtsho was appointed abbot of Dpal 'khor chos sde during the eighth month of the pig-year, which must be 1431. Blo gros rgya mtsho is mentioned as Mkhas grub's successor in Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653-1705) 1698 chronicle of the Dge lugs pa school and its monasteries; see Sde srid 1989, 247.

ma rin chen, 1364–1432), who was himself also a close disciple of Tsongkhapa and the monastery's second abbot from 1419 to 1431. It transpires that Khedrup and Ngorchen were both hotheads and did not pull punches when confronted with ideas with which they disagreed, and neither were they particularly disinclined to call their exponents unpleasant names with Khedrup perhaps more so than Ngorchen.[30] This is readily apparent in his reply to the Guanding guoshi and later in his impatient response to Ngorchen's earlier biting critique of 1426 of the position he had taken.[31] Dachille's, Heimbel's and Bentor's exemplary analyses of what was at stake should be consulted here.[32] Khedrup's rencounters with the young Chökyi Gyaltsen (Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1375–1451) in 1400 in Jangam Ring (Byang Ngam ring) Monastery[33]—Chökyi gyaltsen became better known as Bodong Panchen Choklé Namgyal (Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal)—in which he defended Sakya Paṇḍita's *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter* against Chökyi Gyaltsen's criticism, and Ngorchen are well-documented. Less known so far are the series of doctrinal disagreements he had with Jangdak Namgyal Draksang (Byang bdag Rnam rgyal grags bzang, 1395–1475) of Jangam Ring. Their polemic exchanges focused primarily on the interpretation of the *Kālacakra* corpus, and I intend to return to this on another occasion.[34]

Going through his oeuvre, many of his writings do make it plain that he was an accomplished *nyen-ngakhen*, a poet of ornate poetry, even if he nowhere hints in his writing that he ever explicitly wrote on the *Snyan ngag me long per se*.

I noted above that very, very few of his writings have dates or can be dated with any precision, even if most of them can be basically dated to before and after his ascent to the abbatial throne of Ganden in 1431. How fortunate it is that what is perhaps his earliest foray into the poetic, maybe even his earliest extant piece of writing *überhaupt*, is dated! This is his ode to Jamyang Mawai Sengé ('Jam dbyangs smra ba'i seng ge), that is, Vādisiṃha Mañjughoṣa, which, the colophon relates, he

30. Ngor chen's first polemical treatise dates from 1404, which he wrote in Sa skya; see Ngor chen 2010.

31. Mkhas grub 1980–82[j].

32. We learn this from his extremely interesting defense of his polemic exchange with Ngor chen a propos of the Hevajra body-mandala, for which see Dachille 2015, Heimbel 2017, 231 ff., Bentor 2017, and now also Dachille 2022, which I have not seen. Like Mkhas grub, Ngor chen had also studied under Buddhaśrī, for which see Heimbel 2017, 155–74.

33. He details this in the letter he addressed to the aforementioned *guanding guoshi* for which see Mkhas grub 1980–82[h], 795.

34. Mkhas grub 1980–82[k] and 1980–82[l], 159, 231, 239, etc. The latter references still need to be verified, since they are based on annotations *ngam* [= Byang Ngam ring] in the xylograph and do not occur in the text itself. He wrote the first in his see of Ri bo mdangs can, which means that it was at least written prior to his shift to Dga' ldan Monastery; the second is dated 1434 and was indeed composed while he resided in Dga' ldan. Blondeau 1997 studied a work, Mkhas grub 1980–82[m], that was allegedly written by Mkhas grub in reply to queries raised by Byang bdag. It now turns out that it was wrongly placed in a series of his miscellaneous writings that we find in all the available printed editions of his oeuvre. The text cites Gser mdog Paṇ chen Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) and Padma gling pa (1450–1521), so that Mkhas grub could not have written it.

wrote in Tsang Bulong (Gtsang Bu long Monastery) at the age of 17/18.[35] The ode consists of nine syllables per line in verses of four lines each in consideration of the explicit presence of a finite verb at the very end of the fourth line and has one verse in eight lines. It is a very personal document, full of admonitions to himself. He revisited the deity together with its mandala in an ode he had written in Nyang stod Rin chen sgang, perhaps with the inspiration of his erstwhile teacher 'Jam dpal rdo rje snying po [= ?Tsongkhapa].[36] This time the poem has a much more complicated structure, for each line has no less than thirty-one syllables! Even more forbidding are the two stanzas with thirty-five syllables per line that he wrote as part of his "statement of intent" to write what turned out to be his capacious and undated, pre-Ganden period study of the *Pramāṇavārttika* that is subtitled "Ocean of Reasoning" (*rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*). A very detailed and indispensable commentary on these verses was written by the Yongzin (Yongs 'dzin).[37]

Khedrup's poetry is generally recognized by the tradition as being particularly difficult and cerebral. This seems to be indicated by several pieces whose petitioners requested that he write them in such a way that they are easily understood and not constrained by him using [difficult] poetic diction (*snyan dngags kyi brdas ma bcings pa'i go bde ba*). Examples for this are his versified, capsule biography of Tsongkhapa which he wrote at the behest of a Nyima Nyingpo (Nyi ma snying po) and his *Ode* to Sherap Pal Sangpo (Shes rab dpal bzang po) in which, while residing in Riwo Gephel (Ri bo dge 'phel) Monastery in Zhangdo (Shangs mdo), he made good a request by Neten Tsultrim Pal Sangpo (Gnas brtan Tshul khrims dpal bzang po), Minyak Tsultrim sang po (Mi nyag Tshul khrims bzang po), and Palden Gönpo (Dpal ldan mgon po) who was Sherap Pal Sangpo's attendant.[38] This famous work is known under the title of the [*Dpal ldan*] *sa gsum ma*, which consists of the first four syllables of its first stanza to which the nominal suffix *ma* is affixed. Ngawang Tendar cites a passage from it and the commentary on them by the fourth Paṇchen Lama Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen (Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1570–1662).[39] In his somewhat sycophantic series of verses that Khedrup addressed to Gyaltsap, he also states that he has avoided

35. Mkhas grub 1980–82[n]. I cannot place this monastery.
36. Mkhas grub 1980–82[o].
37. Yongs 'dzin 2011[c], 104–26. The Yongs 'dzin began writing his treatise in which he studied these and other opening verses of the *Rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* in Bkra shis lhun po Monastery but completed it in 1777 in his home monastery of Bkra shis bsam gtan gling that was and still is located, in his words, on the Nepal-Tibet border (*bal bod mtshams*). It falls into three main parts; a discussion of Mkhas grub's verses of homage, of the verses of the intent and the need for this work, and these are followed by the Yongs 'dzin's rather derivative appraisal of the role played by logic and epistemology in Buddhism; see Yongs 'dzin 2011[c], 3–79, 79–141, and 141–72.
38. Mkhas grub 1980–82[p], 482 and 1980–82[q], 494.
39. See, respectively, Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 49; 2008[a], 476, 477. Ngag dbang bstan dar cites the passage in Paṇ chen Lama IV 2009, 514, which comments on Mkhas grub 1980–82[p], 480.

rhetorical form (*tshig sbyor*) when he wrote this work even while he acknowledges that he is "an expert in framing the pace of words" (*tshig gi gom pa 'god mkhas*).[40]

Now long ago and thus rather dated, I published a small study of a "minor" work of Khedrup in which he ventured to weed out course and uneducated expressions—in his words, expressions belonging to the "village/uncouth words of the ignoramus" (*blun po'i grong tshig*)— from intellectual discourse.[41] Though he does not hint at this, I suspect that he may at least have had in mind one or the other treasure text (*gter ma*), for, when unedited, texts belonging to this genre are not always free from "unrefined" colloquial speech. Towards the very end of this little tract we learn that even if a piece of writing has all the trimmings of what goes into a fine composition (*sdeb legs*), one blemish, however slight, in the form of a "village/uncouth words" (*grong tshig*) and its appeal is fully destroyed.[42] Aside from the intrinsic interest of this little work, it ends just prior to a peroration in which he appears to tell his audience what in his opinion goes into the making of a poet. He relates there that he:

> */ brda dang tha snyad ming gi rnam dbye dang /*
> */ sdeb sbyor snyan dngags mngon brjod gtsug lag gzhung /*
> */ shes bya'i gnas kun rig pa…*
>
> …is cognizant of all the domains of what is to be known:
> terminology, expressions, nominal cases,
> the analytic treatises on prosody, poetry/poetics, and lexicography.

It is thus quasi autobiographical. Considerably more autobiographical is the narrative that he wrote about himself while in Riwo Mangchen (Ri bo mdangs can), that is, his *Rang gi rtogs pa gtam du bsnyad pa*.[43] Having presumably been written when he was in exile from Gyalkhar Tsé, this work requires careful study.

He crafted, and I purposively use this term, one composition in the so-called *bya dka'i rgyan* (*duṣkarālaṃkāra*) style, that is by making use of complex poetic figures that are based on phonology. The term *bya dka'*/*duṣkara* first occurs in *Kāvyādarśa* III: 3c, and it is explained and illustrated in *Kāvyādarśa* III: 78 and 83–85.[44] Khedrup's creative piece begins with a series of stanzas where every syllable only has the vowel [a] and then transitions to stanzas where every syllable has

40. Mkhas grub 1980–82[r], 490; the verse in which this phrase occurs is also cited in Yongs 'dzin 2011[c], 12.
41. Mkhas grub 1980–82[s] and van der Kuijp 1986.
42. The nod to *Kāvyādarśa* I: 7 is unmistakable; see also Dimitrov 2002, 157 and 215; see also *Kāvyādarśa* II: 54c–56.
43. Mkhas grub 1980-82[t]. This is work is cited at length in Yongs 'dzin 2011[c], and once in Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 58; 2008[a], 482.
44. Dimitrov 2011, 181, 186, 263–64 and Gerow 1971, 183–84.

the vowels [e], [u], [i], and [o].[45] In its afterword, he unabashedly calls himself "the crest jewel of poets of the range of snowy mountains" (*gangs ri'i khrod kyi snyan dngags mkhan rnams kyi gtsug gi nor bu*) and says that he wrote this piece for aspiring poets.

The *Ode to Tsongkhapa* was not Khedrup's sole composition that caught the attention of his readers. One of these was an easily understandable (*go bde ba*), untitled prayer-in-verse to Tsongkhapa that he had written at the behest of the official (*drung*) Namkha Paljor (Nam mkha' dpal 'byor). This prayer is usually referred to as the *Rnam dag gangs ri ma*. Bearing neither a date nor an indication of where it was composed, it is so titled by using the first four syllables of its opening line, / *rnam dag gangs ri'i phreng bas yongs bskor ba'i / phyogs 'dir...* ("...in this area that is fully encircled by a garland of pure snowy mountains"), to which is affixed the nominal particle *ma*. The fourth Gungthang Könchok Tenpai Grönma (Gung thang IV Dkon mchog bstan pa'i sgron ma, 1764–1823) wrote his commentary on this work while residing in Labrang Tashikhyil (Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil) Monastery.[46] The commentary itself is a bit disappointing. Gungthang IV simply unpacks the meaning of the verses, adding some biographical data, and does not engage in the least in its literary qualities. Maybe he felt that it had none to speak of and that its merit solely resided in the fact that its contents provided a skeleton around which he could revel in writing a biography of Tsongkhapa.

Let us now circle back to Ngawang Tendar, the *sog po*-Mongol scholar whom I mentioned in the beginning of this essay. He should not really be a stranger to the readers of this journal for he is well-known for his writings on such language arts as lexicography, grammar, orthography, and poetics, and on a host of other subjects. He relates that he wrote his detailed study of Khedrup's *Ode* to Tsongkhapa at the behest of a certain Arik Gendun Jigme (A rig Dge 'dun 'jigs med) while he resided in the Left Monastery (*g.yon dgon*) of Mipham Chöling (Mi pham chos gling) which is also known as Gedrupling (Dge sgrub gling), that is located in Alakzha (A lag sha). The approach he has taken to one of the *Ode*'s stanzas is vintage Ngawang Tendar. There he combined his subtle interpretive skills with a sensitivity to potential or actual orthographic-orthotactic problems. A verse with specific text-critical problems reads[47]:

/ 'jig rten kun na mgon khyod dang /
/ phyogs gcig mtshungs pa 'ang rnyed dka' nas /

45. Mkhas grub 1980-82[u]. Compare this work with a similar one by Tsong kha pa which, however, is much longer and only uses the vowel [a] in Tsong kha pa 1978-79[e]. The latter is sometimes titled *Bshes gnyen sba ba la gdams pa bya dka' ba a'i dbyangs la nges pa*.
46. Gung thang 2003.
47. Mkhas grub 1980-82[a], 476 and Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 40–41; 2008[a], 471–72. For another philological problem anent two verses in Mkhas grub 1980–82[a], , see Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 37–38; 2008[a], 479–70.

/ de phyir bdag gis khyod kyi dper /
/ rgyal ba kho na yang yang bsgrin /

Owing to the difficulty of finding a single position
in the entire world that is even similar to you protector,
I will therefore, following your example,
repeatedly strive/contend for only the Victorious One.

All the versions of the *Ode* have *sgrin* instead of *bsgrin* as the last word of this stanza. After giving an explanatory prose version of this verse, Ngawang Tendar adds the following philological note in which he argues for reading *bsgrin* rather than *sgrin*:

rtsa bar sgrin zhes byung yang de lta bu'i sgrin ni dag yig ngag sgron ltar na mkhas pa dang spro ba la 'jug / lam rim chen mo ltar na [472] *'bad pa la 'jug pa'i skabs yod kyang bsgrun pa dang bsgrin mi phod pa lta bu'i bsgrin ni 'gran pa'i don yin pas skabs 'dir sngon 'jug pa yig chad dam snyam /*

Though *sgrin* occurred in the basic verse-text,[48] such a *sgrin* is rendered as "learned" (*mkhas pa*) and "joyful" (*spro ba*) according to the *Dag yig ngag sgron*.[49] Though according to the *Lam rim chen mo* there was an occasion for it to render "strive for" (*'bad pa*), insofar as *bsgrin* as in *bsgrun pa* and *bsgrin mi phod pa* involves the sense of *'gran pa*,[50] I think that on this occasion [in Khedrup's text] the prescript (/b/) had been elided.

It is perhaps fitting that we conclude this part of the essay that deals with Khedrup's poetic

48. We do not know what kind of a text of Mkhas grub's *Ode* was available to him. Suffice it to say here that all the xylograph versions of the *Ode* have *sgrin*. This means that the editors of Ngag dbang bstan dar's commentary corrected his text of the *Ode* in accordance with his comments.

49. This refers to the famous versified work on correct orthography (*dag yig*) that Dpal khang Lo tsā ba Ngag dbang chos kyi rgya mtsho (16th c.), alias Dbyangs can snyems pa'i sde, wrote in 1538. While Dpal khang Lo tsā ba 2014, 7 does contain the terms *sgrin po* and *bsgrin pa*, it does not have the explanations cited by Ngag dbang bstan dar.

50. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[b], 326; 2008[b], 631–32 study of "old words" (*brda' rnying*) and their updates (*brda' gsar*) contains the following entry: "*sgrun* and *sgrin po* mean a learned (*mkhas pa*) or an energetic one (*brtson pa can*); *bsgrin* means contender/competer (*'gran pa*); *bsgrin mi phod pa* means unable to contest/compete (*sgrun dang sgrin po ni mkhas pa'am brtson pa can / bsgrin ni 'gran pa / bsgrin mi phod pa ni* [632] *'gran mi nus pa /*). His contemporary A kya Yongs 'dzin Blo bzang don grub (1740–1827) was the author of word studies of several treatises, and we come across the following gloss of the word *sgrun pa* in Tsong kha pa's *Lam rim chen mo*: "Since *sgrun pa* is an old word for contender/competer, the fact that it is not a wrongly spelled word is essential" (*sgrun pa ni 'gran pa'i brda rnying yin pas yi ge ma nor ba gces /*); see A kya Yongs 'dzin 1971, 126.

oeuvre with the penultimate stanza that occurs just prior to the *Ode*'s peroration which is a dedication of the wholesomeness of having composed it (*brtsams pa'i dge ba sngo tshul*). The stanza in question aims to show how the *Ode* came to be written (*ji ltar brtsams pa'i tshul*); it reads[51]:

/ dpal ldan sa yi mgon po bshes gnyen gyi /
/ yon tan dri bzhon ma la ya yi rlung /
/ snying la reg pas dad pa'i yid g.yos te /
/ mdor bsdus bstod pa'i tshig 'di gtam du byas /

The Ma la ya breeze that carries the fragrance of the qualities
of the lustrous protector of the world, the spiritual friend,
has touched the heart and thus having stirred my faith,
this summary words of praise were written as a message.

But now a few more remarks are called for. Most of the commentarial work done on Tibetan poems of whatever stripe consists of expanding the verses into prose and filling out the case-endings that Tibetan versification allows authors to omit. Ngawang Tendar indicates that *ma la ya yi rlung* refers to the breeze that comes from the Malaya, the mountain range where one finds, according to tradition, the most precious kind of sandalwood that is called *sbrul gyi snying po* in Tibetan; it is called *uragasāra* in Sanskrit. In his remarks on this verse, he gives two quotations from the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, once for the expression *tsan dan sbrul gyi snying po* and once for *tsan dan kha ba can*, that is, sandalwood of the snowy region, and he wonders whether these refer to the same thing.[52] They do not. He fancifully writes apropos of the term *sbrul gyi snying po* that the origin for this expression must be sought in the fact that snakes coil around such cooling trees to shelter from the Indian heat. Daṇḍin himself is quite clear in *Kāvyādarśa* II: 171 that the Malaya is for him in "the South" and we can be more specific, it is found in the northeastern part of Odisha State as well as, especially, in the Western Ghats of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The poetic figure of invested with double entendre (*sbyar ba can*, *śleṣāviddha*), the third subtype of the so-called introduction of another matter (*don gzhan bkod pa*, *arthāntaranyāsa*), reads[53]:

51. Mkhas grub 1980–82[a], 476 and, for the verse and his remarks, see Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 54–59; 2008[a], 480–82.
52. For the first, see Roberts 2022, 54.250 and for "Himalayan sandalwood" (*kha ba'i tsan dan* not *tsan dan kha ba can*), see Roberts 2022, 27.10, 54.210, 54.251. The sūtra does mention a kind of "sandalwood called *gośīrṣa* that comes from the Malaya mountains"; see Roberts 2022, 24.9.
53. For this poetic figure and its subtypes, see Gerow 1971, 118-22; Gerow 1971, 121-22 discusses this subtype and the English translation of the Sanskrit verse that follows is his.

utpādayati lokasya prītiṃ malayamārutaḥ /
nanu dākṣiṇysampannaḥ sarvasya bhavati priyaḥ //

The wind from the southern mountains arouses joy amongst men;
indeed one born in the South is everybody's friend.

/ ma la ya yi rlung gis ni /
/ 'jig rten dga' ba skyed par byed /
/ dā kṣi ṇya dang yang dag ldan /
/ kun gyi snying sdug ma yin nam /

The Malaya wind
produces well-being in the world.
Is not one truly endowed with southern gentility
the friend of all?

The point here is that *dākṣiṇya* was wisely left untranslated and can mean something in the order of "southern," "polite," and "pious", and we should add that Dpang Lo tsā ba was all too aware of its multivalence.[54]

Ngawang Tendar then pivots to the question of the meaning of the third line and finds *yid* in the phrase *dad pa'i yid* particularly problematic and capable of many different interpretations. This may have led him abruptly to end the discussion and he concludes his comment on this verse by playing the ethnic card[55]:

... sog po'i rigs su skyes pa'i gos ngan hrul po gyon mkhan gyi bdag lta bu'i tshig la su zhig gis yid rton par byed snyam nas de tsam las spros ma 'dod do //

Thinking who would rely on the word of someone like me who wears the rags of one born in the Sog po ethnic group, I do not wish to elaborate further apart from just what I have written.

In addition to turning the verses of a poem into prose and identifying the more obscure words or unusual turns of phrase, the traditional commentator also draws attention to the specific poetic figures that lie embedded in the verses, and Ngawang Tendar has done so on several occasions.[56]

54. Dpang Lo tsā ba 1981, 369 and No date, 112[pdf].
55. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 57; 2008[a], 482.
56. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 41, 46; 2008[a], 472, 475. Respectively, these identify the use of the figures of ascription

Striking is that other than this approach to Tibetan poetry, members of the tradition seldom if ever seem to be inclined to critique a poem in terms of its structure or diction or its success, or lack thereof, as a literary creation. We do find this in the competing commentaries on the *Snyan ngag me long*, but by and large not in comments on short ephemeral poetic pieces such as the innumerable odes, reverential petitions (*gsol 'debs*), prayers (*smon lam*), etc. that came from the pens of the Tibetan intellectual elite. It is also not insignificant to point out that Ngawang Tendar does not hesitate to point out some problems he had with ideas that had hardened in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. For example, he writes that he has a slight problem (*cung zhig dogs pa*) with how Nāgārjuna might have received teachings from Mañjuśrī and he cites a long passage from the fifth Dalai Lama's commentary on *Dmigs brtse ma*, a short prayer first by and then to Tsongkhapa, with which he takes profound issue.[57]

We should also not neglect to mention that Ngawang Tendar himself wrote a work of illustrative verses anent the relevant poetic figures of each of the *Snyan ngag me long*'s three chapters and two separate pieces on the second chapter.[58] In the colophon of the first, he waxes singularly autobiographical[59] and he begins by saying that although he was by nature inclined to compose verses, he initially despaired because he did not know *snyan ngag*. And what must have added to his despondence was his inability to find a good teacher in Kumbum (Sku 'bum) and Gönlung (Dgon lung) monasteries. We do not know when he was looking for someone in these institutions who could teach him the *Snyan ngag me long* and it is almost counterintuitive that he was unable to find anyone there with sufficient expertise in this text. After all such *snyan ngag mkhan* as Sumpa Khenpo Yeshé Paljor (Sum pa Mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, 1704–88) and Third Thuken Losang Chökyi Nyima (Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 1737–1802) and others were active at these monasteries for good parts of their lives. It is equally peculiar that he did not learn *snyan ngag* when he was studying in Central Tibet under Yongzin Yeshé Gyaltsen (Yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan) or Longdöl Lama Ngawang Losang (Klong rdol Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang, 1719–94).[60] In any event, fearful that the transmission of *snyan ngag* had been interrupted, he left

(*rab rtog*, *utprekṣā*) and deceptive praise (*zol gyis bstod pa*, *vyājastuti*) that are found in *Kāvyādarśa* II: 218–30, 340; see the varieties of the former Gerow 1971, 131–38, and Gerow 1971, 286, for the latter.

57. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[a], 31, 37–38; 2008[a], 466, 477–78; and see also Dalai Lama V 1990a, 363–64.

58. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c, d, e]; 2008[c, d, e]. In addition, echoing the structure of Sa skya Paṇḍita's famous *Mkhas 'jug*, Ngag dbang bstan dar also wrote a treatise on the triad of exegesis (*'chad*), debate (rtsod), and composition (*rtsom*). L. Cook's translation of his musings on the latter in Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[f], 143–54; 2008[f], 531–37 is found in https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/ngawang-tendar/on-literary-composition. The latter suggests that he had "compiled" this work "during Great Prayer Festival", but this ignores the appositional character of the nominal phrase *lha ldan smon lam chen mo'i grwa skor ba* which means that Ngag dbang bstan dar was one who had done his examinations during the Lhasa Great Prayer Festival, and not that he had written this work on that occasion.

59. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c], 476; 2008[c], 723

60. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[d, e]; 2008[d, e].

for Labrang Tashikhyil Monastery when he was some fifty years old and there he met Dorampa Lhashé (Rdo rams pa Lha zhe) who had been in Palpung (Dpal spungs) / Sde dge— this was evidently the place where *snyan ngag* was actively taught— and it was from him that he received classes in the *Snyan ngag me long* from *Kāvyādarśa* I: 13 [simple prose, *grol ba*, *muktaka*] to III: 124 [riddles, *gab tshig*, *prahelikā*][61] together with the fifth Dalai Lama's study of the *Snyan ngag me long*, the *Dbyangs can dgyes glu*.[62] The first two lines of his illustrative stanza of the eighth type of the introduction of another matter figure of *Kāvyādarśa* II: 176, affirm the difficulty of the latter in no uncertain terms[63]:

> */ dbyangs can dgyes pa'i glu dbyangs go dka' na /*
> */ rtsa ba rgya gzhung me long smos ci dgos /*
>
> If the *Dbyangs can dgyes pa'i glu dbyangs* is difficult to understand,
> what is the need to mention the basic text, the Indian treatise, the *Mirror*?

The text occasionally cites or refers to such earlier *Snyan ngag me long* commentators as Pang Lotsawa (Dpang Lo tsā ba), Narthan Lotsawa Gendun Pal (Snar thang Lo tsā ba Dge 'dun dpal), alias Sangha Shrī, (ca.1370–after 1439),[64] Rinpungpa Ngawang Jikten Wangchuk (Rin spungs pa Ngag dbang 'jig rten dbang phyug, 1523–97), Bö Khepa Gelek Namgyal (Bod mkhas pa Dge legs rnam rgyal, 1618–85) and, of course, the fifth Dalai Lama. Both editions of his oeuvre do so by using smaller characters, as they also do when they mention the names of the poetic figures on which basis Ngawang Tendar composed his own illustrative stanzas, and when he is making text-critical comments. It is not clear whether Ngawang Tendar was their author or whether these were inserted by a later reader/editor of the manuscripts that were ultimately used for the xylograph edition. Daṇḍin signals the counterpart simile (*prativastūpamā/zla bo dngos po'i dpe*) and its

61. Gerow 1971, 210–217 discusses the *prahelikā* and the sixteen types Daṇḍin enumerated in *Kāvyādarśa* III: 96–124; see also Dimitrov 2011, 7–9, 192–209, 265–70.
62. Dalai Lama V completed this work in 1647 but made the final corrections in 1656. In addition to providing important information in his unusually long afterword and colophon of how his treatise came to be, it also contains much autobiographical detail of how the Dalai Lama understood himself as a scholar and thus begs to be studied in detail; see Dalai Lama V 2009, 387–98.
63. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c], 436; 2008[c], 695. The tenth-century Sinhalese commentator Ratnaśrījñāna called this this type of an *arthāntaranyāsa* a *viparyayo yuktāyukta*; see Ratnaśrījñāna, 1957, 121. The Tibetans call it "having the reversal, what is unsuitable and suitable" ([*ldog pa can*] *mi 'os shing 'os pa*), which explicitly refers to the opposite of the preceding figure in *Kāvyādarśa* II: 175 as *'os shing mi 'os pa* (*yuktāyukta*). Gerow 1971, 119–20 describes the *viparyaya* and concludes "The term 'reversal' is probably to be taken as a reversal of *yuktāyukta*, where an otherwise appropriate situation is deemed in some respect inappropriate. Here the inconsistency is accepted." We can safely elide "probably" in his first sentence.
64. For his works on the language arts, see van der Kuijp Forthcoming.

illustration in *Kāvyādarśa* II: 46–47, and Ngawang Tendar offers a rather uninspiring illustration of it[65]:

> */ mkhas pa mang yang lcang skya thams cad mkhyen /*
> */ rol pa'i rdo rje 'dra ba gcig kyang med /*
> */ rgyu skar grangs med shar ba de'i dbus su /*
> */ pa sangs gnyis pa nges par yod ma yin /*
>
> Though the learned are many,
> there is no one like Rol pa'i rdo rje, the all-knowing Lcang skya.
> Among the countless shining constellations
> Venus is certainly second to none.

The Tibetan translation of Daṇḍin's illustrative verse reads[66]:

> */ rgyal po rnams ni skyes gyur kyang /*
> */ da lta khyod 'dra gcig kyang med /*
> */ yongs 'du dag **gi** rkang 'thung ni /*
> */ gnyis pa nges par yod ma yin /*
>
> Though kings have been born,
> at present, there is not even one like you.
> The coral tree,
> is certainly second to none.

Note that the Tibetan translators rendered *jāyamāneṣu rājasu* by */ rgyal po rnams ni skyes gyur kyang /*, where *skyes gyur* renders *jāyamāna*, "being born." Ngawang Tendar's text then has the following gloss anent the last two lines, one that is absent in the fifth Dalai Lama's *Snyan ngag me long* commentary[67]:

> *de'i rtsa ba'i tshig la sanggā shris /*

65. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c], 425–26; 2008[c], 689.
66. See Gerow 1971, 160. *Kāvyādarśa* II: 47 reads: *naiko'pi tvādṛśo'dyāpi jāyamāneṣu rājasu / nanu dvitīyo nasty eva pārijātasya pādapaḥ //*, which Gerow renders "There is not even one who resembles you among victorious kings; but then, the coral tree has no imitator either."
67. Dalai Lama V 2009, 253.

*/ rkang 'thung dag **la** yongs 'du ni /*
/ gnyis pa nges par yod ma yin /

zhes 'gyur bcos mdzad kyang rin spungs pas de mi 'thad gsungs /

As for the wording of its basic text, Sanggā shri [= Snar thang Lo tsā ba] emended the translation:

> The coral tree among the trees,
> there is certainly second to none.
>
> But Rin spungs pa said it was incorrect.[68]

Rinpungpa actually wrote that it is obvious that Narthang Lotsawa's emendation (*bcos mdzad*) did not fit (*'grig par ma mngon*) because the lines primarily involve a grove of coral trees and not of wishfulfilling trees (*lha yi dpag bsam gyi shing*). There are other places where Narthang Lotsawa sometimes explicitly states that he emended the earlier translation[s] of the *Kāvyādarśa*,[69] but he does not write here that he slightly changed the earlier translation of the third line and thus simply read it */ rkang 'thung dag **la** yongs 'du ni /*.[70] On the other hand, both Pang Lotsawa's and Jamyang Khaché's ('Jam dbyangs Kha che) commentaries

68. See, respectively, Snar thang Lo tsā ba 1976, I, 276 and Rin spungs pa No date, 57a–b. Snar thang Lo tsā ba's work was written in Snar thang at the behest of Rong ston Shāya rgyal mtshan (1367–1449) and Bzad ston Blo gros rgya mtsho. It is dated *sa mo bya'i lo'i ston zla tha chung smin drug gi zla ba'i rgyal gyi nyin par gnas lnga*, "the fifth place in the *rgyal* day of the final autumn-month, the month *smin drug* (*kārttika*), of the earth-female-hen year," that is, on 20 November, 1429, and is posterior to those of Bde ba'i blo gros and 'Jam dbyangs Kha che [?Bsod nams dpal], as he cites them; see Snar thang Lo tsā ba 1976, I, 79, 215. Rin spungs pa's work stands out because it quotes from a large variety of different sources, Indic and Tibetan to supplement Daṇḍin's illustrative verses. It is dated *mi zad pa'am / me pho khyi'i lo smin drug gi nya ba glu dbyangs kyi zla ba yar gyi ngor 'char ba*, "the *mi zad pa* (*avyaya*) or the fire-male-dog year, dawning of the first half, the month of song, the full-moon day of the month *smin drug*," that is, 26 November, 1586. Note here the apposite use of the *mngon brjod* term for the month, *glu dbyangs kyi zla ba*, "the month of song." The equivalence of the month *smin drug* and *glu dbyangs kyi zla ba* is given by Rin spungs pa in his *mngon brjod* lexicon of 1581, where it is glossed by "the tenth Mongol-month"; see Rin spungs pa 1985, 39. In the useful dictionary of astral terminology, Bsam grub rgya mtsho and Huang Mingxin 1985, 162, no. 682, state that this month is the equivalent of the ninth Mongol-month, but that is due to the fact that the dictionary is based on the Phug pa calendar, whereas Rin spungs pa evidently followed the one used by the Sa skya pa school. Note further that the new month begins on the full-moon day.

69. He did not do so for his version of *Kāvyādarśa* I: 1, and there are not a few instances where his readings of the text are at variance with the other. See, for example, Snar thang Lo tsā ba 1976, I, 49–50 comments on Dpang Lo tsā ba's remarks anent *Kāvyādarśa* I: 3.

70. This was already noticed in Dimitrov 2002, 51, where his "eigenständige Fassung der tibetischen Übersetzung" is noted. For the Tibetan text of his commentary, see Snar thang Lo tsā ba 1976, I, 276–277.

indicate that they read the line as */ yongs 'du dag **la** rkang 'thung ni /*.[71] This is curious in light of the fact that Ratnaśrījñāna, a prominent tenth-century Sinhalese commentator of the *Kāvyādarśa,* explicitly has *pārijātasya divyavṛkṣaviśeṣasya*...,[72] where *divyavṛkṣa* is of course the equivalent of Tibetan *lha'i ljon pa* and *lha'i ljon shing*. Later, the fourth Khamtrul Tenzin Chökyi Nyima (Khams sprul IV Bstan 'dzin chos kyi nyi ma, 1730–79) dryly remarks in his marvelous *Snyan ngag me long* commentary of 1770–72 that the difference between these two, ***gi*** and ***la***, is not altogether material, but that the Sanskrit text has the sixth case ending, the genitive case ending—*pārijātasya*!—, so that he [and his mentor Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699–1774)] read the line in question as[73]:

/ yong[*s*] *'du dag gi rkang 'thung ba ni /*

And he adds that it really should be read this way.

Let us now briefly turn our attention to Ngawang Tendar's interesting afterword.[74] There he writes that generally a work of poetry (*snyan ngag gis bstan bcos*) is a work that non-Buddhists and Buddhists have in common in terms of the way it comports to a domain of knowledge (*rig gnas*). Given that the majority of Indian and Tibetan [Buddhist] texts are "decorated" with poetry, it is suitable for those who are motivated and intelligent to study the subject. However, there are some who find some of the wording in the *Snyan ngag me long* offensive and ugly (*tshig rtsog*), and should therefore not be studied and others who, more specifically, found its study unsuited for clerics of the Gelukpa school. It is well to recall here that in opposition of the other schools, all the clerics of the Gelukpa are in theory celibate monks, whereas not all clerics of the other Tibetan Buddhist schools necessarily are monks and are thus not bound by the commitment of leading a celibate life. And indeed there is a lot in *kāvya* / *snyan ngag* that might give offense to the celibate sensibilities of the men of the cloth who were the translators of much of it and one can certainly understand how a celibate monk of any stripe might find some disturbing discomfort when reading a bit of erotic poetry like *Kāvyādarśa* II: 214, which illustrates the third subtype – the conclusion (*nirṇaya/nges pa*)—of the expression involving exaggeration figure (*atiśayokti/phul du byung bar brjod pa*)[75]:

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71. Dpang Lo tsā ba 1981, 342: No date, 78[pdf], and 'Jam dbyangs Kha che 1985, 29. His work is not dated, but we read in the colophon that he was requested to write it by Mi dbang Chos kyi rgyal po Ta wen (< Ch. Dayuan 大元) Nam mkha' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, that he wrote it in the monastery of Bzang ldan. For the Mi dbang Chos kyi rgyal po, see the notes in van der Kuijp 2018, 43–45.
72. Ratnaśrījñāna 1957, 82.
73. Khams sprul IV 1976, 232.
74. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c], 472–76; 2008[c], 721–22.
75. For this figure, see Gerow 1971, 97–101.

/ dga' ma khyod kyi nu ma dang /
/ dbyi yi bar na sked pa ni /
/ yod dang med ces bdag gi ni /
/ the tshom da dung [b]zlog ma gyur /

Lovely! Whether or not there is
a waist between your
breasts and hip,
my doubt has not been resolved.

And many other such poems are found in the *Snyan ngag me long*. But Ngawang Tendar avers that this is based on a misunderstanding. For example, *Kāvyādarśa* II: 15a–b states:

/ mdzes ma khyod kyi lag mthil ni /
/ chu skyes bzhin du cung zad dmar /

Beauty! The palm of your hand,
slightly red like the water-born lotus.[76]

And this can be so easily changed into lines that are in a religious register:

/ 'jam dbyangs khyod kyi bzhin ras ni /
/ gser bzang bzhin du kun tu ser /

'Jam dbyangs! Your countenance,
everywhere yellow, like pure gold.

Here, we should not lose sight of the fact that "'Jam dbyangs" [*Mañjughoṣa] has at least three registers during Ngawang Tendar's lifetime. First, it can refer directly to the bodhisattva; second, it can point to Tsongkhapa; and third, it can indicate the Manchu emperor. Further, Ngawang Tendar points out that *snyan ngag* received the imprimatur of and the intellectual support by the much-revered Tsongkhapa, the very founder of the Gelukpa school, and he quotes a pertinent stanza from the latter's poetic narrative of the Chenga's life that I mentioned earlier[77]:

76. This is an allusion to a custom found in the Indian subcontinent where women apply the red alta-dye to the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet on festive occasions.
77. Tsong kha pa 1978–79[a], 445—as can be easily checked, the same reading of this verse is also found in the Sku 'bum monastery recension of Tsong kha pa's works.

/ de dag mkhas pa'i dga' ston mchog /
/ snyan dngags[a] dag gi yon tan[b] yin /
/ de phyir snyan dngags[a] sbrang rtsi'i ros /
/ blo gsal bung ba'i[c] dga' ston bya /

[a] Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c], 2008[c]: *ngag*.
[b] Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c], 2008[c]: *phan yon*.
[c] Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[c], 2008[c]: *bas*.

Those are the qualities of *snyan ngag*,
the supreme feast of the learned.
Therefore, *snyan ngag*, with its taste of honey,
should be a feast of the bees,[78] the lucid-minded.

And he comments that this allows him to guarantee that poetry is not something that the Gelukpa should shun. He also comments to this effect on a verse from Tsongkhapa's famous *Rin chen gsum gyi gtam du sbyor ba*:[79]

/ rigs lam phra mo phyed pa'i rnam dpyod dang /
/ gzhung lugs gdams par shar ba'i nyams len dang /
/ tshig sbyor tshul la mkhas pa'i ngag gi dpal /
/ sa steng 'di na rin chen rnam gsum snang /

Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971, 2008: 'byed.

An intellect that has analyzed the subtle path of logic and,
spiritual practice that is manifested in the instructions of
textual traditions and,
the vocal luster of one learned in the ways of literary composition,
in this world, three jewels shine.

Finally, the introductory part of Narthang Lotsawa's commentary contains a short section on the

78. Dalai Lama V 2009, 398 speaks of himself and others as the "bees of the domains of knowledge" (*bdag sogs rig gnas pa'i bung rnams*)!
79. Tsong kha pa 1978–79[f], 313. Commenting on the third line, this little work makes later an even stronger case for the study of literary composition and poetry.

place *snyan ngag* has in the Buddhist experience and a longer one on the Buddhist tenor of the *Snyan ngag me long*.[80]

Connected to the *Snyan ngag me long*'s second chapter, two shorter works by Ngawang Tendar are related to the Longdöl (Klong rdol) Lama.[81] The first of these is undated and involves an ode to his mentor with the title [*Snyan ngag dpe rgyan so gnyis kyi sgo nas*] *bstod pa yon tan rgya mtshor gzhol ba'i dad pa'i chu bo* and uses the thirty-two different kinds of similes (*dpe*, *upamā*) as enumerated by Daṇḍin.[82] He calls himself "the poet of Mongolia" (*sog yul gyi snyan ngag mkhan*). Titled [*Snyan ngag me long gi le'u gnyis pa'i mtshungs pa gsal byed kyi sgra'i sgo nas*] *rang gi bla ma la bstod pa byin rlabs 'bod pa'i dbyangs snyan rol mo*, the second is a longer ode to the Longdöl Lama in which he uses the sixty-three types of words that indicate "likeness" (*mtshungs pa*) listed by the *Snyan ngag me long*[83] to which he added eleven additional ones as argued for by the elusive Ngawang Drakpa (Ngag dbang grags pa) [*Vāgīśvarakīrti].[84] It bears the precise date of the thirteenth day of the second fortnight of the tenth Mongol-month of the iron-tiger year, that is, December 12, 1830, and Ngawang Tendar's scribe was a certain Kushri Gelong Drakpa Sherap (Ku shri Dge slong Grags pa shes rab).

In the circles of the educated elite, lay and clerical, poetic improvisation was a favorite pastime. The ability to write in the ornate idiom of *snyan ngag* was not merely a sign of having been privy to a very decent education. It was much more than that. It was a mark of cultivation and of having what in German is called *Bildung*, a word that does not let itself be easily translated and involves the idea of character formation through education and cultivation. There is ample evidence for this among the laity in the writings of such members of the social elite as Rinpungpa, Dokharwa Tsering Wangyal (Mdo mkhar ba Tshe ring dbang rgyal, 1697–1763), Ga Shipa Tenzin Paljor (Dga' bzhi pa Bstan 'dzin dpal 'byor, 1761–after 1810), to name but a few. The same holds for such as Bara Gyaltsen Pal Sangpo ('Ba' ra Rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, 1310–91) and, once again, the second Shamar, to name but a few. The inability to do so or to allow something unsophisticated and impolite to enter one's composition was not the mark of a cultivated lay or clerical gentleman, and the writer would be subject to censure. In that sense, the following verse by Khedrup provides a fitting conclusion to this essay[85]:

80. Snar thang Lo tsā ba 1976, I, 11–18, 24–45.
81. Ngag dbang bstan dar 1971[d, e]; 2008[d, e].
82. *Kāvyādarśa* II: 15–50; see also Gerow 1971, 140–170.
83. *Kāvyādarśa* II: 56c–65.
84. Ngag dbang bstan dar's source was most likely Dalai Lama V 1990, 255. Snar thang Lo tsā ba 1976, I, 292 counts sixty-five such types and explains these by dividing them into four rubrics. He also writes that Shong ston Lo tsā ba had left the terms in Sanskrit and that he rendered them in Tibetan to facilitate understanding the text. He makes no mention of *Vāgīśvarakīrti.
85. Mkhas grub 1981–82[s], 535.

/ sdeb legs tshig sbyor snyan dngags lus mdzes ma[86] */*
/ rgyan mangs mdangs kyis rnam par bkra na yang /
/ grong tshig gcig gis snyan dngags skal ngan byed /
/ rgyan mang na chung sna bcad ji bzhin no //

The beautiful [female] body of a poem, a composition that is well-ordered,
even if it were beautified with the glow of numerous poetic figures,
the poem is turned from worthy to bad with one single uncouth expression,
just like having cut the nose of a well-bedecked young woman.[87]

86. Thu'u bkwan III's biography of Lcang skya II Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717–86) cites this verse but has the feminine ending *ma* instead of *la*; see Thu'u bkwan III 1969, 816 and 1989, 760–61.

87. Compare here *Kāvyādarśa* I: 65a–b: *śabde 'pi grāmyatāsty eva sā sabhyetarakīrtanam /*; */ sgra la'ang grong pa nyid yod de / / de ni legs pa'i cig shos grags /*.

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Songs that Tell the Thousand-Year Story of the Shangpa Lineage

Sarah Harding

Abstract The literary genre known as "song" (*mgur*) includes a vast range of verse composition in the Tibetan language. It is a broad category and subsumes many subcategories, ranging from simple ditties to highly stylized poetics. The subject matter has a similar range, everything from religious cantos to expressions of sadness and yearning for freedom, often disguised in modern songs. Their purpose also varies, from rhythmic songs that accompany physical labor to spontaneous outpourings of spiritual experience from great Buddhist masters, inspiring faith and motivation through example. This essay will examine a collection of such spiritual songs from the Shangpa Kagyü lineage. The songs were collected into a single text, known popularly as the *Shangpa Ocean of Song* (*shangs pa mgur mtsho*), by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé in the nineteenth century. It begins atemporally with verses attributed to the Buddha Vajradhara and continues chronologically through lineage holders up to the nineteenth century, presenting the songs of some twenty masters. In doing so, the collection also reveals a kind of history of the Shangpa lineage and its doctrines by means of the narrative context surrounding each song. We have chosen a small sampling of the songs to explore and elaborate. We bring it up to the very recent past with a song of aspiration by the great meditation master Kalu Rinpoché, who brought this formerly unknown school of Tibetan Buddhism into the modern world.

Introduction

Songs (*mgur*) were one of the most iconic and popular forms of literature in Tibet, continuing to the present day. Lying somewhere between simple folk songs (*glu*) and highly formulaic poetics (*snyan ngag*), these songs allow for a freedom in composition and limitless range of subject matter. Songs of experience (*nyams mgur*) reflect the author's subjective experiences in an accessible style with many applications, whether in the field of religion or daily life. In the case of the former, they allow not only for celebration of spiritual accomplishment, but often reveal feelings of struggle and even failures on the spiritual path. In all cases, they are edifying for both the reader and the author. They also tell a story. In Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé's ('Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, 1813–1900) more-or-less chronological collection of the songs of the Shangpa Kagyü (Shangs pa bka' brgyud) masters and their ancestors, a thousand years of its history can be dis-

cerned, in both its continuity and all its diversity. The following songs selected from his collection, when taken in context, offer a particularly delightful way to learn the history of a lineage.

The following essay will briefly introduce the Shangpa lineage and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé, one of its main proponents and creators of its later anthologies. His projects of collection and preservation in the nineteenth century were crucial for the continuation of this and many other Tibetan lineages. We will focus on his collection of verses from the Shangpa lineage holders, which not only conveys their experiences but also the narrative history of the school. An examination of the meaning and function of this genre of Tibetan literature called songs of experience, as well as the challenges of translating them, will precede the actual translations. The necessarily limited number of songs chosen here represent three separate contexts and time-frames. First, the Indian antecedents at the source of the Shangpa tradition will include some short verses from three important ancestors: Niguma, Sukhasiddhi, and Rāhulaguptavajra. Then follow some examples from the first Tibetan adepts: Khyungpo Naljor (Khyung po rnal 'byor 1050/990–1127) and his disciple Mokchokpa Rinchen Tsöndru (Rmog lcog pa Rin chen brtson 'grus, 1110–1170). Third, the later Jonang branch of the lineage will be presented through the work of two brilliant scholar-poets, Kunga Drolchok (Kun dga' grol mchog, 1507–1566) and Tāranātha (1575–1634). Each work will be contextualized through both their meaning and their narrative, two aspects that I consider inextricable. Finally, a short aspiration prayer by the previous Kalu Rinpoché will bring our survey of the tradition up to the present.

The Shangpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism had been considered a rare and endangered tradition until recently when the modern head of the lineage, Karma Rangjung Kunkhyab (Kar lu Rin po che Karma rang byung Kun khyab, 1905–1989), founded monasteries and retreat centers in India and Bhutan after the Tibetan diaspora and traveled widely to establish teaching and retreat centers internationally. However, the preservation of the associated literature can be largely credited to the work of the great eclectic savant, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé in the previous century and his predecessors, mainly Kunga Drolchok and Jonang Tāranātha. Kongtrul adopted a system for organizing the main streams of meditation instruction by tracing the instructors who brought them from India into Tibet and called it the Eight Great Chariots of the Practice Lineages (*sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*). In this system, Shangpa Kagyü took its place alongside some of the well-known and more widespread traditions, such as that of Nyingma, Kadam, Marpa Kagyü, and Sakya Lamdré. In his great efforts to preserve as much of these teachings as possible through the collection of texts into five great treasuries or anthologies, he paid special attention to scarce and imperiled lineages, such as the Shangpa lineage and the other three "chariots": Pacification (*zhi byed*), Approach and Attainment of the Three Vajras (*rdo rje gsum kyi bsnyen sgrub*), and the Six-Branch Yoga of Kālacakra (*sbyor drug*). In the explanation of his motives for producing *The Treasury of Precious Instructions* (*Gdams ngag rin po che'i mdzod*), his most iconic of anthologies in its assemblage of texts from all these lineages, he stated:

> The continuity of the Shangpa teachings, Pacification, Approach and Attainment, and some others are extremely rare and nearly going extinct. With the noble aspiration of hoping to benefit the continuity of the teachings of empowerment, reading transmission, and guidance, and in order to give meaning to my great diligence and exertion of effort, and so that the frayed rope of those long lineages would at least not break, we must pay some attention to them.[1]

Thanks to the success of his efforts, carried forth by Kalu Rinpoché and others, and the ongoing publications by the Tsadra Foundation of his major works, which now includes the two volumes on the Shangpa Kagyü from the *Treasury of Precious Instructions*, the teachings of this lineage seem to be fairly well preserved and accessible. Now it only remains to appreciate them.

Among the texts that Kongtrul included in the Shangpa volume of the *Treasury of Precious Instructions* is a collection of verse, often called songs of spiritual experience, attributed to some of the Shangpa ancestors and later lineage-holders, spanning over a thousand years. Kongtrul collected these from various sources, primarily the individual biographies (*rnam thar*) of the authors, and called it *An Ocean of Blessings Meaningful to Hear: Collected Vajra Lines, Dohās, and Melodious Songs of the Glorious Shangpa Kagyü*.[2] They have been reproduced in several subsequent collections, though nothing that predates the *Treasury*.[3] They are not found in the collection of Kongtrul's own works, so it would seem that he created it as a stand-alone text, or specifically for inclusion in the *Treasury*. They are, of course, intended for inclusion in offering rituals (*guru puja*) that extol the virtues of the masters and inspire faith in their teachings. Here, a short selection of songs will be presented as a less painful way to introduce some of the predecessors of the lineage and its teachings.

Expressions of spiritual inspiration or "songs of realization" were in evidence from as early as the seventh century CE, usually written in the late Middle Indo-Aryan dialect of Apabhraṃśa.[4] Many such verses from the *mahāsiddhas*, the great adepts of India, were brought into Tibet with the spread of Buddhism and found their way into Tibetan canonical collections, such as those of the great Brahmin Saraha and the south Indian master Dampa Sangyé (Pha dam pa sangs rgyas,

1. Jamgön Kongtrul 1999, 12:386. See more on Kongtrul's eclectic projects (*ris med*) in Kongtrul 2007, 31–42.
2. *Dpal ldan shangs pa bka' brgyud kyi do ha rdo rje'i tshig rkang dang mgur dbyangs phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs pa thos pa don ldan byin rlabs rgya mtsho.* In *Gdams ngag mdzod,* Shechen edition, vol. 12, 463–559; Palpung edition, vol. 8, 757–853 (not listed in English table of contents). Previously translated in Zangpo 2003. My translation of this text in volume 12 of the *Gdams ngag mdzod* is forthcoming from Shambhala Publications as *The Treasury of Precious Instructions: Essential Teachings of the Eight Practice Lineages of Tibet: Volume 12: Shangpa Kagyu*. Used here with the kind permission of the Tsadra Foundation.
3. For instance, in Karma Rang byung kun khyab 1990's. And anonymous editor 1996, 317–530.
4. For examples of Apabhraṃśa dohās and their translations see Jackson 2004.

11th c.–1117).[5] The custom of expressing near-ineffable spiritual experience in poetry and song was taken up enthusiastically by indigenous Tibetans. Most famously, perhaps, by the great yogin and poet Milarepa (Mi la ras pa, 1028/1040–1111/1123), who's so-called Hundred Thousand Songs (*mgur 'bum*) are sung, recited, and studied to this day.[6] Such collections are also known as a multitude or "ocean" of song (*mgur mtsho*).

The term "song" (*mgur* or *mgur dbyangs*) should be understood in a very broad sense as verse or poetry. In his book on modern Tibetan literature, Lama Jabb has identified gur (*mgur*) as a recognizable genre due to "[h]istorical endurance, simplicity of style and language, colloquialism, metric flexibility, and a sense of spontaneity alongside accessibility and popular appeal."[7] Experiential songs (*nyams mgur*) are understood to be spiritual, where nyam (*nyams*) in this context refers to meditational experience. In a collection of such songs, Thupten Jinpa states, "Because they are simultaneously so personal and so metaphoric, the songs of spiritual experience form a unique category of religious literature in Tibet."[8] Other terms used here are "vajra lines" (*rdo rje tshig rkang*), referring to ancient "original" lines spoken by ancestral sources, and *dohā*, an Indian word that technically means verse composed in couplets, but has become a more general term almost synonymous with gur, while retaining a sense of Indian antecedents. It is not known whether most of these verses were actually voiced in tuneful song by their creators, or written down as poetry, though they may be "close to the melodies of music."[9] The sense is that any expression of verse is said to be "sung." Perhaps "poetry reading" would be more precise.

The wide range and rather loose interpretation of "song" allows for a wide variety of expressions and uses, making the task of translating a selection of them pleasantly challenging. In his study of the subject, Roger Jackson cites one list of possible subjects for songs of spiritual experience: "Don grub rgyal, who has written the most comprehensive study to date, lists seven major types of *mgur*, those that (1) remember the guru's kindness, (2) indicate the source of one's realizations, (3) inspire the practice of Dharma, (4) give instructions on how to practice, (5) answer disciples' questions, (6) admonish the uprooting of evil, and (7) serve as missives to gurus or disciples."[10] All of these and then some are in evidence in the following selection. In the songs from indigenous Tibetan masters, I have focused on those that express some irony regarding the hardship of a life dedicated to the single-pointed pursuit of enlightenment. In other words, those to which ordinary Dharma practitioners might relate—rather than those with soaring and spectacular glimpses of ultimate

5. For a thorough study, see Schaeffer 2005.
6. Milarepa's dates are usually given as 1052–1135, but vary. See his songs in the perennial classic, Chang 1962. Also Andrew Quintman's translation of *The Life of Milarepa* in Tsangnyön Heruka 2010.
7. Jabb 2015, 5.
8. Jinpa and Elsner 2000, 19.
9. Jinpa and Elsner 2000, 14.
10. Jackson 1996, 374. Citing Don grub rgyal 1985, 194-95.

reality. In this, it is good to keep Thupten Jinpa's advice in mind: "The experiential poems posit a particular challenge to the translator, since they combine a deliberate use of vernacular and even colloquial terms or expressions with quite complex esoteric vocabulary. It is easy for translators to be tempted into reading too much high mysticism into what may sometimes be a very ordinary or simple expression of feeling. Ultimately, one effect of the experiential songs is their union of the spiritual with the everyday, so that sacred experience is expressed through the popular and even the familiar."[11]

Most of the songs here and in other collections are couched in a narrative that puts them in the context of the circumstances in which they were sung or composed. As a translator, these narratives are crucial to consider. One trend in translating songs and other writings of the great Tibetan masters is to attempt to elicit the same response in the reader as the original did, whether or not the outcome is faithful to the words. This is not my approach, as it asks the translator to make assumptions that one can somehow know what the authors' intentions and the listeners' reactions were those many centuries ago, or that one's own response is the only correct one. (And when is that ever true of poetry?) Without the information from the narratives, life stories, and occasional commentaries to contextualize them, a translator would be even more challenged.

In some cases, the narrative is greatly reduced from the original source. According to Andrew Quintman, the famous biography of Milarepa was extracted from the collection of his songs by Tsangnyön Heruka (Gtsang smyon He ru ka, 1452–1507) in order to make a more readable chronological version. It certainly did that, and Tsangnyön also reformulated the collection of Milarepa's songs to make them more accessible to accompany the life story as a supplement.[12] Nevertheless, there is the danger in any anthology that the poems will float unmoored outside of historical time and place and person, for better or for worse. Kongtrul's collection of Shangpa songs is also guilty of a vastly reduced context for the songs, except in the case of Khyungpo Naljor. However, the hagiographies from which they are extracted provide plenty of material, too much to cover here. Nevertheless, in order to relate the poetry to the person, as much of the circumstance and setting as possible was considered when making the translation.

Jamgön Kongtrul authored a very long supplication to this lineage that includes many of the same authors that produced these songs and included it in this volume of the *Treasury*.[13] It is called a biographical supplication (*rnam thar la gsol 'debs*) in that it is meant to extol the liberated lives of these masters. However, one finds precious few details of their lives actually recorded therein. Rather, it is a dithyramb full of incredible, awe-inspiring, abstract realizations of the highest order, each one vying with the other in their descriptions of the ineffable. What is impressive is Kongtrul's unswerving faith, while the descriptions of actual individual adepts are lost within the heaped-on

11. Jinpa and Elsner 2000, 27.
12. Quintman 2014, 137–142.
13. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:389–447.

praises. I can honestly say it was the most tedious translation I've ever done. It is the adepts' own voices in the following collection of experiential songs that convey, to me at least, their real characters, full of real experiences described in a nuanced way, and the wisdom that resulted.

Songs of the Indian Ancestors of the Shangpa Kagyü

The Shangpa lineage in Tibet traces to Khyungpo Naljor, who visited India and met with 150 gurus, as the story goes. The main ones were the two ḍākinīs Niguma and Sukhasiddhi, and the great adepts Rāhulaguptavajra, Maitrīpa, and Vajrāsana, all of them dating from the tenth to eleventh centuries. Brief verses attributed to the first three are represented here. It seems likely that their songs were recorded by Khyungpo Naljor, according to his memories of the very unusual encounters he had with them. The narratives that resulted and come down to us today reveal levels of meaning that might speak more to Khyungpo Naljor's experience than that of the masters themselves. Niguma in particular, whose teachings Khyungpo Naljor received in dreams and dream-like experiences in a charnel ground, and which form the very basis of Shangpa practice, is veiled in mystery.[14] It is fitting that many of the songs and vajra lines attributed to her speak of illusion, blurring the lines between a supposed reality and a felt experience, no matter how "unreal." In the following two quatrains, Niguma not only dismisses the entrapment of our own thoughts, which is a common Buddhist trope, but even enlightenment itself as an actual thing.

> This variety of desirous and hateful thoughts
> that strands us in the ocean of cyclic existence,
> just realized to be without intrinsic nature,
> makes everything the land of gold, my child.
>
> If you meditate on the illusion-like nature
> of all illusion-like phenomena,
> illusion-like manifest buddhahood
> will arise through the power of devotion.

Here, devotion (*mos gus*) is the subjective experience, or even a kind of transformative emotion, that allows for the feeling of an awakened state, even though no such thing exists ontologically. Devotion is generally understood as the total commitment to a spiritual master, a heightened sense of love associated with an intense personal relationship—I and Thou. There is the assump-

14. Harding 2010, 1–22.

tion that such transformative feeling occurs only between people, rather than concepts or deities. This song, however, seems to suggest that the devotion to the spiritual journey itself could awaken such feelings. Similarly, the knowledge of discursive thought and everything else as illusion results in the joy of finding oneself in the land of gold. This is a reference to a legendary island where everything is precious—where you couldn't find an ordinary rock even if you tried—a pure land (*zhing khams*) by definition, not the purity that stands in contrast to impurity.

This idea is of course not unusual in Buddhist literature, but here the instruction to Khyungpo during his already altered state of consciousness, while asking Niguma if her magical appearance floating in space is real or not, strikes him with unusual precision. Niguma also taught him an entire treatise called *Stages of Illusion*[15] that turns the traditional Mahāyāna approach of paths and stages upside-down, pulling the rug out from the detailed cartography of spiritual progress. Ḍākinīs in general are the very embodiment of illusion, their female form recalling the association of the feminine with the perfection of wisdom that cognizes emptiness (*prajñāpāramitā*). Tibetan literature is replete with stories of spiritual adepts encountering these forms in visionary experiences, though it is unusual for a Tibetan lineage to be sourced primarily in two such women, whether in visions or real life.

Sukhasiddhi seems at first to be a little more down to earth (literally, in this case). Her story of a sixty-something housewife who is banished from home for giving the last family food to a beggar could really have happened in ancient India. And her enterprising survival method of growing hops for her start-up brewery reminds us of women's enduring strength. One of her customers is a female practitioner who buys her beer and takes it to her partner, the yogin Virūpa, dwelling in a nearby forest. When Sukhasiddhi finds out where the beer is going, she refuses to accept payment. When Virūpa finds out that she is donating his beer, he asks to meet her, and the rest is history. Or legend. Elderly Sukhasiddhi transforms into a sixteen-year-old girl, pure and white. That is how Khyungpo Naljor finds her, also in a charnel ground, where she gives him this instruction:

> Disengaged from the objects of the six senses,
> non-recollection is the path to transcendence.
> No conceptual thought is the realm of phenomena,
> free of mentation—that is mahāmudrā.
>
> Don't meditate! Don't meditate! Don't mentally meditate!
> Mental meditation is the machination of conceptual thought.
> Concepts bind you to cyclic existence.

15. *Sgyu ma lam rim*. Translation in Harding 2010, 37–133.

In empty space, which lacks awareness,
with awareness tame the root of mind.
Tame the root and rest relaxed.

As with Niguma's verses, the songs of experience make most sense in the context of their pronouncement. Translation should take the circumstances into consideration whenever possible. What does it mean that Sukhasiddhi becomes a beautiful young woman? Not just that yogis can then appreciate her. The Tibetan word for ḍākinī (*mkha' 'gro ma*) means "she who moves through space," and the only thing in our experience that does that is awareness itself. Just so, that pure intrinsic awareness, which underpins all experience, is unchanging and eternal—ever youthful and beautiful. Awareness never ages; it only is covered up and disguised by discursive thought. So Sukhasiddhi urges Khyungpo Naljor to give up concepts. And above all, not to meditate! Meditation, after all, can be the most deleterious of contrivances, with all its incumbent hopes for success and fears of failure.

What then? Sukhasiddhi's answer is in the last verse, which is perhaps her most famous utterance and often used as the means to point out the nature of mind, such as during the fourth empowerment in a tantric initiation. This space or sky (*nam mkha'*) is itself without awareness (*rig med*), and thus empty. That which possesses awareness (*rig bcas*) is the mind (*sems*). One needs to get a hold of that mind by the roots and tame it. Then once tamed, relax. This seems straightforward, and I have translated it as that. However, there is more to it.

Sukhasiddhi appears in several adept lineages besides the Shangpa. One in particular is the lineage called Pacification (*zhi byed*) that was based on the teachings of the south Indian master Pha Dampa Sangyé (d. 1117). Two of the terms that occur in our verse here appear together throughout Dampa's unique teachings: "root of mind" (*sems kyi rtsa ba*) or simply "the root," and "tame" or "control" (*bcun*). That the two appear so often together seems more than random, and leads me to believe they are particular to Sukhasiddhi's lexicon. However, chün (*bcun*) is more often spelled as chü (*bcud*) in the Pacification literature. This can also mean to control, but has the additional meaning of to squeeze or intensify. This changes the idea slightly to something like "intensify the root [of mind and then] rest relaxed." That is, focus intently and then relax into it, a fairly common mahāmudrā instruction. An interesting example from one Pacification instruction states "Outward intensification (*bcud pa*) is to look fixedly at whatever objects arise to the five senses. Once the consciousness of the three times is cut off, settle in the radiant clarity of a moment of consciousness. Inward intensification is to maintain strict [attention] on precisely whatever subtle or obvious thoughts arise. Once they are suddenly grasped, settle into the pristine, clear freshness in the state of bare presence."[16]

16. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 13:319. Translation in Jamgön Kongtrul 2019, 416.

In another text of Sukhasiddhi's teachings, our verse is expanded by an added first line and explained in interlinear notes (here in parentheses) from an unknown editor. The result would be as follows:

> With the physical yogic exercise (legs slightly crossed, left hand in the threatening gesture at the heart, the right thumb and little finger grasped and the other three raised)
> in empty space, which lacks awareness,
> with awareness (visualize) taming the root of mind (looking with sharp eyes).
> Tame the root and rest relaxed.[17]

Now we are in the realm not of mahāmudrā but of the tantric completion-phase practices based on yogic manipulations of the physical body and yogic gazes to achieve that same realization. This adds a whole new dimension, although we cannot know whether that first line was part of the original, or whether it was added later. Just as we cannot know whether tame or intensify is the "correct" translation of the verb. Such deviations are exceptionally challenging for the translator. In any case, including all the potential nuances and options is fairly impossible, especially in a short and sweet song that is meant to inspire through its very simplicity.

The next selection is from Rāhulaguptavajra, or Lama Rāhula, another of Khyungpo Naljor's primary Indian masters. Of the other two male teachers who greatly influenced him, Maitrīpa was a prolific composer and important teacher who has received much attention elsewhere.[18] Vajrāsana was not included in the collection, apparently not a singer. Lama Rāhula, on the other hand, was instrumental in guiding Khyungpo Naljor, the only one who came to him in Tibet to continue his training. He was an important source of the Four Deities Combined Practice—those four deities having appeared to Rāhula throughout his life. However, his final piece of advice, before taking leave of his disciple in Tibet and flying solo back to India, was not concerned with detailed meditation instructions, nor with lofty abstract teachings, but rather appears to be practical and somewhat playful personal advice. It is called *Vajra Lines in Six*,[19] referring to both the number of syllables in each line and the number of verses. There often seems to be a fascination with enumeration, which may add a bit of challenge and fun to the poetic endeavors of some masters. I have tried to follow suit, though the difficulty of translation from a monosyllabic Tibetan to equivalent syllables in English means that much is lost in translation, particularly rhythm. Perhaps the following is an example of privileging form over content, which may not always be advisable.

17. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 199912, 318.
18. Some examples are Mathes 2021 for his life and Brunnhölzl 2020 for some of his songs.
19. *Zhal gdams rdo rje'i tshigs drug ma*, in 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, 1999, 12:475–76.

The root of suffering
is fixation on self.
Without hate or desire,
settle in evenness.

Life changes and ends but
is not done; born again.
Care for cause and effect,
uphold sacred pledge.

Since nature is union,
this rainbow-like body
appears without substance.
Always remember that.

This life's desires will come,
next life's path will be shown
by Buddha-like gurus.
Always remember that.

Until you are stable,
you're busy and upset.
Like a wounded gazelle,
practice alone yourself.

Beings in this age of war
have great pride and envy.
Like a lamp in a vase,
hide your good qualities.

Khyungpo Naljor likely memorized the previous verses as he heard them and consequently wrote them down. After he returned to Tibet, and after Rahūla's lengthy visit, he set about teaching and establishing monasteries, the first one being in the valley of Shang, from which the tradition derives its name. He also began to compose his own verses. Clearly they reflect the main themes of his masters, particularly the importance of recognizing all phenomena as illusion. Kongtrul included the following verses, among others, from Khyungpo's biography.[20] Though echoing the advice of the two ḍākinīs, one senses a certain male perspective in the first. That could be because Khyungpo Naljor was attempting to reform a group of slacker monks by first manifesting enticing gods and goddesses and then regaling them with frightening death-lord minions in order to scare them into line.

> All objects of desire and hatred
> come from your own mind.
> To the yogin, these appearances
> of death-lord forms, like flesh-eaters,
> carrying various weapons in their hands
> to reap our life-force right now,
> are liberating if known as illusions.
> Even when surrounded by captivating
> beautiful goddesses adorned with jewels,
> singing songs with sweet melodies,
> if you know they are self-appearing illusions,
> they have no power to ensnare you.[21]

After that, of course, "everyone applied themselves diligently to study and meditation." Another time when he was challenged by a skeptical geshé, he displayed miraculous feats, such as passing through mountain cliffs and hovering in the air. After that, the geshé was convinced, and asked which instruction had resulted in such abilities. Khyungpo responded simply with the following six-line, seven-syllable song:

> Experience the illusion-like nature
> of all illusion-like phenomena
> to manifest illusion-like buddhahood.

20. Rmog lcog pa, in Karma Rang byung kun khyab 1990's, 1:59–143.
21. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:489.

Phenomena appear but are unreal.
The childish view them as real, causing delusion.
Appearing while nonexistent—how amazing!

The learned and accomplished Khyungpo Naljor gathered thousands of disciples in Tibet. However, the corpus of teachings received from the Lady Niguma, known as the Five Golden Dharmas of the Glorious Shangpa Kagyü (*dpal ldan shangs pa'i gser chos lnga*), had been placed under a command seal by the ḍākinī herself as a single or one-to-one lineage for seven generations. (Khyungpo Naljor was himself the third, after Buddha Vajradhara and Niguma). That meant that there was just one favored disciple who received it all: Mokchokpa Rinchen Tsöndru (1110–1170). Mokchokpa had trained with several great lamas before meeting Khyungpo Naljor, but was not satisfied with his progress. He accomplished two years of retreat with Khyungpo's guidance, and experienced the culminating realizations of illusory body, dream yoga, and lucid clarity, three of the Six Dharmas of Niguma (*Ni gu chos drug*). After the death of Khyungpo Naljor, he spent two more years in retreat, and then, to resolve any remaining doubts, he sought out the great Gampopa Sönam Rinchen (Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 1079–1153), lineage holder of the Marpa Kagyü (Mar pa bka' brgyud) and disciple of Milarepa. Gampopa recognized their teacher-student relationship from previous lives and Mokchokpa was able to receive teachings from him during lucid dreaming, an ability he had mastered previously. In particular, he gained realization of mahāmudrā in Gampopa's system. He left Gampopa after a year. In a visionary experience of the ḍākinī Sukhasiddhi, she repeated this single stanza to him three times:

Until phenomena's nature is actualized,
Nourishment by human food obscures meditation experience.
Sever the bonds of food and clothing,
and eat the food of meditative absorption.

Thereafter he cut the ties to food and clothing and remained in retreat in the cliffs of Mokchok for twelve years. He composed many vajra songs during that time. In a retreat situation, especially if hungry and cold while obeying Sukhasiddhi's instructions, such songs are spontaneous expressions of feelings composed for their own sake, rather than as teaching tools. These first few verses of *Seven Royal Possessions Complete in Oneself* seem to be reminders of his decision to enter retreat in the first place.

I acted to defeat enemies and protect friends,
but at no time were the enemies defeated,
and at no time were the friends satisfied.

Now my main act is to live without enemies and friends.

I acted to propitiate gods and exorcise demons,
but at no time were the gods satisfied,
and at no time did the demons leave.
Now my main act is to live without gods and demons.

Though I chased after emptiness
reaching the view of emptiness is endless.
Now my main act is to cut to the root alone.[22]

Some of his songs are quite candid about the actual hardships of protracted meditation retreat.

Although expressing dismay at very real meditation conundrums at first, the verses also offer Mokchokpa's instructional personal resolutions in this *Song of Six Attitudes of an Experienced Mind*. Meditators everywhere might relate to these issues. Mokchokpa uses the poetic devise of repetition to emphasize the tricky or deceitful-like nature of spiritual practice, literally: "as if even the view deceives and deceives the yogin" (*blta bas kyang rnal 'byor bslu bslu 'dra*), as well as the repetition of the line as a kind of refrain.

At first I resolved my false assumptions,
but sometimes doubt still came up.
It's as if even the view tricks the yogin.
Now I ask only to keep a simple mind.

At first I realized the unborn,
but sometimes inflation still came up.
It's as if even meditation tricks the yogin.
Now I ask only to keep an undistracted mind.

At first I acted without fixation,
but sometimes attachment still came up.
It's as if even the conduct tricks the yogin.
Now I ask only to keep an unfixated mind.

At first I rested with one-pointed mind,

22. *Rgyal srid sna bdun rang la tshangs ba'i mgur*. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:495.

but sometimes hopes and fears still came up.
It's as if even the fruition tricks the yogin.
Now I ask only to keep a spontaneous mind.

At first I made surpassing progress,
but sometimes anxiety still came up.
It's as if even the eight concerns trick the yogin.
Now I ask only to keep a crazy mind.

At first I renounced loving relatives,
but sometimes face-saving still came up.
Now I ask only to keep from saving face.[23]

At first faith was born,
but sometimes complacency still came up.
It's as if laziness tricks the yogin.
Now I ask only to keep diligent and yogic.

May I not grow weary of faith and devotion
to the one deity, the Three Jewels.
May my devotion be uninterrupted
to the one parent, the holy guru.

May I not corrupt with extra words
the instructions of awakened mind's essence.
Practice is more dear than further scholarship.
I will stay by myself and keep practicing.[24]

And finally, in this *Instruction on Eight Hardships*, there is yet another honest confession, and another enumeration. The eighth hardship is enlightenment itself—might as well just admit it.

It's hard to tire of the faults of cyclic existence
and devote oneself to transcendent Dharma.
It's hard to believe in the Dharma of cause and effect

23. I believe the third line of this exceptional three-line verse been left out in all available editions.
24. *Nyams myong blo drug gi mgur*. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:497–98.

and then to have faith without sorrow.
It's hard to reject all sickness and pain
and then put this human body to use.
It's hard to find a compassionate guru
who has scripture, reason, and esoteric instructions.
It's hard to find a disciple who rejects distractions
and then cultivates meditative experience.
It's hard to abandon all attachment and aversion
and then compassionately work for others' welfare.
It's hard to meditate single-pointedly
free of dualistic conceptual thinking.

This instruction on the eight hardships
is valuable to all who practice Dharma.
Only a few out of a hundred get them all;
that's why attaining awakening is so hard.[25]

Mokchokpa established a small monastery in Mokchok and his teaching and wisdom were passed on in the main Shangpa lineage to Kyergangpa Chökyi Sengé (Skyer sgang pa Chos kyi seng ge, 1154–1217), from him to Nyentön Rigongpa Chökyi Sherab (Gnyen ston Ri gong pa Chos kyi seng ge, 1175–1255), and then to Sangyé Tönpa Tsöndru Sengé (Sangs rgyas ston pa Brtson 'grus seng ge, 1107–1278), who was the seventh in what became known as the Seven Jewels of the Glorious Shangpa Kagyu. Then the vajra seal placed by Niguma on her instructions was lifted, and the Five Golden Dharmas could spread openly. These five instructions are mapped using the analogy of a tree: the roots are Niguma's Six Dharmas; the trunk is Amulet Mahāmudrā; the branches are the Three Integrations on the Path; the flowers are the White and Red Celestial Goddesses; and the fruit is Immortal and Infallible. These and other Shangpa practices were transmitted down a long lineage of adepts, eventually dispersing into twenty-four separate lines. Later masters consolidated twenty-three of those into one, and kept as a separate lineage the short or direct transmission (*nye brgyud*) that was received by the great adept Thangtong Gyalpo (Thang stong rgyal po, 1361–1484) in his visionary encounters with Niguma and Sukhasiddhi.[26] Both long and direct transmissions also entered other schools, such as the Gelukpa and Jonang lineages. For Jamgön Kongtrul, the Jonang lineage became especially important.

25. *Dka' ba rnam brgyad gdams ngag*. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:498.
26. For the story of these encounters and the whole amazing life of the adept, see Stearns 2007.

Songs from the Later Lineage

Kunga Drolchok (1507–1566) was one of the later masters counted in the Shangpa tradition known as the Jonang line. Kunga Drolchok had spent thirty-one years of his life, starting from the age of seven, gathering instructions and empowerments from as many masters of various lineages as he could find. Though he was personally involved mainly in Sakya and Kālacakra practices, after a visitation from our ḍākinī, Niguma, his faith in the Shangpa teachings was ignited. During his abbacy of Jonang Monastery, from 1546 until his death, he finally organized all the various instructions he had gathered into a collection known as *One Hundred and Eight Guidebooks of Jonang*. This work seems to have been an inspiration and the precedent for Jamgön Kongtrul's great anthology projects, and in fact the whole of Kunga Drolchok's text is included in the last volume of *The Treasury of Precious Instructions*.[27]

Kunga Drolchok identifies the following song as a "long-distance song" (*rgyang glu*), belonging to a genre better known as "calling the lama from afar" (*bla ma rgyang bod*). Typically these reveal a rather self-deprecating yearning for instruction or comfort from one's teacher, full of awareness of one's own faults and failures on the spiritual path. In the colophon, Drolchok states that it was "composed spontaneously as a whip to encourage my vigilance." In that sense, it functions as an act of confession to acknowledge shortcomings and a determination to do better, with the guru's blessings. It was composed in the somewhat unusual style of eight-syllable lines that has been attributed by some as typical of Eastern Tibet, although Kunga Drolchok was originally from Mustang. When this style is chanted or sung in Tibetan, the first syllable is emphasized: "Refuge—not sought elsewhere Gyagom / Mind—undivided I go for refuge…" etc. I could not faithfully translate the whole song in that style without resorting to horrible English.

> Refuge that I needn't seek elsewhere, Gyagom,
> I take refuge in you with mind undivided.
> Father, unerring lord guru,
> turn your one child's mind to Dharma.
>
> In action, I diligently pursued worldly thoughts;
> my body disciplined, yet my mind shameful.
> In name, I'm called religious, but I'm a hypocrite.
> This you see with your compassion, my chief guru.

27. *Jo nang khrid brgya*, in 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 18:127–353. Translated by Gyurme Dorjé in Jamgön Kongtrul 2020.

The place, samsara, though I seem to know its faults,
my mind is ever wandering in useless activity.
Mentally suspicious, my body is left behind in retreat.
This should be abandoned; please see it with wisdom.

In character, I am decidedly tough.
On the spot, I don't hide from any nonsense.
I am betrayed by myself, turning my own head.
Father, doesn't this just stir your tears of love?

In Dharma, my fiction of knowledge and awareness
mentally pleases me with my own childish prattle.
Of meditation and the like, I take little account.
Father, does this not concern you?

Karma's impressions in my mind are inexhaustible.
My character is not detached from samsara's swamp.
Present-time consciousness has not been recognized.
This song of what I'm missing is getting long!

Hey! This piled-stone illusion of a monk's form,
intelligent or stupid—it's deluded to analyze it.
The venerable image of lovely qualities is a rainbow.
Fixated concepts analyzing its value are vulgar.

Samsara's pit of nasty vomit is ruinous
when touched with the idea that it's delicious.
Mind's indefinite perceptions are pervasive.
To take a tenuous stand on their existence is crazy.

In mindfulness with singular mental consciousness,
witnessing [my own] non-dharmic [thoughts] was rough.
Whatever I've done is reflected in illusion's mirror.
By the code of true or false, it was all distraction and deceit.

What I've done has destroyed the crops of emancipation,
scorched by the drought of my conceptual analysis.

I understand, but will not leave it at that,
nor ever leave "meditation" as an empty word.
Now if I die it is good; living is also okay.
My aim, I know, is to consummate virtue.[28]

The recognized incarnation of Kunga Drolchok at Jonang was the great polymath Drolwai Gönpo ('Gro ba'i mgon po), better known by the translated Sanskrit name, Tāranātha (1575–1634). He was author of countless works on history, grammar, philosophy, epistemology, tantric ritual, and meditation, among other subjects. He figures prominently in many schools and lineages, as either protagonist or antagonist, but holds a special place in the Shangpa Kagyü. He also was graced with visions of the ancestral ḍākinīs, and was a prolific composer of texts on the Shangpa histories and teachings, as well as a "singer of songs." The first selection is a song of nine-syllable lines that was composed at the age of twenty-three, while Tāranātha was residing at Samding Monastery, and was stated to be a counsel to himself as an incentive. One can almost imagine him standing before his reflection wagging his finger at himself. The refrain *snying med po* sets off each six-line verse. Literally this is "heartless" or something without an essence or purpose. "Hollow man" seems to capture the sense, while also recalling T.S. Eliot's stunning poem that also ponders impermanence: "We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men…"[29]

oṃ svasti
I bow to the three precious sources of refuge
and say these words that dawned in my mind.

You tell of meditating in mountain retreats,
which makes a good impression in others' eyes.
But on closer examination, your mind is not joined to Dharma.
How can this be the honest holy Dharma?
Now it's time to practice from the heart.
Discard this life's goals, hollow man!

You hasten to teach, supervising study and contemplation,
but at the slightest adversity abandon the holy Dharma.
Renowned as a scholar, you're a waste of a human life.
How can someone like you be a good spiritual mentor?

28. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:423–24.
29. Eliot 1936, 101–108.

Now it's time to tame your mind.
Point your finger inward, hollow man!

You see the fleeting nature of cyclic existence,
but really don't believe it and become negligent.
When it's time to pass on, you will not feel confident,
yet you don't worry about it; a careless madman.
Now it's time to prepare for the next life.
Turn your mind to the Dharma, hollow man!

You need nothing more, yet harbor attachment and aversion.
Your pride in your qualities is as big as Mount Meru.
You conform to social norms, though no one is impressed.
You who have done so little but expect so much:
now it's time to reject the eight worldly concerns.
Whatever happens has the same value, hollow man!

You can't give up even a little sleep for the sake of Dharma.
Later this year will do, you think with good-natured forbearance.
You want instant signs of experience, you empty braggart.
You don't control your desire for food, wealth, and fame.
Now it's time to concentrate on a single intention.
Be rid of your deepest hopes and fears, hollow man!

After adolescence, youth fades and deteriorates.
All your followers just repay benefit with harm,
yet you are still open-minded and not sick of it.
You plan for this life as if you don't know better.
Now it's time to wholeheartedly stop activities.
Train your mind to be impartial, hollow man!

All who bear the title of guru do not practice Dharma.
All their disciples are not keepers of sacred pledge.
All the people even lack shame and conscientiousness.
In these hard times of decline of the Buddha's doctrine,
no matter how many ways you try to help others,
mostly it just harms yourself and does not help them.

Once you gain stability in the Dharma,
the benefit for others will arise continuously.
Give up the sporadic semblance of helping others
in this life and concentrate on yourself.

This is the time to embrace the holy Dharma.
Since that is indeed the case, keep it in mind.[30]

Tāranātha later applies a similar incentive to others. In the following case, to some yogins living in the hidden land of Latö who requested instruction. He takes an ironic jab at them as "great meditators" (*sgom chen*), a common term for lay practitioners, dismissing them with the wrathful shout of *phaṭ*, often used by such practitioners. With its random variations of seven, eight, or nine syllables per line, those who chant it in group rituals must work hard to keep to a regular fast-paced rhythm, probably fudging some of the syllables. (At least that is this translator's experience).

namo guru
Sovereign guru, my single sufficient father,
I supplicate you continuously without a break.
Turn my disciples' minds to the Dharma
and bless them to realize all-pervasive mind.

At this time, you've accrued all favorable conditions,
you have met a qualified spiritual master
and received many profound instructions.
Now, no matter what, do not render them futile.

This body is a composite heap of flesh and bones,
unbefitting to hold as stable and permanent.
Establish your virtuous practice right away
without postponing it to a later time.

Those without meditative experience make false claims
and mouth on with assertions about emptiness.
They are at risk of succumbing to dark, empty talk.
It's vitally important to scrutinize cause and effect.

30. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:529–30. Also in Tā ra nā tha ca. 1990, 1:783–85.

With unceasing longing devotion,
fervently engage in supplicating the guru,
but don't try to cling to that as real.
Your mind and the guru's are no different.

Not knowing yourself, you wander cyclic existence,
but irresistible compassion is most important.
The delusion of clinging to its reality tricks you.
Regard all joy and sorrow as a dream.

This ordinary consciousness of your mind
need not be modified, for it is dharmakāya.
Whatever arises are the experiences of discursive thought.
Understand them to be like water and waves.

However meticulous your conduct,
please don't be false and hypocritical.
It's crucial to be in harmony with Dharma.
Perverse "great meditators:" *phaṭ*—be gone!

For continuous meditation day and night,
it's most important to lack action or work.
Effortlessly maintain that with mindfulness.
If you are left in the dark: *te le le*—despair!

The fruition, this buddha of your own mind,
is fundamental, not from baseless delusion.
Do not fall into the abyss of hopes and fears.
You need assurance of knowing this decisively.

All that appears is the dharmakāya.
Sure, it's fine not to make biased distinctions,
but artificial pure view undermines autonomy.
Stick to your guru's lineage.[31]

31. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:536–37. Also in Tā ra nā tha ca. 1990, 1:866–68.

One time when Tāranātha was staying at Yoru in Tsang, he saw that many things were changing. Then, as if taking his own advice one step further from the above song, to recognize one's own mind as the guru, he realized that even all appearances arise as teachers to introduce the nature of mind. The three-step progression in the later verses adds to the sense of the gradual process of realization. It also provides us yet another play with enumeration.

oṃ svasti
Here in Yoru where auspiciousness spreads
at the time of flowers in the Ox Year,
I, a yogin free from bias,
fondly recall my kind lord guru.

Indeed, I have previously wandered until now
in cyclic existence from beginningless time.
Yet, here in this cycle without bottom or boundary,
the precious one sends my mind to buddhahood.

Although the six kinds of migrators are kind parents,
not one has helped me out of cyclic existence;
no guide to prepare me for everlasting [happiness].
For such essential plans I ask my mentor.

This physical composite of flesh and blood
will destruct; we know not at all when.
Those who lack confidence in the afterlife,
please focus inward with this knowledge.

Fearing my death, I sought out a guru.
I fully applied all practices, as rock breaks bone.
Since then, I know I'll be perfectly fine when I die.
Don't you need a provision for such a carefree state?

First, these ever changing four seasons;
second, these pictures of rising and falling prosperity;
third, these grave changes in the land and country:
these are the same teacher showing impermanence of the conditioned.

First, this farming that never ends;
second, these mean, ungrateful responses to care;
third, the salt water that doesn't quench when drunk:
these are the same teacher who shows us futility in action.

First, this seething bustle of the village;
second, this busy-bee activity of insignificant toil;
third, these wispy white clouds that flex and roil:
these are the same introduction showing aimless samsara.

First, this rainbow of formless appearance;
second, this clear echo without locality,
third, this unreal dream that produces joy or pain:
these are the same teacher who shows appearance as mind.

First, the magical machinations of outer appearances;
second, the doors of perception of inner mental awareness;
third, the emptiness of basic space without identity:
these are the same inseparability of pouring water into water.

When a little meditation experience is born,
any and all appearances demonstrate this.
Any acts of the three doors serve to enhance it.
When you think about this meaning—*a la la*!

Now then, whatever little is left of this life
will be spent in accomplishing the practice,
keeping to remote mountain retreats,
and integrating whatever arises on the path.

Surely my benevolent, precious guru
granted inconceivable blessings in the past.
Now again please grant your blessings;
Dharma Lord, I have no other refuge.[32]

32. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:537–38. Also in Tā ra nā tha ca. 1990, 1:976–38.

Jamgön Kongtrul's Colophon for *An Ocean of Songs Meaningful to Hear*

The precious Kagyü tradition considers singing vajra songs extremely important and the custom has spread widely. However, the long tradition of the Shangpa Kagyü has not spread much in this context, so even texts containing samples of the songs of that lineage of adepts have become like daytime stars. I have gathered these mainly from the biographies and similar sources, and supplemented them from the [songs of] the later lineage wherever appropriate. Whatever sublime quintessence of the elixir of the profound teachings from this lineage was to be found is now contained in this golden receptacle of former virtue. Karma Ngawang Yönten Gyatso Lodrö Tayepai De compiled this at the secluded retreat of Devīkoṭi at Tsadra Rinchen Drak. May this become the cause for the immaculate long tradition of the glorious Shangpa Kagyu to spread and flourish in all directions and times. Let virtue prevail.[33]

Contemporary Aspiration

To properly conclude this brief foray into songs of the Shangpa lineage, the following brings us up to the very recent past with a composition by Khyabjé Kalu Rinpoché, Karma Rangjung Kunkhyab (1905–1989), who was considered the Shangpa lineage-holder. Though not identified as a song, the following *Eight Thoughts of a Great Being* is perhaps the most common kind of verse, that of an aspiration prayer. In its title, Rinpoché uses irony in connecting "great being" (*skyes bu chen po*) with "thought" (*rnam rtog*). This term, often rendered as "discursive thought" or "conceptuality," is decidedly not the right word for the intentionality (*dgongs pa*) associated with the awakened mind of a great being. In using it here, however, the idea of a great being shifts to mean someone with an altruistic intention, even if they are still in the throes of conceptual thought. This makes it practical and plausible, here on Earth.

Eight Thoughts of a Great Being, an Aspiration Prayer

By the truth of the compassion of the sublime refuges,
and the power of this virtuous root and pure noble thought,
may whatever suffering felt by migrators throughout space
be dispelled by my own effort alone.

33. 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas 1999, 12:558.

May the hopes and desires of beings be fulfilled
by worldly and transcendent virtue and goodness.

May my body, flesh, blood, skin, and so on
benefit any sentient being appropriately.

May I absorb the suffering of all mother migrators,
and they all attain my happiness and virtue.

As long as the world remains, for that long in my being
may a thought of harming another not arise for an instant.

In the benefit of beings may I not waver for an instant
with despair, fatigue, and so on, but exert myself diligently.

May all beings beset by poverty, hunger, and thirst
effortlessly find whatever resources they desire.

May I take upon myself the great burdens of unbearable suffering
of hell beings and others so they can be free of them.

Karma Rangjung Kunkhyab's aspiration.

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Tsultrim Jyamtso

Dondrup Gyal

Translated by Lowell Cook

Tserang Namjyal. Jyumdre Namjyal. Tsultrim Jyamtso. Geshe Lharampa…

Ah yes, even with these many different names, they ultimately referred to him and him alone. These names were like tape recorders, recording all the events from the life of Geshe Tsultrim Jyamtso in perfect detail. And just like mirrors, these names reflected the tales of Geshe Tsultrim Jyamtso's joys and sorrows in images crisp and clear.

Ah-tsi, hidden behind these names were so many tears and so much laughter. Buried inside them was plenty of gloom and disgust, but also serenity and cheer. If you opened your mind a bit and retraced the cycles of day and night, months and years; the seasonal changes between summer and winter, spring and fall; and the ebb and flow of the moon waxing and waning, there's no way you could miss his unmistakable footprint with his trials and tribulations deeply imprinted on the path of the Lord of Death.

To be sure, this darling child seated in front of two loving parents was Tserang Namjyal. He was the golden yolk in their egg, the heart in their chests, and the pupil in their eyes. Tserang Namjyal's parents were honest folks with deep faith in the Three Jewels and great reverence for the law of karma. It was karma on their tongues when they opened their mouths and karma in their hearts when they closed their eyes.

During his childhood, Tserang Namjyal's mind was a fertile field where his parents spread the rich manure of karma, planted the seeds of karma, yoked the work animals of karma, tilled it with the plows of karma, and irrigated it with the waters of karma until the green sprouts of karma eventually started to grow.

"The law of karma, eh? Well, that'd be obeying your parents, not telling lies, not stealing, not wishing harm on others, and not fighting with the other kids. Do these things and, well, that's the law of karma."

That was the answer Tserang Namjyal's father gave him once when he asked what karma was.

From that day on, Tserang Namjyal obeyed his parents and didn't fight with the other children. He did his best to follow the laws of karma that his father had taught him.

One day, he went to his father and said, "Now I can follow all the laws of karma that you taught me. So how about you call me Jyumdre Namjyal? Jyumdre means the 'law of karma' after all."

His father gave him a peck on the cheek. His son was so good at saying the darndest things. Beaming, he nodded his head a few times, signaling that yes, they could call him that.

"Well then, we'll have to change your names too. Apa will be called Jyumdre Jyap and Ama will be called Jyumdre Jyit. How about it, Apa?"

Both parents burst out laughing. "This little boy of only ten sure does have some wit about him," they thought to themselves.

Their eyes were full of love and moist with tears as they told him, "Sure, sure. That sounds great." From then on, his father jokingly called his mother Jyumdre Jyit and his mother called his father Jyumdre Jyap. Their household was a family true to the law of karma in both name and meaning.

During the fall one year, Jyumdre Namjyal and some other children went to play on a grassy knoll near the edge of the village where a variety of plants and shrubs, willow and sallows, grew. The children rifled through a few bird's nests and came back with some seven or eight eggs. The moment Jyumdre Namjyal's mother caught sight of them, her face grew grim.

"What a nasty thing to do, you cold-hearted little devils," she scolded them. "What do you think you're doing rifling through birds' nests? Hurry up now and put those eggs back!"

The other children ignored her and ran back to their homes with eggs in hand. Jyumdre Namjyal however saw how angry his mother was and dashed back to the knoll where he returned his two eggs to their nest.

When he got home, his mother said, "Oh mercy, how upset would that momma bird have been if you'd taken those eggs from her nest. Don't you ever do anything so wicked again."

After listening to his mother, Jyumdre Namjyal could see that from all she'd told him, he'd clearly made a big mistake and broken the law of karma. Skipping lunch, he took a handful of barley grains and scattered it near the bird's nest.

Ema! What an upstanding and pure-hearted little boy Jyumdre Namjyal was. Yet, just as the sprouts of karma and flowers of compassion were beginning to grow in his heart, a cruel hailstorm at odds with the law of karma came pelting down unexpectedly. In a single instant, the flowers blooming in the depths of Jyumdre Namjyal's heart would be annihilated. What's more, their family which was true to karma in both name and meaning would be torn apart.

Having scattered the handful of barley near the bird's nest that day, Jyumdre Namjyal hid a little ways away and waited for the momma bird to return. He waited and waited and waited the whole afternoon until the momma bird finally showed up and nibbled at the grain. Only after

seeing the momma bird did he come bouncing back home. The moment he arrived at the gate to his house though, he heard the voice of a stranger. *Ah-tsi*, it was Chief Harelip.

Chief Harelip was the head of their community which included over ten villages. He was tall in stature and on the heavy side. His face was dark and he had a split lip running from his upper to his lower lip, and everyone called him Chief Harelip behind his back. Chief Harelip bore a strong resemblance to King Drachen from the opera *Nangsa Wobum*. The opera describes him as follows: "He had a temper hotter than fire and was pushier than a river's current. He was stingier than a horse's hair and his tongue was fierier than Indian chilis. He was as wobbly as a round pea, though his calculations were as fine as flour." Just the sight of Chief Harelip made Jyumdre Namjyal's skin crawl and his bones ache.

"The law of karma? Hell, I've got so much wealth that karma practically works for me! Where would karma be without me? Heh heh. But I don't have the time to be talking about karma. Get over here and hop on top of me."

"Please, dear mister Chief. Don't do this. I'll gladly bow down at your feet instead. Surely you don't mean to let all the other young girls out there get away when they're as fresh as flowers and do this to the likes of me, a married woman with a child? Please mister Chief, I'm begging you."

"Heh heh, no need to bow down now. You might be a mother with a child, but don't you know you're the moon shining amidst the stars and the queen lotus among the other flowers? And I'm a chief who only says things once. So get on with it! Hurry up and undo your sash. What's that? You won't? Well, then you leave me with no other choice."

As Chief Harelip pressed Jyumdre Namjyal's mother down on to the ground, Jyumdre Namjyal felt he couldn't keep watching as his mother was being harassed like this. He scurried up to the roof and aimed a rock the size of his fist at Chief Harelip. He let the rock fly. The stone was like an arrow propelled by the law of karma as it struck Chief Harelip square at the base of his ear. A nasty cry rang out from Chief Harelip's mouth and he collapsed to the ground.

"Oh no, now I've done it! What should I do? What should I do?" Jyumdre Namjyal's mind was a torrential hail storm and his heart a rolling landslide. His lungs were gasping for air like little bleating lambs and his insides felt like they'd been struck by lightning. He stood there frozen for a spell.

Not sure what had happened, his mother also stood there speechless for a while. Her face had turned paler than white ash, and yet darker than raw liver. Seeing the blood gushing out from the base of Chief Harelip's ear and the rock smeared with blood, she hurried to tear off a piece of her sash and bandage Chief Harelip's wound.

"I've got no other option now but to run far, far away. But where can I go?" As Jyumdre Namjyal thought over his predicament, he started to panic.

"Oh, that's right! Uncle Tsultrim's at Shedrup Monastery. I'll go there. I'll tell him everything that's happened and we can try to figure something out. But I've never been beyond our mountain

town. I don't even know what direction Shedrup Monastery is in. Whatever, a two-pointed mind won't get me anywhere. I have to go and find Uncle Tsultrim. Even if it kills me."

Without any provisions for the road, Jyumdre Namjyal started out by crossing the small knoll near the edge of the village. He hid there for a while before climbing down to the bottom of the valley and crossing through a forest. Just as the sun was setting, he arrived at the mouth of the valley. He spotted a house with a stone wall ahead on the left-hand side of the valley. But with no smoke coming out of the chimney, there was no way to tell if anyone was home. Either way, night was soon approaching and Jyumdre Namjyal was starving, so he ran over in hopes of finding a place to spend the night. As luck would have it, he showed up just as the family was having dinner. They invited Jyumdre Namjyal to eat with them and he slurped down more than two helpings of hot noodle soup. It turned out that they worked as traders. There was only a husband and wife and they took to Jyumdre Namjyal with great affection. They asked him lots of questions about where he was going and what he was up to. Jyumdre Namjyal didn't want to lie, but he'd be in grave danger if he told the truth, so Jyumdre Namjyal told the first lie in his life.

"I'm from Sertang. My mother is my only family. My father went to Central Tibet on business many years ago, but still hasn't come back. There's no news as to whether he's dead or alive. And now my mother's fallen ill and is bedridden. So, I'm on my way to call on an uncle who's a monk at Shedrup Monastery."

The married couple felt a pained tenderness toward the boy. "Oh mercy on you, poor little boy!" they exclaimed as they took care of him with hearts full of love and kindness. Fortunately, it happened that two pilgrims were going to Shedrup Monastery the following day. The married couple gave Jyumdre Namjyal some provisions for the road and sent him off with the two pilgrims, instructing them to look after the boy.

After three days of traveling alongside the two pilgrims, Tserang Namjyal finally reached Shedrup Monastery. With their help, he was able to track down his Uncle Tsultrim. When he told his uncle everything that had happened, Uncle Tsultrim just shook his head. With gloom in his heart, Uncle Tsultrim remarked on how utterly senseless this samsaric world was.

"There's no other option now, my nephew. You were always a clever young boy. You'll be ordained as a monk here and practice the Holy Dharma. You might even do the Buddhist teachings some good."

Like that, Tserang Namjyal became a monk as his uncle had instructed and received the ordination name of Tsultrim Jyamtso, meaning "Ocean of Discipline." The days and nights flew by as Tsultrim Jyamtso threw himself into his reading, writing, and other studies. One day, his uncle said, "My nephew, you no longer have anything to be attached to. Your mother died and your father fled far away after killing Chief Harelip. So focus on your practice of the Holy Dharma and see if you can't find your way to liberation."

Basically, what had happened the night after Tserang Namjyal ran away was that Chief Harelip

regained consciousness and stabbed his mother to death. His father had arrived home at that exact moment to see his wife being murdered and flew into a violent rage. Unable to control his anger, he ended up driving a hatchet into Chief Harelip's skull, sending him on to his next rebirth. After burying his wife, he then fled to another region.

From the day he heard the news of these inauspicious events, Tsultrim Jyamtso suffered so much sorrow that he lost all appetite during the day and couldn't sleep at night. And who could blame him? What ten-year-old boy doesn't miss his parents? Though the law of karma probably did exist, it didn't seem to apply to Tserang Namjyal or his parents. Chief Harelip's voice echoed in his ears. *The law of karma? Hell, I've got so much wealth that karma practically works for me! Where would karma be without me?*

He thought back to everything that had happened that day. The way he'd brought the law down on Chief Harelip with that stone played out vividly in his mind's eye. All that must be the law of karma, he thought.

At that moment, his uncle walked in and tried to console him. "The law of karma does exist. Not only does it exist, but we're even witnessing it right now. The misfortune that's befallen your parents in this life comes from their negative actions in past lives. Bad results come from bad causes, and good results come from good causes. Here, let me give you an example. If you plant barley, you won't get wheat. And if you plant peas, you won't get mustard, right? It's just like that. You need to believe in karma and have faith in the Three Jewels. The only thing of any meaning in this life is the Holy Dharma. So muster up your courage and put the Dharma into practice!"

With his uncle's guidance, the dying embers of karma in Tsultrim Jyamtso's heart had been rekindled. He vowed to forsake all negative actions and engage only in wholesome deeds with the aim of helping his parents purify their negative karma and increasing his own stores of virtue as well. Like a man starving for food and dying for water, Tsultrim Jyamtso dove into his studies of the Buddhist scriptures. He passed his days and nights solely by reading texts and refining his understanding of them. After some time, there wasn't a single monk who could rival his diligence and intellect. His reputation roared like thunder throughout all of Shedrup Monastery.

But Tsultrim Jyamtso started to miss his parents again. The face of his mother with all her feminine beauty never faded from his mind. It was as if his mother's face were that of his guru, whose form he was supposed to be visualizing. The words of his honest and honorable father never stopped echoing in his ears, even for the amount of time it takes to boil tea. It felt like his father's words were the prayers he should've been memorizing.

"Oh, kind and loving Ama, your negative actions from past lives caused your beautiful face and attractive form to become your enemy in this life and led you to die at Chief Harelip's blade. I'll be dedicating prayers to you all day and night to help you purify your negativities. Even so, you've probably already been reborn amongst the buddhas in the Akanishta or Abhirati pure lands where you're listening to the holy teachings right now. If you could only see how your son has entered the

gates of Dharma and is engaged in virtuous deeds, there's no doubt you'd feel that having a child was worth it. I'm sure you'd be proud of me.

"Oh, dear Apa, where might you be now? Every time I think about your dazzling white smile and your guidance in the laws of karma, I'm overcome with a mixture of joy and sadness. I'm swept up in a flurry of happiness and sorrow. You might've had to kill Chief Harelip and flee far away to avenge Ama's death, but in doing so you've accrued enormous sin. With that, there'll be no happiness in store for you in your future lives. I'm chanting confession prayers on your behalf to purify your negative deeds. Apa, oh Apa. You might've saved your neck for the time being by escaping to the ends of the earth. But do you really think there'll be any road out of town or any hole to hide in when the Lord of Death and his demonic mercenaries come for you?"

Image upon image washed over Tsultrim Jyamtso. He shed tears of compassion that soaked his robes.

"What happened to you?" his uncle asked. "Why're you crying?"

"Oh, it's nothing. Just missing my parents…"

"Look, nephew, you don't have the time to keep thinking about them. In this degenerate age, conflict and turmoil are never-ending stories. They even say that in the Chinese lands there are two opposing parties doing nothing but trying to massacre each other. So you'll be going to Central Tibet to advance your studies. I've already prepared the provisions for your journey. You head out tomorrow."

At dawn the next day, Tsultrim Jyamtso joined a group of traders and embarked on the road to the holy land of Central Tibet. What should've taken them a year took them months, and what should've taken them months took them days. They traveled during the night when others would've only traveled during the day and, eventually, they arrived in Lhasa. Tsultrim Jyamtso enrolled in the Gomang Monastic College at Drepung Monastery where he applied himself in his studies with the perseverance of a roaring river. Meanwhile, five whole years went by.

In the fall of 1949, Tsultrim Jyamtso received a letter from Uncle Tsultrim. The letter contained news of the Liberation of their homeland and details about how wonderful the Communist Party's policies on religion and ethnic minorities were. At the end of the letter, his uncle stressed how it would be best for him to return home as soon as possible. With his mother dead and his father at the ends of the earth, his uncle was the only kind and caring relative he had left in this world. If there was anyone he was going to listen to, it was his uncle. Be that as it may, Tsultrim Jyamtso had made up his mind to take his Geshe Lharampa exam the following year. He wrote back to his uncle explaining his situation and reasoned that he'd return home as soon as he received his Geshe Lharampa degree.

In the middle of spring, 1950, Tsultrim Jyamtso had turned thirty and had taken up the great responsibility of transmitting the teachings of the Buddha. His reputation of being a Geshe Lharampa preceded him. He felt called by his hometown and uncle and departed the holy land

of Lhasa on horseback, headed for Amdo. On the way back, he offered many faithful men and women great feasts of Dharma teachings. That summer, he eventually arrived at the great monastic center of Shedrup Monastery on the auspicious full moon day in June.

Witnessing how the Party's policies on ethnic equality and religious freedom were being implemented, Tsultrim Jyamtso took a great liking to the Communist Party and its magnificent leader Mao Zedong.

"The Communist Party oppresses tyrants but is also like parents who care for the downtrodden. This was a Party that respected the law of karma!" Tsultrim Jyamtso thought to himself.

He was so overcome with joy and happiness that tears welled in his eyes and his hair stood on end. These feelings inspired him to compose a long poem called *Melodies of Praise Amidst Pure Clouds*. In that poem, he used flowery words to pay tribute to Mao Zedong as the emanation of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, and to the Party as the ambassador of the law of karma. Soon just about everyone—both men and women, lay and ordained—had learned that poem by heart and chanted it as if it were a Buddhist prayer.

Amidst much fanfare, the Working People's Secondary School was established in his local area and the People's Government invited Tsultrim Jyamtso to be one of its teachers. Not only did they award him the title of Patriotic Scholar, but they also appointed him to be a member of the Provincial Political Consultative Conference and vice-principal of the secondary school. From then on, Tsultrim Jyamtso did away with the trappings of being an ordained monk. He instead pursued the activities of the Revolution as he shouldered the glorious responsibility of training the next generation of revolutionaries.

For Tsultrim Jyamtso, the communist system and the pure land of Sukhavati ultimately came down to the same thing, aside from some minor differences in rhetoric. Not only did he continue to have faith in Buddhism, but he also found faith in Marxism. That newfound faith led him to apply to join the Chinese Communist Party. His request form read:

> *With the aim of liberating the impoverished from the shackles of oppression and exploitation and with the intention of guiding all mother sentient beings on the path to liberation, I adamantly request to join the Chinese Communist Party*.

This application statement is certainly worth a few laughs. Yet, there's no doubt that those were the heartfelt words of a genuinely religious man. Even though Tsultrim Jyamtso's wish to join the Party never amounted to anything, his belief in the Party never wavered in the slightest at any time or in any situation.

"Any work to benefit the People and the different ethnicities is the highest of virtuous acts," Tsultrim Jyamtso told himself. "I'll forsake any personal gain, fame, or power and instead utilize

my body, speech, and mind for the advancement of future generations. That's not only the Party's orders, but it's also the wish of the People. There's no way I'll let the Party and the People down."

Nevertheless, the path that lay before him was filled with hardship after hardship. To make meaningful steps forward on that path was like sailing a boat on the ocean. Occasionally the winds were calm and the waves placid, but other times there were violent swells that could turn heaven and earth upside down. There were even times when Tsultrim Jyamtso found himself on the verge of death.

In the winter of 1957, Tsultrim Jyamtso received a letter. It was sent by the abbot of Drepung Monastery outside of Lhasa. The main thrust of the letter concerned a few local aristocrats who had recently taken a disliking to the Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army. They were revolting and staging many uprisings. The abbot wanted a clear answer as to whether or not that was also the case in Amdo. Tsultrim Jyamtso wrote the following response:

> Replete with the ten powers, you are the treasury of omniscience.
> The ways in which your physical emanations manifest know no limits.
> The meritorious virtues of your wholesome deeds simply defy counting.
> This letter I address to you, you who are poised on the seat of abbacy.
>
> Your letter was like a petal from the blue lotus flower
> And your words the laughter of a hundred dazzling smiles.
> The honey bee of your faithful heart carried cupped in its hands
> The glory of springtime to the delight of my ever-humble ears.
>
> I am but a lowly mendicant in the snowy land of Tibet
> Who folds my hands in prayer before Buddha Shakyamuni.
> Yet I stretch out the proverbial leaf that is my tongue
> And humbly offer these words with a heart of pure intent.
>
> Mao Zedong, a name that blazes with renown and reputation,
> Is the reincarnated emanation of the bodhisattva of wisdom.
> I praise him, this great god who watches over the world,
> For bringing us the everlasting glory of goodness and well-being.
>
> Never turning a blind eye to the karmic law of cause and effect,
> The splendor of the Party's speech rings with the sixty divine melodies.
> The songs of the Communist Party with their harmonies of peace
> Dispel every last trace of sorrow within us weary beings.

The summertime thunder of the policies on religious freedom
Has roared throughout the immortal sky in the Land of Snows.
Those who spit wrong views with delusion and deception
Are sure to be vanquished by the thunderbolts of karma.

The shackles of exploitation ensnaring our bodies and minds
Are courageously shattered by the People's Liberation Army.
Any attempt to press thorns into their rocky mountain of victory
Will only serve to bring about one's own defeat.

Since they are polluted by afflictions and the five poisons,
There's no end nor control to the words of those tricky demons.
Those who shed blood in the milky ocean of the harmonious friendship
Between the Chinese and the Tibetans are but a cause for pity.

Consider the sage advice of Sakya Pandita when he said,
"Foxes ought to compete with other foxes."
How ought you, the king of beasts, the lion himself,
Stand beside those aristocrats and their greed for wealth?

I have now done away with any signs of being ordained
And aim to help develop Communism's beneficial affairs
By taking up a position of guiding and leading the neophytes.
It is toward these wholly virtuous causes that I exert my efforts.

You yourself lack no knowledge as to what is right and what is wrong,
Nor do you tire of properly upholding our religious and political traditions.
It is thus that I humbly encourage you to lead by sublime example
As you work solely for the benefit of the teachings and other beings.

—Composed on an auspicious date

That letter had truly come from the bottom of Tsultrim Jyamtso's heart. And yet, it was this same letter that eventually led him to be denounced as a counter-revolutionary ringleader in 1958 and thrown into prison with a seventeen-year sentence. During his time in prison, Tsultrim Jyamtso often recited a prayer that went like this:

O Three Jewels, our unfailing source of refuge,
And the Communist Party, the upholder of the law of karma,
Please continue to watch over us with compassion
As we follow your Dharma in this age of degeneration!

In both times of pain and joy, Tsultrim Jyamtso's late mother would dawn in his mind with a brilliant presence and his father, who might still be alive at the ends of the earth, would appear vividly in his mind's eye. Even though he still missed his parents, he no longer suffered or felt the same sorrow as before.

Tsultrim Jyamtso might have been undergoing all that pain and hardship on behalf of his parents, but who was there to help share his pain and hardship? His uncle had also been sentenced to prison where he died and passed on to the pure land. Now Tsultrim Jyamtso no longer had a single kindred spirit left in this world. He fit the saying, "A lonesome man with a horse all alone: traveling alone and fleeing on his own when the bandits come." And yet, during that period of his life, there was one person who Tsultrim Jyamtso couldn't help but think of. Who was that? Well, that person might not have had much in the way of womanly qualities, but from the glow in her eyes, the sound of her voice, and the look on her face, it was clear that she was indeed a woman.

She was ten years Tsultrim Jyamtso's junior and used to be a nun. In her twenties, she gave up nunhood for lay life and became one of Uncle Tsultrim's most faithful patrons. Whenever she brought meat, butter, or sweet cheese to offer to Uncle Tsultrim, she'd go out of her way to find something to say to Tsultrim Jyamtso. Even if she didn't have anything to say, an affectionate glow in her eyes would always find its way to him.

Once Tsultrim Jyamtso had discarded the trappings of being a monk and was working as a teacher, she was drawn to him like a bee after honey and used a number of ways to show her affection for him. Waves of yearning churned in the sea of Tsultrim Jyamtso's heart, but now he was a criminal in prison, a bird locked in a cage, and there was no point in entertaining such thoughts. Be that as it may, the bubbling brook that was his consciousness continued to flow in her direction, while the honey bee of his soul continued to buzz its wings around her.

"If one day the entire world became monks, who'd work the fields? Who'd be left to herd the yaks and tend the sheep? Monks would have a hard time getting by without any patrons. And more importantly, who'd continue the human race? Without anyone to do so, there wouldn't be any wombs for the great buddhas and bodhisattva to take rebirth in. How could there be any reincarnated masters or tulkus? And if the human race came to an end, there'd be no one to learn the Holy Dharma and nowhere for it to spread. Wouldn't the Holy Dharma just die out then? *Ah-tsi*, how come I didn't think of any of this before?"

As he mulled these thoughts over, Tsultrim Jyamtso's heart and mind found themselves in conflict with each other. His worldview had been shaken.

Around that same time, Tsultrim Jyamtso was suddenly released from prison. Had seventeen whole years gone by? He did some math on his fingers and realized that only three years had passed. Tsultrim Jyamtso had no idea why they'd put him in prison in the first place, and now again, he didn't have the slightest clue why he was being released. It must've been the blessings of the Three Jewels and the workings of karma, he thought. Either way, he was overjoyed. But, where would he go now? His mother was long dead, his father could be anywhere, and his uncle had passed away. So where was there to go?

Tsultrim Jyamtso thought back to her once more. "That's right! I'll go and try to find her. Shedrup is where we grew up, so that's where I'll head."

And just like that, Tsultrim Jyamtso once again started off in the direction of Shedrup Monastery.

The story "Tsultrim Jyamtso" came to me through the oral accounts of other people. I never knew Tsultrim Jyamtso personally. I don't know what he looked like or what might have happened to him after he got out of prison and returned to Shedrup. Writing a story like this that simply repeats what others have told me based on uneducated guesses and limited perspectives has surely offended some readers while also creating some unwanted gossip about myself. Perhaps if I were new to writing these types of stories, I could manage to throw away my sense of self-respect and plug my ears. But ...but ... yeah. It's true what they say—it's a lot easier to climb up a ladder on a cliff face than down one. So let whatever happens happen. I'm left with no choice but to wear this mask and try to dance the dance. There *are* those who've made it all the way to Central Tibet on the backs of old donkeys. Cats can still gnaw on bones when there aren't any dogs around and you can still recognize daybreak from the donkeys when there aren't any roosters. Nevertheless, rafters without pillars will never stand firm, and sewing without a needle will never work. When you console yourself it's seventh heaven, but when you deceive yourself it's the pits. All that goes to say, I didn't have a way to write an ending for the story "Tsultrim Jyamtso."

Rap-rap-rap...!

All of a sudden, the sound of someone banging on the door to my room rang out.

"Who's there? Come on in," I said half-heartedly.

I turned around and stared at the door, but no one came in. Did they not hear me? Or did they not feel comfortable walking in on their own? I repeated myself louder, but still nothing.

Who was this going out of their way to give me a hard time? There are always a few folks who ignore their studies and slack in their duties. Whenever they get a second of free time, they go banging on this person's door or peeking into that person's window. These types pass their days doing nothing but talking empty talk. I can't stand listening to all the coarse topics they'll go on

about. They'll badmouth others, talking about so-and-so's nose or such-and-such's mouth. And then, to top it off, they'll brag about being an expert at this or an ace at that, trying to show off how special they are. Basically, they love to interrupt and sabotage whatever others happen to be doing.

But this was strange. I had a few of those types of friends and thought they might've been trying to give me a hard time today. Yet in those situations, they'd always come bursting through the door. So today was unusual.

Then came another knock at the door.

If it's one of those guys, I'll give them a goddamn piece of my mind, I told myself as I threw open the door in a rage.

Ah-tsi. A stranger stood in front of my door.

Who was this? I didn't know anyone like him. Even so, his face told me he was a Tibetan from the Amdo region. And judging by his looks, I could easily make out that he was an intellectual type. I looked him over and he too stood there studying me.

A pair of eyeglasses with black frames sat perched on his prominent nose. His two eyes looked tired from years of having to stare through them, and yet his eyes darted about incessantly as they twinkled with a shimmering glow. His hair was three or four inches long and parted on either side of his forehead in the shape of a crescent moon. There was a black mole the size of a pea on his left ear with two brownish hairs growing out of it. One long. One short.

"Who're you looking for?"

"You."

His long face, his raised nose, and his two beady eyes behind the glasses on his prominent nose broke out into a smile. He raised his eyebrows a few times and walked straight into my room.

The man was basically completely hunched over, but if you didn't look at him from behind, his body appeared as straight as an arrow. That had to be some sort of optical illusion.

"Whoa—would you look at all these books?!" he said after he'd looked up and down my room.

It seemed like he might've been admiring the random assortment of books he saw on my bookshelf, on my table, and strewn across my bed. Or maybe he was being sarcastic since my books were scattered every which way. It was hard to be sure.

"Mhmm. Not only do you have a lot of books, but they're all important works too, eh? Hahaha!"

There're plenty of people throughout life who feel that having something over others somehow makes them better. It doesn't matter if it's being slightly older, better looking, more eloquent, or just a little bit cleverer. Either way, they love to tear people down with spite and insults. Ignorant of their own position relative to heaven and earth, they see themselves as somehow being more senior or greater. They love to feed you their "advice" on how that was wrong or you were mistaken, how it's done this way or you should do it like this. Every time I meet someone like that, I get a nauseating feeling of hopelessness. And so, that was exactly how I felt at that moment as this

man, this stranger, gave me his sarcastic laugh. There was simply no way I could've seen him in a positive light.

He sat down on a chair and adjusted his glasses before saying, "Boy, it sure is hot out today. Would you mind pouring me a cup of water?"

His words nailed me to the stake. My face turned blistering hot all of a sudden. Why of course, to not even offer a guest a cup of tea, but to give them an attitude when they're in your home completely goes against all of our Tibetan customs. I stumbled over to my tea cabinet, but I didn't even have a single leaf of tea left. Now I had embarrassment to pile on top of my shame.

"I'm sorry," I said as I poured him a cup of boiled water. "But drink this first and I'll run out to buy some tea."

"No, no. No need to go out. You must've heard the saying 'Heroes drink their water hot,'" he said with a chuckle.

I had no choice but to go along with that. And to be honest, I'd emptied my wallet yesterday. The water was boiling hot, but he took several slurps as he blew on it. He must've really been thirsty. He finished the entire cup of water right before my eyes. I refilled his cup with more boiled water.

"I'm probably interrupting your work right now. But I didn't show up at your doorstep for no reason. Basically, we should've gotten to know each other a long time back, but we live too far away. I came to Beijing for a meeting and I'm due to take the train back tonight at eight-twenty. Here, this is my train ticket."

It seemed like he must've been some sort of government official. And let him be. Their work was the type that took them to meetings in big cities and in fancy hotels. I couldn't care less if he was leaving tonight or next year. What'd that have to do with me? He's probably quenched his thirst, so why didn't he just go ahead and leave right now?

"I read that piece of yours a few times. Your writing is superb. However—mhmm—it seems like you don't actually know Tsultrim Jyamtso. But of course, it would've been impossible for you to have ever met him."

Everyone enjoys a bit of praise from time to time. That's for sure. This man's kind words gave me a pleasant feeling as if flowers had bloomed inside me. I started to feel a certain sense of affinity and empathy toward this stranger. He told me he hadn't just randomly shown up and had even read my story a handful of times. He was also aware of the fact that I'd never met Tsultrim Jyamtso. I figured, in all likelihood, he had to be a friend of Tsultrim Jyamtso. Or at the very least, someone who knew him.

I couldn't hide my excitement. I was now sitting with someone who personally knew Tsultrim Jyamtso. I could now stop second-guessing myself on whether or not I should complete the story. I'd no longer have to sit alone in my room, chain-smoking, and trying to come up with something. I could have yogurt made not from whey but actual curds, as they say. And I could eat my prover-

bial tsampa with real butter rather than bone marrow. I no longer had to patch up old boots or keep my felt folded up, so to speak. All that is to say, I was beside myself with elation.

"Hey mister," I blurted out, unable to contain myself, "do you happen to know Tsultrim Jyamtso?"

He took another sip of water before putting his cup down on the table. He pushed his glasses back and shot me a smile that told me he did indeed know Tsultrim Jyamtso. Right then, I started treating him with more respect and speaking with honorific words. I even started taking a liking to those two long hairs sticking out of the mole on his ear.

"What great luck! To be honest, mister, I was thrilled to have written that story, but I ended up regretting sending it off to the publisher. And I'm sure I don't have to tell you why. The story 'Tsultrim Jyamtso' put me in a tough spot. Here, take a look. This is how much I wrote for the original manuscript, but I was never satisfied with it."

I handed him my manuscript of "Tsultrim Jyamtso" which had been written, erased, and re-written far too many times.

He thumbed through the thick manuscript and said with a smile, "The way I see it, you're the type of man who buys his troubles. There's no point in going through all this hassle. Tsultrim Jyamtso is the most ordinary of ordinary folks. His story isn't worth writing about. It won't do anyone any good to have it in writing. If I were you, I wouldn't write another word."

So that's why this guy was here. With those words, he'd taken this story I'd spent days hard at work on and dismissed it as rubbish. And not only that. He went so far as to degrade the one Tibetan scholar who held the position of greatest importance for me. All my emotions surged in my chest and I started fuming. As far as I could see, this man was good for nothing. His beady, mouse-like eyes and that jackal face of his struck me with revulsion. That mole on his donkey ear looked no different than a spider.

"Don't give me that nonsense. Sure, maybe the story I wrote isn't all that great. But I won't let you degrade Tsultrim Jyamtso with those nasty words coming out of your nasty mouth. Tsultrim Jyamtso was pure in heart to the Party and the People and held the law of karma in highest regard. He was an exceptional man who cared about others more than himself. It's true that I don't know his whole life's story in detail. But his heart was as pure as crystal and his character as strong as a vajra. His nature was as clean as a white khatak and he had capabilities as vast as the ocean. He was by no means an ordinary man. It's my duty to try to capture an image of this Tibetan scholar in writing. And it's my personal calling to show the next generation the bumpy and winding road that was his life. I plan to shed light on the footprints of joys and sorrows that dotted this Tibetan scholar's life's path. Make no doubt about that."

Had my words laid bare his blunders? Or had he regretted his mistaken remarks? I couldn't be sure. But either way, the color of this unwelcome visitor's face transformed all of a sudden. Tears blossomed in the corners of his eyes and his breathing grew faster and heavier. Even that mole on

his ear seemed bigger and blacker. I thought I'd managed to shut this bigmouthed stranger up for good. I felt proud of myself for having served him so many systematic and logical counterarguments, all in a single breath. My rebuttals really had flowed out like a river's current and rained down upon him like a hailstorm roaring with thunder and lightning.

"You're right, I don't doubt you. If you want to write this story, then go ahead. I'm Tsultrim Jyamtso."

"Huh?"

Now readers, can you believe this? The man sitting right in front of me was Tsultrim Jyamtso himself. If you were in my situation, you'd be just as shocked and moved as I was then. You'd share the same sense of excitement and joy. I regretted my appalling behavior but went on to ask Tsultrim Jyamtso a number of questions. It was one o'clock in the afternoon and Tsultrim Jyamtso was due to head back to his hometown at eight-twenty that evening. What a rare and precious thing time is! Fortunately, though, we still had around five or six hours to talk.

The story that follows is what Tsultrim Jyamtso told me himself. I've put his words into writing exactly as I heard them without inserting or deleting a single thing. You can believe what you read.

I.

In the words of Tsultrim Jyamtso:

Your story already covered my childhood days, my parents' history, my time in Lhasa, and my eventual imprisonment. So I won't repeat any of those things. But to be honest, I'm not the sort of man you made me out to be in your story. I did believe in the workings of karma from a young age and tried my best to follow the law of karma. But there was one area that… heh heh. It's hard to find true gold and even harder to find a perfect man. That's right, I'm referring to some of my regrets. Even great lamas and noble folks have things they keep hushed up or are ashamed of. So it goes without saying that I should too. You wrote that with my mother gone, my father out of sight, and my uncle dead in prison, I had no home to go to or hole to hide in. But you got that wrong. I had a few friends who were closer than brothers. And, on top of that, I still had plenty of my old students left. But the point is… hold on… you probably remember writing about that ex-nun who became our patron, right? Well, her name was Lhamo Drolma. You didn't even manage to give her a proper name beyond the pronoun "she." It looks to me like you might've been worried about harming my reputation and tried to keep that part of my story hidden.

Having secrets is what makes us human. The only difference is that some people know how to keep a secret and some don't. Either way, people are bound to find out about your secrets, no matter how well you keep them hidden. And if you continue to pretend that nobody knows about them when you become the talk of the town, then it's actually no longer a secret you're keeping from others, but rather a secret they're keeping from you! There's something to the saying, "Kings can't conceal the guilty and lamas can't save the sinners." So I'm going to lay my whole story out in front of you without hiding a single thing. After all, no wall can block all the wind and no container can hold all your secrets. So you do the same too when you write down my story. There's nothing you need to keep out of sight or try to conceal. That being said, write about whatever you think merits writing and skip the unnecessary bits. I'll leave that up to you. All right, so now let me tell you about that little secret of mine.

It all happened when I was still quite young. In those days, my uncle had lots of patrons. But the one that made the deepest impression on me was Lhamo Drolma. She had great faith in my uncle. She was a generous patron who made sure to save at least half of whatever she had for us, whether it was a tin of tea or a handful of tsampa. You got that wrong about her being ten years younger than me. That was someone else. But anyway, that's a story for another time.

Lhamo Drolma's hair wasn't terribly long on account of having been a nun. But the hair she did have was thick and black and glistened wonderfully. One day, I went to the banks of the Shedrup River to fetch some water. Even though I was a monk, my main duties in those days were to fetch water and prepare meals. Lhamo Drolma was also down by the river that day with her water pail. She was normally a playful sort of woman, but she wouldn't show so much as a smile around the younger monks. I was something of an exception though. I got to enjoy her smiles and even some other expressions that the other monks never saw. In those days, I didn't have any coarse thoughts on account of being a monk with vows of celibacy. Yet the root of desire is not so easily severed. And so, each time I'd catch a glance of that smile or her figure, my imagination would take over. I couldn't help reflecting on what a captivating young woman she was. If I didn't have vows to uphold and my uncle to fear, I'm sure I would've taken her as my life partner or, failing that, at least a lover for a night.

"Did you come to fetch some water?"

Lhamo Drolma and I'd usually only exchange small talk whenever we passed each other. So that day, when she asked me that question, what could I do but say "yes" and try to make do with that single syllable reply. My imagination swarmed with all sorts of images in that moment and my heart churned like waves on the ocean.

These things we call vows are like chains restraining the joy of life. They're a dungeon imprisoning youthful ambitions. What was I doing letting myself be suffocated by these chains as I wallowed away in that dungeon?

"O dear Lord Buddha, you sure did teach a lot of exquisite things. But none of them were quite

as spot-on as when you declared, 'Pledges are a source of suffering.' I follow in your footsteps in pledging to guard my monastic vows as carefully as I do my eyes and my life. But it's only now, as I gaze upon her smile and her figure, that I realize what it means for pledges to be a form of suffering. It's only now that I see how they contradict your teachings. What's the use of making us pledge to uphold vows on the one hand and, at the same time, telling us they're a form of suffering? I'm only in the middle of studying the Middle Way philosophy and I've yet to perfect my understanding of the Perfection of Wisdom. So how could I possibly even begin to comprehend the depth and profundity of your scriptures? It was *she*—she with her radiant glow, her slender figure, her round face, her sharp dark eyes, and her brilliant smile… *ah-tsi*. It was 'she,' she who had all that and more. It was she who managed to slip inside my heart."

There were a few times after that when we ran into each other. Each time without fail, the glow in her eyes was never the ordinary sort and also, without fail, my heart would throb inside my chest. Where did she get such allure? Where did she get that power to magnetize me? Had the intoxicated elephant of my mind not been tied down with the ropes of my monastic vows, there's no way my life would've turned out like this.

One morning, I was doing my chanting when she came by.

"Is your uncle home?"

My uncle was away acting as preceptor for a group of monks who'd requested full ordination. So it was only me in our monk cell. She held a cloth bag in her hand.

"Oh, here's a little bit of butter. You and your uncle can…"

"No," I interrupted her. "Look, you're always giving us your food and not saving anything for yourself. We can't accept this butter. Please, keep it for yourself."

She shot me an odd look. The unusual expression on her face made her look like a spoiled little girl pouting at her mother. What a kind-hearted woman she was. As her breasts heaved with her breath, buried inside was her beating heart, purer than white milk and sweeter than honey. Who was aware of that but me? My heart was pounding and my lungs heaved heavily. I genuinely felt as if my liver might've been turned upside down. My uncle and my vows were nowhere to be seen…

Ah-tsi, the sack of butter hit the floor. I felt a warm roughness and a cold tenderness. In my hand was the hand of another. But whose? Lhamo Drolma's head was hung low and her left cheek was growing red. But why? Oh no, had this damn hand of mine come into contact with non-virtue? Immediately I remembered the law of karma. Thoughts of my uncle and my vows swirled around in my head.

I saw her a few times after that either by the side of the road, in the monastery, or in the midst of crowds. But with that particular regret still inside me, I didn't dare talk to her. And it wasn't long after, that I went to Lhasa.

When I returned from Lhasa, my homeland had already been liberated. Since the Revolution had turned heaven and earth upside down, I ended up disrobing and becoming a teacher. I still had

the title of a Lharam Geshe in those days and a few volumes of scriptures stored away in my brain. Even so, being a teacher in the schools of the new society was no easy task. We only had seven teachers and fifty students in our school at the time. Nearly all the teachers lacked even the most basic teaching experience and we even had to make our own textbooks. There were two Chinese comrades among us seven teachers. One was Mr. Li, the principal, and the other was Mr. Chen, a math teacher. Neither of them really knew any Tibetan while the Tibetan teachers—Shyazang, Tenjam, Wangden, and myself—couldn't speak much Chinese either. The other Tibetan teacher, Tupten, was fluent in both Chinese and Tibetan and translated for all of us.

Mr. Li was a competent man. Even though I was given the title of assistant principal at that time, I wasn't able to help him with his work that much. My responsibilities included teaching two grades and writing textbooks for four grades on top of that. I was incredibly busy with work in those days, but I'd also never been happier. It was at the insistence of Mr. Li that I wrote the Party application statement you found so funny.

I never forgot about my late mother at that time and likewise never forgot about "her," the woman whom I missed dearly. Back then, I was a strapping young man in my thirties and didn't have my uncle to fear or vows to hold me back. So how could I have not been thinking about her? I'd head out in the morning sunlight and try to find her among the ladies fetching water at the banks of the Shedrup River. I'd go out at dusk to see if I couldn't catch a glimpse of her smile in the crowds at the Shedrup Market. Had she floated away into the sky? Had she dug herself underground? If she had flown away, there'd have to be a cliff where she'd come back to land. Or if she had gone under the earth, there'd at least have to be some hole left behind. Nevertheless, I didn't dare ask my uncle and wasn't comfortable bringing her up with anyone else. The pain I held in my heart during that period was known only to me.

"You think I don't know about your little secret? Don't beat yourself up now. She's already married with kids. And feeling down about that won't do you any good. Better you busy yourself with something new."

My uncle's words felt so cruel. Any hope of being her lover was now nothing but the horns of a rabbit, the fur on a turtle's shell, and the son of a barren woman. *Ah-tsi*, I'd let myself believe in something everlasting, even though I knew all too well how impermanent worldly things are. Who could've been dumber than me?

"My dear Lhamo Drolma, there's nothing left for me to do but to pray for the happiness of you and your family. O Three Jewels, have mercy and continue to gaze down upon her with eyes of compassion."

I learned a lot of new things about her from my uncle. She'd married a guy named Lushuk three years back and gave birth to a son the year after. Lushuk wasn't a bad guy, but he was the sort who lacked both the know-how and the interest to raise a family. The newlywed couple had constantly been at each other's throats for the past year because Lushuk had taken up with some sweet-talking

young woman. Lhamo Drolma's mother-in-law was a stern old lady who tried her best to blame the whole situation on her daughter-in-law. Lhamo Drolma had to endure her mother-in-law's temper and shouting all day and night. The moment I heard that news, I felt more pity than I could bear for Lhamo Drolma. Each time I thought of her, her face would appear distinctly before my eyes and her voice would echo clearly in my ears. Be that as it may, she was now a mother with children and a wife with a husband. Tormenting and torturing myself over her wouldn't accomplish anything. So instead, I promised myself that I'd work harder. I'd dedicate my entire being to the Party's mission of educating the ethnic minorities. I'd be the mentor to a new batch of scholars for the next generation of our Tibetan people.

And suddenly, one day I saw her. It was a day I'll never forget for the rest of my life. She was wearing a goatskin robe with colorful trim. Her previously slender and supple body now looked like a crooked old tree. Her piercing eyes and bright smile were nowhere to be seen. The sullen expressions covering her face spoke to me of the pain she held in her heart.

Did she not see me? Or did she just pretend not to see me? I couldn't be sure, but what I was sure of was that the "she" in my heart and the "she" whom I was looking at now were not the same person. Even so, the shape of her face was proof that she was indeed Lhamo Drolma. I figured I'd better chuck all those past events into the crate of history and bolt it with the lock of forgotten memories. She might've been the satin brocade around my heart, but now its pattern had faded. And what value is there in fox fur that's lost its sheen or in leopard skin with faded spots? From that day on, I forced myself to banish her from the castle of my heart.

The work at school presented plenty of challenges, but we overcame them and our labor produced some major results. Our bright and diligent students were growing up day by day and were advancing in their studies as they competed with each other to earn their place of respect. We teachers couldn't help but feel proud. We were especially excited when the Provincial Education Agency granted our school an award of recognition and selected us as one of the most progressive departments among all the educational institutions for ethnic minorities throughout the entire province. The second meeting of the Political Consultative Conference convened that year and I was appointed as a member. I saw and heard many new things in those meetings that I'd never encountered before and was able to expand my worldview in new ways. Once back at school, my determination was strengthened and my confidence boosted. I dedicated all my strength and energy exclusively to the Party's mission of educating the ethnic minorities and didn't let anything else cross my mind. Not that I would've had the time to think about other things.

In those days, something unbelievable happened. Unbelievably funny, that is. Hey there young man, won't you pour me another cup of water?

II.

I was so focused on Tsultrim Jyamtso's words that I'd completely forgotten to offer him more water.

What a riveting story this was! Tsultrim Jyamtso might've had rivers of suffering throughout his life, but he also had oceans of happiness. An air of sadness came over him when talking about Lhamo Drolma, but a smile took its place when he talked about his work. Not wanting to stop him, I quickly got up to pour him some water.

Tsultrim Jyamtso picked up where he left off:

> In those days, I had to teach Tibetan grammar and poetry to secondary school students, but I also had loads of administrative duties on top of that. I didn't think about Lhamo Drolma much anymore and, to be honest, I didn't have the time to. Now that she was a mother with children, a wife with a husband, and the lady of a house, all my worries had brought me nothing but heartache. It was in that way that I came to focus all my energy on the Party's mission to educate the ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, something unimaginable happened to me around that time.
>
> After I'd left Lhasa and came back to Shedrup, I'd gotten in the habit of going down to the Shedrup River each morning, no matter what season it was. There, I'd recite some of the main prayers I had stored away in my memory in the hopes that they wouldn't fall prey to the bandits of forgetfulness. I'd also try to memorize some new scientific facts that I'd never gotten the chance to learn before.
>
> One fall morning, I went down to the banks of the Shedrup River as was my habit. When I got back from my morning session that day, I spotted a glass bottle of milk on the windowsill outside my room. I figured it must've belonged to one of the neighbors on either side of me. When I got back home after my afternoon classes, the bottle of milk was still sitting on my windowsill. I checked with my neighbors, but neither of them said it was theirs. The next day, there was another bottle of milk. As each day went by, more and more bottles of milk appeared on my windowsill.
>
> It was strange. Who could've been sending me all this milk? And why were they leaving me milk bottles without any message? When that odd situation didn't stop after a day or two but went on for several days, I started feeling uneasy. Maybe it was my buddy Lozang trying to prank me. He was a real jokester. Otherwise, it might've just been a kind-hearted student bringing them to me without saying. Either way, if this was one of Lozang's practical jokes, then I only

stood to gain since I didn't have much in the way of milk money. If it was a student though, I planned on reimbursing them. I boiled up some of the milk and made a point of inviting Lozang over to drink it with me. Yet, he just repeated the same old jokes he always made and didn't do anything out of the ordinary. I'm going to get to the bottom of this tomorrow, I told myself.

The next day, oh boy, that was a day I'll never forget for the rest of my life. That was the morning of September 15th, 1958. I got out of bed early that morning, went outside, and hid behind a poplar tree facing my window. As if trying to help hide me, the full moon laid down to sleep behind the western mountains earlier than normal, taking with it all of its radiant glow. In the cloudless sky above, the stars and planets smiled down on me and laughed at my dumb efforts. Everything around me was draped in darkness. The golden spires of Shedrup Monastery were dimly visible as they stood exalted in the sky. Everyone else on earth was still in the heavenly realm of sleep. There was stillness and silence.

A chilly breeze slowly blew by, relieving me of my sleepiness for a moment. The poplar tree had lost most of its leaves and its empty branches swayed back and forth in the shadows. I could see the occasional dead leaf or two fall from the top of the tree down to the ground. The sound of my heartbeat and the tick of my wristwatch had aligned their rhythms to play a symphony my ears had never before heard. Time passed, minute by minute, as the wind grew colder and colder. My face stung and the tip of my nose felt like a frozen stone. The light of the stars began steadily fading as the old tree beside me started to moan, complaining about the wind's tortuous effect. On the eastern edge of the sky, the glow of dawn glimmered with a pale light. I could hear the crow of a rooster and dogs barking somewhere off in the distance. It was around that time that I went to the bathroom before coming back to stand at the same place behind the tree.

Daybreak had come. And to my amazement, a bottle of milk was sitting on my windowsill. *Ah-tsi-tsi*! All my efforts in braving the cold to stand guard for over two to three hours had come to nothing. Who was this magician? When I got up this morning to check the windowsill with my flashlight, there definitely weren't any milk bottles there. But now, after more than two or three hours, one was sitting right before my eyes. What else could this be but something supernatural? I was genuinely shocked.

I described these events to the other teachers and they too were astounded. "What's so amazing about that?" Lozang retorted. "What? Do you think the milk came from the gods or something? You're all what they call not having a single good thought in a hundred years. Even the Geshe here is dumbfounded. By

tomorrow, I'll have exposed this mystery for what it is. Who wants to bet on it?"

Wangden bet Lozang two liters of liquor. When Principal Li caught wind of all that, he gave me a stern talking to. I wasn't sure why, but it seemed like he'd stopped trusting me around that time. He hesitated to acknowledge me in passing and even stopped calling on me in both official and informal meetings. When he handed me back my application to join the Party, the application that I'd written with his help, I was taken aback.

I knew these inauspicious events could not be good omens, but there was no way I could've known what was happening to me. I had a hunch that my belief in Buddhism was making the principal suspicious of me and that he'd returned my application to join the Party due to a lack of qualifications. Faced with that, I worked harder to correct my worldview. I resolved to make better choices from then on.

The next morning, Lozang and I stood behind the same tree as yesterday and waited to get to the bottom of things.

"Geshe," Lozang said to me, "Do you know why you couldn't crack this mystery yesterday? No? Well, it's quite simple. Had you not gone to the bathroom you would've already figured it out. Oh, by the way, Geshe, they're saying there's unrest in Lhasa. Do you think it's true?"

"I don't know about any such thing. Lozang, you'd better not be stirring up controversy."

"Controversy? This isn't any controversy. When I went to the market yesterday, there were lots of folks discussing the matter. I asked my brother-in-law about it once I got home and he said it was in fact true. Alak Drakjung Rinpoche also went to a meeting and still hasn't returned. Some say he was thrown in prison."

Lozang's brother-in-law was the committee vice secretary for our county. I was in the middle of considering how the news Lozang was sharing with me must've been true when he suddenly called out, "Hey Geshe, look! Your milk fairy has arrived!"

I glanced over to where Lozang was pointing. A woman covered in a shawl and wearing a water pail on her back was making her way toward my room. She first came up next to my door and glanced behind her before taking a milk bottle out of the folds of her robe and placing it on my windowsill. She then dashed off toward the main gate of our school. Lozang wanted to stop her and got up to run, but I pulled him back and stopped him from going after her. I'm sure I don't have to tell you why. That was a shape I was used to staring at and a stride I'd seen countless times. I stood there wide-eyed as her silhouette disappeared through

the main gate.

"Who was that?" Lozang asked me with surprise.

I didn't give him an answer. Instead, I went over to the windowsill and took that bottle of milk to my room. I set some milk tea on the stove and boiled it quickly. Lozang had all sorts of questions for me, but I didn't give him a single answer.

"Yep, that just about says it all. Heh heh. You don't even have to tell me. I know. Basically, Geshe here used to have a..."

I cut Lozang off. But you can imagine what he was about to say.

I saw Principal Li only once that day. There was a strange look in his eyes. When we nodded to each other, the way he smiled looked completely artificial.

That evening, I went to my uncle's monk cell. I only went because he'd sent a monk to call on me. I had no other choice. My uncle's cell hadn't changed in the slightest. But as I reached his door, I saw a young woman sitting inside. The moment she saw me approaching, she rose quickly and her face turned red. Her name was Gangkar Tso. She was the woman you said was ten years my junior. She might not have been all that attractive, but the look in her eyes had a dazzling sharpness. The tone of her voice and the way she held her body also told you that she was a woman who was hard to read and skilled in manipulation. That was the sort of wife my uncle had found for me. At that, my uncle and I started arguing. Our disagreement remained unresolved until the day of my uncle's imprisonment. It wasn't long after that when I was accused of being a counter-revolutionary ring leader and sentenced to seventeen years in prison.

All right there, young man, I drank too much water. I'll just step outside. Where's the bathroom?

Hey there, readers, Tsultrim Jyamtso had to step outside and I've got no choice but to pause the story here. Once he returns, I'll let you listen to the end of his tale.

Editor's Note: Dondrup Gyal passed away before he could complete this story and we are therefore bereft of the good fortune to read any more of it.

Translator's Commentary

Acclaimed as the father of modern Tibetan literature, Dondrup Gyal (Don grub rgyal, 1953–1985) helped Tibetan literature to emerge from the ashes of several decades of cultural, religious, and linguistic oppression. Despite his tragic and untimely death, Dondrup Gyal was an extremely prolific writer whose collected works fill six volumes and include poetry, short stories, essays, translations, and other writings. While some scholars have highlighted the novelty in Dondrup Gyal's writings to argue that he sought to break with tradition, a closer reading of his works clearly demonstrates that Dondrup Gyal intentionally made use of numerous traditional themes and classic literary tropes, albeit in new and innovative ways.[1] In her article on Dondrup Gyal's reworking of the *Rāmāyana*, Nancy Lin clearly shows how Dondrup Gyal's writings on this epic demonstrate his efforts to uphold the classical Tibetan literary tradition while, at the same time, developing new indigenous Tibetan literary principles.[2]

The story *Tsultrim Jyamtso* is an excellent example of Dondrup Gyal's pioneering blend of the traditional and the modern. In this story, readers encounter oral literature such as proverbs and folk expressions alongside high literary *belles-lettres* like Tsultrim Jyamtso's poetic response to the Drepung abbot. Quotations from Tibetan operas, revolutionary communist jargon, Buddhist philosophical terminology, newly coined words, and Amdo dialect all sit comfortably beside one another. It is this rich, literary diversity that makes Dondrup Gyal's fiction such a joy to read (and to translate) and has installed his stories at the center of the canon of contemporary Tibetan literature.

Tsultrim Jyamtso is eponymously titled after its protagonist, Tsultrim Jyamtso, whose story begins in childhood under his lay name of Tserang Namjyal. Young Tserang Namjyal is so keen on his belief in karma that he asks his parents to rename him Jyumdre Namjyal after the word *rgyu 'bras* for "karmic cause and effect." Yet Jyumdre Namjyal's convictions in the workings of karma are shaken when he nearly kills Chief Harelip, a local leader, in order to prevent him from raping his mother. Dondrup Gyal's treatment of the otherwise taboo theme of rape in this and other stories is another pioneering aspect of his fiction and one that merits a more detailed study.

Another recurring motif in Dondrup Gyal's stories is the Buddhist idea of karma. Dondrup Gyal used fiction as a vehicle to explore karma's place in the suffering associated with the 1958 Amdo rebellion, the famine of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), and the senseless violence of Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) that he would have either witnessed or heard direct accounts

1. For more on traditional Tibetan literature's continued presence in modern Tibetan literature, please see: Lama Jabb (2015).
2. Lin 2008.

about.[3] In *Tsultrim Jyamtso* it is significant to note that once Jyumdre Namjyal runs away following that violent encounter and is forced to tell the first lie of his life, Dondrup Gyal refers to him less as Jyumdre Namjyal and reverts more to his earlier name, Tserang Namjyal. This change in name suggests a change in identity as well, signaling his doubts in the existence of karma. These misgivings are dispelled by his Uncle (also named Tsultrim), though, once he becomes a monk and receives the ordination name of Tsultrim Jyamtso. Indeed, it is Tsultrim Jyamtso's conviction in karma that leads him to be so captivated by Communism when he returns to his homeland of Amdo to find it "liberated."

The 1958 Amdo rebellion, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution are some of the major events that form the backdrop to many of Dondrup Gyal's stories. In voicing the collective trauma suffered by the Tibetan people, some of Dondrup Gyal's fiction belongs to the body of scar literature, a genre that began being written (mostly by Chinese authors) in the late 1970s to address the injustices of the Cultural Revolution. Scar literature is, first and foremost, a Chinese genre and, as such, does not necessarily map neatly onto Tibetan literature. Since *Tsultrim Jyamtso* focuses primarily on the 1958 Amdo rebellion and not the Cultural Revolution, it technically is not characterizable as scar literature. Nevertheless, *Tsultrim Jyamtso* provides a similar cultural catharsis around comparably traumatic events and, in this sense, may be understood as a form of Tibetan scar literature. Perhaps the limitations of the scar literature genre should be adapted when applying the designation to Tibetan literature.

In *Tsultrim Jyamtso*, Dondrup Gyal does not give explicit details of the horrors that occurred during the 1958 Amdo rebellion, instead simply noting that Tsultrim Jyamtso suffered greatly during his incarceration and that his uncle passed away in prison. The readers are left to fill in the blanks, an ability that Dondrup Gyal's Tibetan readership would possess all too well. Instead, Dondrup Gyal seeks to heal his people's collective suffering through comic relief. Readers are sure to be struck by the humorous absurdity of Tsultrim Jyamtso's seemingly contradictory faith in the tenets of Buddhism and belief in the avowedly atheist ideology of Communism. For Tsultrim Jyamtso however, there was not the slightest contradiction between these two systems that "ultimately came down to the same thing, aside for some minor differences in rhetoric." Indeed, Tsultrim Jyamtso's failed application letter to join the Chinese Communist Party is, as Tsultrim Jyamtso's biographer writes, "certainly worth a few laughs."

The inspiration for the character Tsultrim Jyamtso was likely taken from what Lauran Hartley has termed the monastic vanguard.[4] The monastic vanguard refers to monastically trained scholars who became patriotic supporters of the Communist Party early on. They also became

3. For more on the 1958 Amdo Rebellion and *Tsultrim Jyamtso's* place in the literature addressing that period, please see Robin (2020).
4. For more on the role of the monastic vanguard in the development of contemporary Tibetan literature, please see Hartley (2003).

some of the university professors who educated Dondrup Gyal's generation, the first generation of Tibetan students to attend Chinese university. The monastic vanguard included scholars like Geshe Sherab Gyatso (Dge bshes Shes rab rgya mtsho, 1884–1968), Sungrab Gyatso (Gsung rab rgya mtsho, 1896–1982), Tseten Zhapdrung (Tshe tan zhabs drung, 1910–1985), and Dungkar Lobsang Trinle (Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, 1927–1997), among others. Among the monastic vanguard, Samten Gyatso (Bsam gtan rgya mtsho, 1921–1979) seems the most likely to have inspired Dondrup Gyal's character Tsultrim Jyamtso. Indeed, the Tibetan poet Jangbu (Ljang bu, b. 1963) recounts how it was well known that Samten Gyatso was "the only Tibetan intellectual in Amdo for whom he [Dondrup Gyal] had a tremendous respect."[5]

We cannot be sure whether Dondrup Gyal would have continued to develop his character Tsultrim Jyamtso in the likeness of Samten Gyatso or the other monastic vanguard scholars, since the work was never completed due to the author's untimely demise. Dondrup Gyal had intended for *Tsultrim Jyamtso* to be a full-length novel when he started writing at the beginning of 1984. *Tsultrim Jyamtso* was, in fact, the last piece of fiction Dondrup Gyal would ever write.[6] The disappointment readers are sure to feel at not being able to continue the story of Tsultrim Jyamtso was also deeply felt by its Tibetan audience. So much so that two authors, Rangdra (Rang sgra)[7] and Dorje Rinchen of Jentsa (Gcan tsha Rdo rje rin chen)[8] have written their own continuations (*rtsom 'phro kha skong*) to Dondrup Gyal's *Tsultrim Jyamtso*.

This translation of Tsultrim Jyamtso is from *A Frostbitten Flower and Other Stories: The Collected Fiction of Dondrup Gyal* (forthcoming). In this translation, I prioritized rendering the stories in natural English rather than reflecting the Tibetan construction of the source text. At the same time, however, I sought to preserve certain idiomatic Tibetan expressions and the internal logic of the work. To achieve this I allowed myself a greater degree of poetic license, one that many translators of canonical Buddhist literature, like myself, find uncomfortable at first. Yet it was this newly found creativity that allowed me to bring the stories to life in English. To arrive closer to the heart of the story precisely by allowing some distance from the literalness of its source text is, for me, the very paradox of translation. With this approach, I hope to have allowed Dondrup Gyal's stories to come alive in English while also giving the reader a taste for the uniquely Tibetan flavor of the original, the *rtsam dri* so to speak. The reader, however, will have to be the judge of that.

All of the proper names in Tsultrim Jyamtso have been transliterated according to their Amdo-pronunciation in order to further root them and their stories in their respective environment. As Benno Weiner notes in his study on Chinese state- and nation-building efforts in Amdo, "In employing Central Tibetan orthography, scholars run the risk of further peripheralizing their

5. Dhondup T. Rekjong 2022.
6. Bde skyid 'tsho, Rdo sbis klu rgyal don grub (trans.) 2006, 71.
7. Rang sgra (Tshe rgyal) 1999.
8. Gcan tsha rdo rje rin chen's *Tsultrim Jyamtso* is currently unfinished. See Gangs zhun 2009, 419.

subjects while reinforcing a framework of a single Tibetan radiating outward from Lhasa."[9] Transliterating Tibetan names like *Tshe ring* as Tserang might initially seem odd to readers used to seeing it transcribed according to Central Tibetan dialects as Tsering. Nevertheless, just as one would expect José not to be Anglicized as Joseph when translating a Columbian novel, it does not make sense for Amdo names to be "Lhasafied" in a similar manner. This, I hope, has helped to locate the characters in their geographical, cultural, and linguistic environments.

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9. Weiner 2021.

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I am Who I am

Palmo

Translated by Lama Jabb

I am who I am
I am an inferior sex
And also a very foolish nomad woman
I have hoped against hope that the flowers of karma would naturally bloom
On the surface of the vast grassland of loyalty
When the brilliance of the flowers is painted on my toes
I am also a pure thing

I am who I am
I am a childbearing mother
And also a fainthearted Tibetan woman
I have bloomed facing the sunshine and have also frozen swimming in the bitter cold
When the beautiful waves of my youth surge
Fantasising about weaving the rainbow in the sky into my wedding dress
I am also a pearl

I am who I am
I am a bride
And also a servile maid
I have wished for the vibrant blossoming of the white lotus of karmic merit
In the little pond of my humble nature
When my life is labelled as the Little Mother
I am also a contract

I am who I am
I am a woman
And also a disgraced prostitute

I can be taken as a platter for pouring out the waste of lust at will
And can also be murdered unsheathing the sword of violence
When my body is sealed asserting that it possesses no excellence and noble path
I am also a commodity

I am who I am
I am a queen
And also a nurturing mother within whose gold vase womb blooms the young of the race
I dare to hold up the pillars and beams of altruism without letting them fall
And without losing the good ancient traditions of Tibet to the killing of the degenerate times
When my life is given rights and equality
I am also a country

I am who I am
I am a female lover
And also a fertile field for sowing the seeds of the lineage
If the karmic justice of dependent origination is not feigned but justly upheld
I bestow warmth without the season of love suffering any change
When the wheel of fused appearance and emptiness revolves esoterically
I am also wisdom

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན།
དཔལ་མོ།

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་སྐྱེ་དམན་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
གྲེན་རྒྱས་ཆེ་བའི་འཕོག་མོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
ངས་ཁྲལ་གཞུང་གི་སྒྲངས་ཐང་ཡངས་པོའི་ངོས་སུ
ལས་ཀྱི་མེ་ཏོག་རང་བྱོན་དུ་བཞད་པར་ཚུ་ཚུགས་བྱས་ཐྱོང
ངའི་ཤུང་སེན་ལ་མེ་ཏོག་གི་བཀྲག་མདངས་བྱུགས་དུས
ང་ནི་དྭངས་གཙང་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་སྐྱེས་མ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
སྐྱིང་སྟོབས་ཞན་པའི་བོད་མོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་རང་ཉི་འོད་ལ་སྐྱེགས་ཏེ་བཞད་སྐྱོང་ལ་གྲང་ངར་ལ་རྒྱལ་ཏེ་འཁྱག་ཀྱང་སྐྱོང
ནམ་མཁའི་འཇའ་ཚོན་བག་ཁོས་སུ་འཐག་པའི་སྟོང་སེམས་བཅངས་ཏེ
ངའི་ལང་ཚོ་ལ་མཇོས་སྤུག་གི་རླབས་ཟེང་འཕྱོ་དུས
ང་ནི་སུ་ཏེག་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་མནའ་མ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
བྱན་གཤེས་ཟབ་པའི་གཡོག་མོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
འཁོས་ཆུང་བའི་ངང་གཤེས་ཀྱི་མཚོའུ་ཇིང་ནང་དུ
བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱི་པད་དཀར་ལྟམ་མེར་འཁྲུངས་པར་རེ་སྨོན་བྱས་སྐྱོང
ངའི་མི་ཚེ་ལ་ཆུང་མ་ཞེས་པའི་ཁ་བྱང་བྱིས་དུས
ང་ནི་འཆིང་ཡིག་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་བྱད་མེད་ཅིག་ཡིན་ལ
རྩིས་ཐང་ཉམས་པའི་འཕྱོན་མ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
འདོད་ཆགས་ཀྱི་གད་སྐྱེགས་གང་དགར་བྱོ་སའི་ཡོལ་གོར་ངེས་ཆོག་ལ
དྲག་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་རལ་གྲི་ཤྲབས་ནས་ཕྱང་སྟེ་དམར་གསོད་བྱས་ཀྱང་ཆོག
ངའི་ལུས་རྐེན་ལ་རྩེར་སོན་དང་འཕགས་ལམ་མེད་ཅེས་ཐམ་ག་བརྒྱབ་དུས
ང་ནི་ཚོང་ཐེབ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་བཙུན་མོ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
བུ་སྐྱོང་ཀྱི་གསེར་བུམ་ལ་རིགས་ཀྱི་ཁྲིའུ་བཞད་པའི་རྒྱིད་ཡུམ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
ཐུ་རྟོད་ཀྱི་གནའ་སྲོལ་བཟང་བོ་སྐྱེགས་དུས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུན་ལམ་ལ་མི་འཚོར་བར
ཤུག་བསམ་གྱི་གདུང་ཀ་མི་འགྱེལ་བར་གྱེན་དུ་འདེགས་པར་བཟོད
ངའི་ཚེ་སྲོག་ལ་ཉེ་དབང་དང་འདྲ་མཉམ་སྦྱད་དུས
ང་ནི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་མཛའ་མོ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
རིགས་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་འདེབས་སའི་གཤེན་ས་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
རྐེན་འབྱུང་གི་ལས་འབྲས་ཟོལ་དུ་མ་བསྡུར་བར་དྲང་བོར་བསྒྲངས་ནས
བཙོ་དུང་གི་དུས་ཚོགས་ལ་འགྱུར་སྟོག་མེད་པར་དོད་ཁོལ་སྟོལ་ཅིང
སྐང་སྟོང་ཟུང་འཇུག་གི་འཁོར་ལོ་གསང་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་འཁོར་དུས
ང་ནི་ཤེས་རབ་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

Source

Dpal mo 2020. “nga ni nga yin.” *Bod kyi den grabs rtsom rig spyi stegs*. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lDLfKUeNdWHwBqS-8WAByA

Sunshine on the Road

Lhashamgyal (Lha byams rgyal)

Translated by Rongwo Lugyal (Rong bo klu rgyal)

As Lhadzé stood on Lhalu Bridge, a gust of the wandering wind of Lhasa Valley came out of nowhere and blew her red hat into the river and under the bridge.

This river, neither large nor small, was a tributary of the Lhasa River—the Kyichu—which flowed from the eastern edge of Lhasa, extending to the north of the city and flowing down through the wetlands of Lhalu. After merging into the Kyichu, it eventually became a confluence of the Yarlung Tsangpo. If one were to think according to the current of the river, Lhadzé's red hat would float along the Yarlung Tsangpo and eventually cross the Himalayan mountain ranges into South India. If everything went well, it might be picked up and worn by an Indian girl wearing bright bangles on her arms and washing clothes on the lower riverbank.

"Older Brother, please grab my hat!" Lhadzé pleaded of Phunam, who was standing next to her.

"What?" Phunam didn't want to go at all, so he pretended not to understand her plea. "Quick, please go and grab my hat!" said Lhadzé, pulling his sleeve and holding onto the bridge railing. Her voice was urgent and panicked, as she watched the red hat slowly drifting away under the bridge and down the river.

Lhadzé was loath to part with the red hat.

Phunam leaned stock-still against the bridge railing showing his annoyance. It was customary for the people on Lhalu bridge to stand stock-still in this way, observing the chaotic traffic of Lhasa shuttling back and forth on the bridge, waiting for a madam with gold earrings or bracelets, or a mister in black shades with a pot belly to talk to them. Once that happened, it meant that they'd found work—and finding work meant earning some money. So, they stood on Lhalu Bridge, waiting in the rays of Lhasa's sunshine.

Lhasa's sun shone brightly on the road without obscuring their vision. With the light reflecting off the river and the hat drifting away, those harsh rays of the sun pierced through and left Lhadzé's white skin to dry out, making her red-cheeked with "plateau redness." Lhadzé took out a black mask from her coat pocket and masked her face, then raised and put her hand on her forehead to protect herself from the harsh sun. The rays of the high plateau were not only harsh and dry, but

it could damage the eyes. Under the shade of her hand on her forehead, Lhadzé watched her red hat drifting away along the river for a while. With the passage of the current, the hat eventually vanished from view.

Lhadzé was heartsick that the river had taken away the hat. In the rays of Lhasa's sunshine, how practical and lovely the red hat was to have! In fact, she had bought it with her income from a job putting Arga stone on the floor for a room in the Potala Palace. The talkative vendor on Barkhor Street had praised her for how perfectly the hat fit her and how beautiful she looked, as if the tailor had made it on purpose just for her. Now that Lhadzé had turned eighteen years old, she was particularly fond of beautifying herself. Her heart filled with joy when she heard the vendor's words of praise. Without any hesitation, she pulled out that day's income and bought the hat. As she walked like a peacock with her red hat, she felt as if many people throughout the area were watching her. Standing at Lhalu Bridge, Lhadzé had discovered that the sunshine of the high plateau was so vexing. The harsh rays pierced Lhadzé face and, as a result, her soft cheeks bloomed red as time went by.

"You should buy a hat and wear it," Phunam, standing next to her, used to suggest.

"I don't have the money to buy a hat yet," replied Lhadzé at the time. However, she had wished that she could afford one. Phunam lit a cheap cigarette and wrinkled his forehead like an old man as he smoked. After a while, thick smoke came out of his mouth and he blew it towards Lhadzé's face. In Lhadzé's eyes, the way Phunam smoked was both handsome and elegant; to her he seemed a matured man with a life full of experiences. In reality, Phunam was the same age as her and both of them came from a village near Lhasa—from a poor household. That day, Phunam smoked and said, "When I get rich in the future, I will buy you a red hat."

Lhadzé blamed that sentence for her falling in love with Phunam. As soon as she heard what Phunam said, a warm feeling inadvertently swirled deep in her heart. The warmth eventually swirled up into her eyes, making their edges piping hot. Lhadzé was a softhearted girl.

"Mister, I will remember what you said, so don't change your mind," she said sternly to Phunam.

"What do I do if I only get rich in the next life?" Phunam replied cheerfully.

In the bright sun of Lhasa, Phunam's smile on his dark face was pure and his perfectly aligned teeth glittered.

Lhadzé looked straight into Phunam's eyes and said seriously, "Even if it's in the next life, I will wait."

Phunam did not reply and avoided eye contact with Lhadzé, choosing to watch the people of Lhasa and the cars going back and forth.

Now, the young man named Phunam stood stock-still on the bridge. Meanwhile, Lhadzé's red hat had drifted away in the water. She had watched as it slowly and inexorably disappeared into the distance. An unstoppable fury rushed through Lhadzé. A few days ago, after she bought that red

hat, she had hurried back along Barkhor Street to Lhalu Bridge. When she reached the bridge, she was soaked all over. She wanted to show Phunam her beauty in that red hat without any delay. She had hoped that Phunam would say, "How beautiful you are!" and blow smoke in her face. Lhadzé, in her red hat, had sped away like a dancing red butterfly in the rays of the sunshine. Amid the vendors and restaurants, and the hustle and bustle of activities on the roadsides, the crowd cruising back and forth along the street paid no attention to her. She hurried back to Lhalu Bridge, and she felt that this was where she belonged—and Phunam, who was waiting for work there, was like her own relative. Now, as Lhadzé recalled her thoughts and feelings from that day, she realized how stupid she was!

"The Yarlung River will carry the hat into India," joked Phunam, blowing smoke in Lhadzé's face as she stood next to him, pitifully watching the spot where her red hat had drifted away. "It's likely that an Indian girl with bangles, washing clothes at the river bank, will pick it up and put it on her head," he continued.

"Phunam, it is an insult to blow smoke in people's faces. Don't do that!" said Lhadzé, trying to suppress her anger, yet the signs of a scowl appeared obviously on her face. Phunam, bringing his cigarette to his mouth, froze and the smile on his face stiffened. He looked at Lhadzé innocently, not knowing what to do.

"What's there to look at!? Will you be happy when my face gets completely sunburnt!?" shouted Lhadzé. Men and women who were standing nearby, waiting for work, laughed. Some made a fuss and shouted, "Phunam... Phunam." People on Lhalu Bridge had nothing else to do but wait for work. Therefore, no matter how trivial a matter was that took place on Lhalu Bridge, they loved to gather together and make a fuss over it. The well-dressed office women who were walking across the bridge fearfully dodged the scene they had created. Men who were driving by had to blow their horns repeatedly to remind them to pay attention to the cars on the road. Phunam was embarrassed. Scratching his head, he walked away from Lhadzé to the other side of the bridge.

Lhadzé and Phunam were separated by the width of the bridge. As Lhadzé turned and looked to the other side of the bridge, she saw Phunam leaning against the guardrail looking at her. As their eyes met, cars of every size were honking and speeding by, with many pedestrians also hustling through. The world around them was in such turmoil, yet the people on Lhalu Bridge were just waiting to be called, standing there without a fuss. Lhadzé looked at Phunam on the other side of the bridge and regretted what she had said to him. She thought to herself that she would go to him if Phunam were to call to her. As the sun went down, the rays of sunlight shone directly in Lhadzé's face and she put her hand to her forehead.

When Phunam saw how Lhadzé was standing on the other side of the bridge, the unhappy incident vanished from his mind like dark clouds and he waved at her. But just then, a big truck rumbled across Lhalu Bridge. Lhadzé didn't see Phunam waving at her. When the big truck passed

by and the dust dispersed by the truck settled, Phunam raised his hand again, ready to wave at her. However, he saw a small jeep stopped on the other side of the bridge; Lhadzé and some others who were waiting for work were talking to the driver. After a while, Lhadzé and three other girls got in the car and left. Phunam's hand still hung in the air. He watched the jeep drive away and was left stunned.

During the Lhasa aristocrat Lhalu's time, more than 60 years ago, there was no Lhalu Bridge. It was established thereafter. On the other side of the bridge was Lhalu Manor, from which the bridge took its name. The people who waited for work on the bridge were like the servants in the Lhalu period. Were they now suffering for lack of work in the open sunshine on the road?

"In the old society, there was too much work available for servants. Now it's different, people are having difficulty finding work," said the jeep driver to Lhadzé and the others. "You'll get 30 yuan each. It's a good deal," he continued as he looked in the rearview mirror at the three country girls on the back seat. It was Lhadzé's first time sitting in a jeep, so she had an indescribable feeling. As the jeep drove through the streets of Lhasa, a gust of wind blew in the half-open window and messed up Lhadzé's hair. The roadside shops and crowds seen from the window passed by instantly. After a while, Lhadzé felt like the car in which they were sitting was not moving at all, but rather the people and shops outside were passing by quickly. Lhadzé felt dizzy and nauseous, so she took off the black mask and fanned a cold breeze into her face. The wind coming in through the window was like a hand gripping her. It violently cleared away the dizziness in her head, instantly relieving both her body and mind at once.

"What a lovely girl!" she heard the jeep driver say as soon as Lhadzé took off her mask. When she looked up, the jeep driver was staring at her through the rearview mirror. Lhadzé instantly turned away and looked out of the window. The streets of Lhasa seen from the car were different from the streets of Lhasa when she was walking. Why was that? Walking on the road, Lhadzé felt that Lhasa was a big, beautiful city and she often looked at the people and up at the buildings. However, seeing Lhasa from the jeep window, Lhadzé felt as if Lhasa's crowds and houses were staring at her. When she heard the voice of the jeep driver, she remembered Phunam once again and thought to herself that, if he were by her, he would share this feeling. In the past, Phunam often said, "What a lovely girl!" while blowing smoke in her face jokingly. She now regretted her bad attitude toward Phunam on Lhalu Bridge a moment ago. She fixed her hair, which had been messed up by the wind.

"Girl, if you buy a hat and wear it, you will look even more beautiful," the jeep driver said, looking in the rearview mirror. Phunam had made such a comment in the past as well. Lhadzé was forced to look at his face in the rearview mirror after he repeated that same comment twice. The man who was driving the jeep was middle-aged. Unlike Phunam, he did not have a skinny face, but a plump and moisturized face that shone with happiness. As she was examining him, the

jeep driver also looked in the rearview mirror. Lhadzé lowered her head and instead looked at the driver's shoulders.

"Her hat drifted away in the river moments ago," said the girl sitting next to Lhadzé. "Can you help her buy a red hat?" continued the girl jokingly.

"Sure," said the jeep driver. Then he steered the jeep over to the side of the road and stopped. He turned around and said, "We've arrived!"

At this point, the sun was long in the sky and its rays were no longer intense. The jeep driver guided them into a Tibetan style building on the roadside. A sign above the door to the building read "Norsang Nangma (Karaoke Bar)," but as Lhadzé and the girls were illiterate, they did not pay much attention to the signboard. However, after entering the building, they were amazed by the interior layout and design. The karaoke bar was just like a temple—the hanging thangkas on the walls, the mandala mural on the ceiling, and the big horns on both sides of the stage made them suddenly lose heart. Lhadzé and the girls humbly stood aside and asked the jeep driver, "Mister, what should we do?"

"My name is Jigme. I've recently opened this Nangma and it still needs some cleaning. Can you wipe the tables, clean the windows, and sweep the floor?" said the jeep driver. Yawning and spinning the car key, he went into one of the rooms in the back.

Having waited several days to find a job, Lhadzé and the others were highly motivated to work. Immediately, they began to sweep the temple-like karaoke bar. Although they had previously heard how fun it was to visit the karaoke bars in Lhasa, they had actually never visited any personally. When people got bored waiting for work on Lhalu Bridge, the young men would look at the wealthy women passing by with their gold bracelets and gossip about them. When Lhadzé heard them saying how those women drank beers in karaoke bars, she couldn't imagine it. "Are women allowed to drink beer in karaoke bars?" she had asked. "When I get rich in the future, I will take you there," Phunam had joked. Now that she was actually in a karaoke bar, she mentally questioned whether one should drink beers in front of so many Buddhist paintings hanging on the walls.

At the end of their work, Jigme came out of the room, yawning and stretching. He looked to the right and left, then said to Lhadzé and the others, "It is clean now." He gave each of them thirty yuan. After a thought, he gave Lhadzé and the others ten more yuan and said, "This is a reward for you." Lhadzé didn't stretch out her hand, as she felt uncomfortable that Jigme was staring at her intensely. Phunam would never dare to stare at her this way. He always gave a fleeting glance—she liked the way he looked at her. It was an unexpressed signal that, in Lhadzé's mind, served as proof Phunam liked her too.

"Thank you, Mister!" said Peyang, who was standing next to Lhadzé, reaching for the money.

"Mister, what a fun place you have!" said Peyang admiringly. Jigme, as if he had just remem-

bered something, said, "Tomorrow night we're celebrating the grand opening! Come and join us!"

"How will we afford to come to the Nangma!?" sneered Lhadzé as she walked to the door.

Jigme hurriedly pulled Lhadzé back from behind and said, "If you want, clean it again tomorrow afternoon and you all can watch the performances in the evening, without paying."

Once Lhadzé and the others heard that they could watch dancers perform in the Nangma, they felt great joy in their hearts. When they stood on Lhalu Bridge, they always heard music from the record shops on both sides of the bridge. As time went by, the lyrics and melodies became familiar to them and they occasionally sang along loudly,

"In Lhasa's club
The crowd gathered
The person I love isn't there..."

The passers-by would walk past with a laugh and smile. Now they finally had the opportunity to go to a Lhasa Nangma. They immediately promised to do the cleaning job.

Jigme accompanied them to the door and said, "Wait for me at Lhalu Bridge tomorrow afternoon and I will come to pick you up."

The sun in Lhasa slowly set in the horizon and the remaining rays of sunshine stretched across the west. Lhadzé and her two girlfriends, holding the wages that they had just received, walked along the street toward Lhalu Bridge. Now they were walking with their heads up, looking at the crowds along the side of the road. Unlike before, Lhasa city was no longer looking at them—that only happened when sitting inside of the jeep. What a magnificent city Lhasa was! Many ethnic groups, with different customs and languages, flowed through the streets like a river. The lingering light of the setting sun shone on the gilded Jokhang Temple and Potala Palace roof, causing it to glitter. As Lhadzé and her two girlfriends circumambulated the Jokhang Temple three times, Lhadzé once again saw the red hat hanging on the store door in Barkhor. However, now she was reluctant to spend fifty yuan to buy it. She walked away from the store quickly. Later, after they circumambulated the top part of Potala Palace once, they finally reached Lhalu Bridge through the Lukhang.

The people who had been looking for work on Lhalu Bridge were almost all gone, leaving both sides of the bridge more spacious. As Lhadzé waited for the traffic light to turn green at the intersection, she saw Phunam leaning against the bridge rail and smoking alone. Seeing that sight, a warm feeling gushed from the bottom of Lhadzé's heart. That very feeling eventually swirled in her eyes, leaving their corners warm. Lhadzé had missed Phunam, whom she had not seen the whole afternoon and who showed his manliness by smoking a cigarette. However, as she drew close, she did not show the slightest sign of missing him. Rather, she offered a sulky face.

"Are you still upset because of the hat?" said Phunam humorously, as he pulled at the bottom hem of Lhadzé's coat.

Lhadzé did not reply to him.

"What are you still doing here rather than going home?" Peyang asked.

"I'm here looking at the water, hoping that Lhadzé's hat will float back!" Phunam blew smoke out of his mouth indifferently as he spoke.

As Lhadzé heard Phunam's words, the warm feeling she had in the bottom of her heart gradually cooled. She ignored Phunam and walked away. The rays of the setting sun lengthened her shadow.

On their way back to the village, no matter how hard Phunam tried to be humorous, Lhadzé didn't laugh at all. Generally, Phunam had a playful spirit and cracked jokes with an unexpected imagination, saying things that no one thought of. In Lhadzé's eyes, Phunam was the most attractive young man among those who waited for work on Lhalu Bridge. However, on that day, a wandering breeze had blown away Lhadzé's red hat into the river. She'd begged Phunam for help, who was standing there and was usually amiable, but he did not move a bit. Furthermore, he said such hurtful words that she truly felt angry and resentful towards him.

The next day, the sun in Lhasa was shining generously and all the passers-by felt it brightly. Lhadzé and the two other girls were waiting for the afternoon to come at Lhalu Bridge. All three of them were wearing relatively new clothes, which was particularly obvious to the other people waiting for work. A family hired Phunam and several others for tamping. As Phunam walked away, he signaled with his hand to Lhadzé and joked, "Wow! You look even more beautiful in new clothes!"

Lhadzé once again ignored him. As Phunam's thin back gradually disappeared in the crowd of people going back and forth, Lhadzé, wearing a black mask and with her hands on her forehead, sat motionless on Lhalu Bridge.

After a while, Jigme parked the black jeep by the bridge. Lhadzé and the two other girls immediately got into the jeep. As soon as they sat on the seat, Lhadzé saw that Jigme was staring at her in the rearview mirror again. She turned away and looked out of the window. As they drove, Lhadzé felt as if Lhasa city were looking at them again.

Along the way, Jigme said, "You look even more beautiful in new clothes." Lhadzé was curious and wondered why both Phunam and the person in front of her had said the exact same thing. When two different people said the same thing, she was not sure who really meant it.

There were more people in Jigme's cabaret than the day before. Young men and women dancers and singers were hurriedly getting on and off the stage, the women walking with shoulders and backs as straight as possible to show off their breasts. As Lhadzé saw that, she thought to herself that putting one's chest out was also a way to show one's beauty. She touched her own small chest when people were not paying attention to her.

That afternoon, they did not have much work to do. Furthermore, the cabaret itself also had service personal who showed contempt towards them, practically jumping in front of them to do the work. Still, Lhadzé and her friends behaved innocently and humbly. Lhadzé found that it was similar to the people looking for work on Lhalu Bridge, who behaved that way in front of potential bosses as they hoped to be hired. Lhadzé and the others waited in such a way for dusk to fall.

The rays of Lhasa's sunshine shone through the window onto the thangka paintings on the wall. As Lhadzé was cleaning the wall mounted shelf, she suddenly noticed the Goddess on the thangka, reclining while holding lotus flowers, her right leg stretched out and left leg bent, her breasts obviously round and pointy. As she saw the rays of the setting sun hit the thangka painting, the Goddess on the thangka painting, and the Goddess's pointy round breasts, Lhadzé wondered why she was so focused on breasts on that day. Then she wondered whether it was sinful to look at the Goddess' pointy breasts.

As dusk fell at last, more and more people started to come—Lhasa's women with gold earrings, men with big bellies, yellow-haired westerners, white-faced people from inland, and Lhasa's Tibetan youth with mismatched clothes. Within a short period, all the seats were filled. Jigme greeted the guests who had entered, walked between the tables with a bottle of beer and a glass of white wine, raising his glass for a toast. At last, Lhadzé saw how Lhasa's women drank their beers bottoms-up. After a while, Jigme arrived at the small table where Lhadzé and the others were sitting, ready to raise his glass and offer a drink.

"Bring some beer here!" said Jigme to a waiter when he saw there was nothing on the table. Then he continued, "Don't be shy and don't worry about spending your money. I'm treating you today. Relax and enjoy the show!"

"We don't drink beer!" said Lhadzé. Due to loud music coming from the stage, her words were inaudible to the others. Jigme held his white wine glass in his hand and shouted into Lhadzé's ear, "Don't be afraid! I bought you a gift."

Lhadzé smelled the bitter taste of the beer and the steam from Jigme's mouth warmed her cheek. As she turned her face away uncomfortably, she saw clearly the girls on stage sticking their chests out and dancing.

"Wait a minute!" said Jigme before he went into the room in the back. In the meanwhile, the waiter brought several bottles of beer to the table. He then asked Lhadzé to pay, saying "It's 120."

Lhadzé and her two girlfriends were shocked. That figure was more than their wages after working several days. Jigme came back right at that moment and said, "Don't charge them."

In that moment, Jigme took out the red hat he'd concealed behind him and said to Lhadzé, "Didn't I promise you yesterday I'd buy you a red hat?" Lhadzé had a very weird feeling. The red hat shone in the bright lights.

Lhadzé was a soft-hearted girl. Amid the cheers and joy of her two girlfriends, a warm feeling

swirled deep in Lhadzé's heart. The warmth eventually swirled up into her eyes, making their edges feel piping hot.

"Have some beer!" Jigme filled the glasses, then put them in front of Lhadzé and the others. The beer foamed and spilled from the mouth of the glasses. In the brightly lit Nangma Hall, people seemed to become crazy after drinking this liquid.

"There's no effect to drinking a little. Look, aren't those older women also drinking?" Jigme said insistently as he put the beers into their hands. Then, he held his white wine glass up and touched it to their glasses. He said again, "Come on! Drink a little, it doesn't do any harm!"

As Jigme, the owner of the Nangma, urged them on, Lhadzé and the others were thrown into confusion. They hadn't had even a sip of beer before. Beer was a man's drink—some of the young men who stood on Lhalu Bridge, waiting for work, bought a bottle of beer from the shop and drank it among them. None of the girls there drank it. However, that night, thanks to Jigme's obstinate determination, Lhadzé, and the others took the glasses in their hands helplessly and tasted the bitter liquid inside.

Lhadzé felt a coldness flow through her throat and down to the bottom of her gut, then some warmth rushed back from the bottom of her gut to her head.

"How is it? Is it delicious?" asked Jigme, laughing and pouring some more beer into their glasses. He put the red hat on Lhadzé's head and said, "What a truly beautiful girl you are!" He continued, "Bottoms up!" He drank his whole glass of wine in one shot.

Jigme was a middle-aged man with a stomach sticking out. Could it be from drinking too much beer? Unsure whether it was due to their first time in this world of dazzling colored lights, Lhadzé and the others felt an indescribable influence working in their mind as they drank one glass of beer after another. After a while, a singer on the stage sang the song that they had often heard at Lhalu Bridge.

"In Lhasa's club
The crowd gathered
The person I love isn't there..."

As Lhadzé heard the song, she thought of the skinny Phunam again. What was he up to? Thinking of Phunam, she remembered the unpleasant event with him and the red hat, and she grew upset about it again. It was unfathomable that Phunam hadn't moved a bit when the wind blew her red hat into the river that day. At the thought of this, tears swirled in Lhadzé's eyes. It was the first time she lifted the glass of beer and drank it deliberately.

By the end of the performance, the three girls, who'd had beer for the first time, were drunk. Because they were very young, they did not notice many things. However, Lhadzé did notice that she was either cruising along on a cloud, or falling from it. In any case, they were unaware of how

much time went by or even the people around them. After some time, Jigme helped them to the room in the back. There, on both sides of a long table, were two couches. Jigme put Lhadzé's two friends on each of the couches, then carried Lhadzé to an inner room. As Lhadzé saw the bed in the room, she instantly tried to turn back. In light of the intoxication, she was powerless. Jigme was full of irresistible strength—he lifted Lhadzé up and laid her down on the bed, then said, "Girl, don't be intimated! I will be gone in a second." As he said this, he got up and left. After Jigme's departure, Lhadzé wanted to get out of the room and back with her two girlfriends. However, she felt that the bed was like a flat piece of cloud, wobbling, so she held tightly to it for fear of falling down.

Lhadzé was unaware of how long it had been; suddenly, she felt something was touching her body. As she opened her eyes, startled, she saw Jigme touching her. Jigme was panting and gave off an unpleasant sour taste of beer. Horrified, Lhadzé pushed him away with all her strength, but she was powerless against his strength. She wanted to shout, but Jigme pressed her down so heavily that no sound came from her mouth. Jigme then used one hand to grip her wrist, so that it was as if she were wearing a tight handcuff. At this very moment, she finally realized why the girls on the stage walk chest out, but she did not have time to think it through. Wasting no time, Jigme then took off her clothes and pulled down his trousers. Lhadzé realized in despair there was nothing she could do to save herself. Saddened and hopeless, tears gushed out of her eyes like a small creek. Phunam's skinny face, his smile, laughter, and his fleeting glances repeatedly flashed in her mind. At this terrifying moment, Lhadzé's freedom was taken, and so was her virginity; she screamed. Suddenly, everything became clear, like the daybreak over Lhalu each morning.

"Don't be sad. I will help you out in many ways in the future," Jigme said to Lhadzé, lying on his back next to her. He lit a cigarette and smoked it.

Lhadzé's tears had already dried up. As she quickly dressed and prepared to leave, Jigme picked her up again and put her back on the bed, and said, "Where are you going in the middle of the night? Sleep here. It'll be quiet. I'll be going home. I need to take my son to school in the morning."

"Can you blow smoke on my face?" asked Lhadzé.

Jigme looked at her curiously. Finally, he shrugged, inhaled a mouthful of smoke, and blew it on Lhadzé's face, who was now lying next to him.

Lying still, Lhadzé closed her eyes as she inhaled the smoke.

Jigme stroked Lhadzé's hair and said, "You are a beautiful girl! Would you like to work in my Nangma? I will give you 1000 yuan as a monthly salary, which is much better than standing on Lhalu Bridge!"

Lhadzé kept silent as she pretended to be in a deep sleep. Jigme, on the other hand, put on his clothes, and on his way out, he said, "I will come to pick you up at Lhalu Bridge tomorrow afternoon. If you are willing, get into my car as you wish." He then placed the red hat next to her, kissed her forehead, closed the door, and left.

The next morning, Lhadzé and the others got up early and walked out of the Nangma; the three of them did not talk much, particularly about drinking beer and being drunk. The morning sun shone brightly on the golden roof of Jokhang Temple and the roof of Potala Palace, while the sky was clear and cloudless as far as the eye could see. As Lhadzé breathed the fresh air, she felt she had become another person within one night. What had changed about her? She felt as if another soul had entered her body through her crown and spread all over. The mountains, houses, and everything in her sight seemed shrouded in another color.

As usual, they circumambulated the Jokhang Temple, the upper level of the Potala Palace once, passing Dzongyap Lukhang, and then headed toward Lhalu Bridge. They bought freshly made potato chips from an old Lhasa grandmother and ate them on their way. As they waited for the traffic light to turn green at the intersection, Lhadzé saw people leisurely standing on the Lhalu Bridge, waiting for work. The sun shone brightly, glaring off of passing car windows. Again, Lhadzé remembered the red hat. The one Jigme had given her she deliberately left in that back room. When she saw it, an unimpeded feeling of heartbreak flooded through her.

Phunam's thin figure was invisible among the crowd—he must have gone to work. Other than that, there were no changes to the crowd waiting for work on the Lhalu Bridge. Lhadzé leaned against the bridge railing and stared at the river beneath. Its murky, unstoppable flow had carried away the red hat and something considerably more important with it. Lhadzé found that some of her tears were dripping in the river.

In the afternoon, Lhadzé saw Phunam crossing the intersection, walking lazily toward the bridge. The sunlight made him seem even thinner and his white teeth became more visible. Lhadzé's heart constricted and inwardly she wailed. She did not dare to look at Phunam any longer; she turned her eyes back to the river beneath the bridge.

"Lhadzé, I bought this red hat for you!" Phunam's voice sounded in her ears. Lhadzé saw a red hat floating in front of her in the sunlight. As her eyes focused, she saw that Phunam was holding the hat, looking at her shyly.

"Take it quickly! If they see it, they will mock me!" he said, leaning against the bridge railing, bending over the hat to conceal it.

"Why didn't you help me save my hat the other day?" Lhadzé felt overwhelming sadness. "Oh! I wanted to buy you a hat as a gift, but I waited because I didn't have the money. Later, I saw that you'd already bought yourself a hat. So I was pretty happy when your hat floated away, giving me the chance to buy you one to replace it."

As she heard what Phunam said, a warm feeling swirled deep in her heart, and the warmth rapidly swirled up and filled her eyes. Eventually, it turned into some tears that fell into the river again.

Lhadzé said, "Older Brother, what an idiot you are!" In her mind, Phunam was as pure and

clear as the sky in Lhasa. She was tainted like the flowing river under the bridge, and she felt far away even though she was standing next to Phunam.

And then, she heard the honk of a jeep. Quickly, she then turned around and saw Jigme's black jeep parked by the bridge. He was looking at her through the rolled-down car window, holding the red hat in his hand. "Last night,"he said, "you forgot to take the hat."

In the bright sunshine of Lhasa, Lhadzé felt dizzy and weak, as if she was unable to control her body. In the past, she did not dare to look Phunam straight in the eyes. Now, she suddenly snatched the hat from him and threw it into the river. Lhadzé lowered her head and said to Phunam, "I'm sorry, Older Brother. Think of me like the hat carried away by the river. Forget about me."

Then she strode away and got into Jigme's jeep. In the jeep's side mirror, as the people waiting for work on Lhalu Bridge watched, she saw Phunam staring blankly at the bright sunshine on the road. A few teardrops ran down Lhadzé's cheeks, and she felt the taste of salt in her mouth.

Translator's Commentary

I started translating Lhashamgyal's writings because he is one of my favorite writers. Over the years, I have translated many of his works, short stories and essays, including "Life in the Shadow," "The Person Who Can't Return," "Window," "The Most Ordinary Morning of My Life," "Sunshine On the Road," etc. Through my translation work, I have come to read him very closely and to see his writings with new eyes.

Lhashamgyal is one of those writers who writes quite differently compared to traditional Tibetan writers. He is on a new path of his own, which brings out a different aspect of story writing. Compared to traditional Tibetan writers, Lhashamgyal's stories touch on new themes and carry different meanings. In this case, he brings a different Tibetan lifestyle to the forefront of our attention and our imagination. It is rare that a person from Amdo can write the life of Ü-Tsang (Central Tibet) so closely and so authentically.

Lhashamgyal's "Sunshine on the Road" reflects the daily life of Tibetan people in central Tibet—in particular the people of low status, the people that society usually ignores or condemns. The ironic title of the story does not seem to reflect on the story, in fact, it reflects the complete opposite. On the surface, this is a story with beautiful images of Lhasa's bright sunshine, golden temple roofs, a decorated karaoke bar, the famous Lhalu bridge, and a love story that circles around a red hat. However, underneath all of these tropes and familiar images, the writer is showing a buried world: a world of darkness, immorality, lust, and anger, where people of high and low status mix and mingle, a world that is surrounded by danger, a world where bad things happen at every corner even under the bright sunshine.

All these images are representations of Tibetan tradition, Tibetan culture, Tibetan history, and Tibetan life. The bright sunshine is the recurrent metaphor of the story. The golden temple roofs represent Tibetans' attachments to their traditions and cultural heritage. The Lhalu bridge represents a time period in history but also stands as a metaphor for social structures, for the border between the aristocratic people on the one side of the bridge and the people of low status on the other side of the bridge, or the border between the old and modern lifestyles. Throughout the story, one can see the clash between old and modern social structures, as the characters face various challenges in leaving the traditional society behind and stepping into the modern one. The red hat belonging to Lhadzé, which I think is the central image of the story, represents modernization, and the great challenge of Tibetans stepping into modernity.

While translating one language into another is always a challenge, I think the most challenging part of the translation process is to express the author's style and to communicate the author's voice in the translation. Lhashamgyal pays great attention to his images in this short story, and one way I tried to render his style and voice is by paying the same careful attention to the images.

Reading the Mila Life Story: Doubles, Double-Takes, and the Literary Affordances of Text

Janet Gyatso

Abstract This essay explores some of the outstanding literary flourishes of Tsangnyon Heruka's *Mila Life Story* and attempts to analyse how they work in the narrative. It advances a theory about the "literary affordances" of texts, which make possible varying levels of detail, irony, suspended resolution, and multiple points of view, and which serve to enhance the interest and impact of the story. It also argues that there is a discernible self-reflexivity when texts take advantage of these kinds of license, seemingly delighting in their own artfulness. The essay examines several episodes in the *Life Story* which illustrate these features of the work's literary brilliance.

I would like to take the opportunity in this essay to enjoy, once again, some of my favorite episodes from the brilliant *Mila Life Story* by Tsangnyön Heruka (Gtsang smyon Heruka, 1452-1507).[1] I will reflect on why they are my favorites, and what makes them so worthy of the designation "literary."

This essay will become theoretical at times. Whatever theory I manage, however, will largely be culled from the particular work at hand, and will hardly serve as a universally applicable description of literature, even if I make a few gestures in that direction. I won't even be able to consider the *Mila Life Story* itself with any comprehensiveness. But my hope, in addition to partaking in the pleasures of this outstanding work, is for the desultory insights in this essay to help open the space for literary analysis in the field of Tibetan studies.

In what follows I consider a Tibetan text that few if any would deny counts as a wonderful piece of literature. This of course would not be true of all Tibetan writing. So, by "literature," or "the literary," I mean not the larger category of everything written, but rather that sense of the English word when it refers to writings that are particularly imaginative and expertly conveyed

1. Gtsang smyon 2007. In this essay I refer mostly to Quintman 2010. The first complete English translation of the work to my knowledge was Evans-Wentz 1928.

I would like to express thanks to Charles Hallisey, who drew my attention, long ago, to the literary critical strategy of paying attention to point of view.

in terms of their style, structure, and impact on the reader. Something like what is referred to as *belle lettres*.

More specifically, I myself have long considered the category of "literature" to apply to any verbal presentation that takes advantage of its own mechanisms—the very possibilities that the medium of literature itself offers, or affords—to convey feelings and experiences and kinds of knowledge beyond the purely documentary, or descriptive.[2]

A literary verbal presentation, or text, can be written or oral; in this essay, the text under consideration is written (although it may well have some oral roots). But either way, there is a kind of second-order self-reflexivity at the very heart of the literary; part of what is brought to the fore in any literary presentation, quite apart from the actual story that is being told, is the very fact itself that special affordances of the verbal are now in play. This does not impute "consciousness" to literature, although it may sound like it. Rather, I am merely suggesting a kind of self-referentiality, in line with what literary critic Julia Kristeva hypothesized is at the very heart of the "semiotic" dimension of literature.[3]

Note that this definition sets aside authorial intent, although surely the literary is often created consciously and intentionally. But it does not have to be. It can also come into being intuitively, or spontaneously, even accidentally, through a writer's hand. But whether deliberate or not, in literature the verbal medium, the very nature of a textual *topos*, serves to convey something beyond the direct denotations of each word and/or utterance. The verbal medium thereby does more than convey what we can loosely call, after Dominick LeCapra, the documentary, or information of practical import.[4] Rather, the literary indulges in its own resources to "work" on its readers, creating kinds of aesthetic and affective resonances—sadness, joy, irony, humor, wonder—with what is being conveyed. There is also a sense of play, and freedom *to* play, in what the literary entails. There is a sense of reveling in the very license that literature affords to enjoy, or commiserate, or laugh. This in turn makes for a second-order self-reflexivity.

Literature often gives the impression of taking pleasure in being literature.

Among the affordances that the medium of a verbal presentation, or textual topos, offers for the birth of literature is the ability to make use of timing. It offers options to draw some things out in detail, and others to say summarily, in order both to give emphasis and even suspense, and to accord with the familiar experience in daily life wherein not all things operate with the same swiftness, nor are they governed by a strict clock. Repetition is another device that texts allow that serves to arrest the attention or also subvert any regimented process of unfolding according to a clock. The inordinate amount of fine-grained detail that written texts allow, detail that may be extraneous to the central message of a work, can instead serve to set off the imagination. Lit-

2. LeCapra 1983.
3. She develops this theory in her book *Revolution in Poetic Language*. See Moi, 89–136.
4. LeCapra 1983.

erature revels in polyvalence; metaphor makes possible multiple simultaneous meaning and inuendo. Alliteration or rhyme in the actual sounds of words adds to the punch of their meanings, an affordance which is grounded on the very (usually quite irrelevant) fact that words have sounds. A reference to something that already came up previously in this work, or to indeed to some other work, will put the reader in mind of something beyond the direct denotation of the words in view. Leaving some parts of the story unresolved for some time while the text turns to other matters—which texts that are being artful can dare to do—means that readers can be left suspended before they "get it." And the more time they are suspended, the more the imagination—and memory, and wisdom, and humor, and etcetera—have to sneak in and color the final resolution.

What is more, all of such strategies can operate at a second order as well and end up drawing the reader's attention to the very manner in which the text is put together, and the liberties that it is taking. In such ways (and many more), the reader can be made to notice that artfulness is at work.

I have just tried to introduce a definition of literature that is focused on the work performed by the text itself, but of course the humans who create the text and those who read or otherwise receive it have a role in its operation as literature too. Authors often intentionally aim to play with the affordances of the medium precisely so as to create a richly literary piece of writing. In this, they draw on their education, their imbibing and appropriation of technique from literary works of the past, as well as their own observational skills in the art of living itself, the very pleasure and sorrow and irony and richness of human experience. The more you are a keen observer and appreciator of this the better the writer you will be.

This is also true of the reader. The good reader brings to the table expectations, knowledge, and especially a willingness to receive and appreciate literary effects. A keen eye on life helps readers greatly too. The more you are already a reader of the ironies and tricks of life the more you will pick up on the depth of the writing you are reading, be that intentional or not. Some readers can almost make a work of writing into a work of literature on their own, seeing, for example irony or the poetic or the lyrical or the tragic where it was opaque to its creators.

In any event, in the case of the book considered in this essay, little such originary effort is required on the reader's part, except perhaps to try to bring to conscious awareness the many impacts that are already raining down on her (or erupting up) from this brilliant *tour de force*. In the particular case at hand, the literary text does its own work first and foremost. And then the efforts of its string of authors—as well as the work of its reading as I will try to enact here—come in second.

Low-Hanging Fruit

My subject for this essay is a text that no reader can deny is a masterwork of world literature, let alone Tibetan literature. The life story of the eleventh-century yogi Milarepa (Mi la ras pa) was written in the fifteenth century by Tsangnyön Heruka. There have been many translations in many languages, and it is widely known. We also have a detailed study of the story's gradual development over time.[5] Its main episodes likely originate in oral rendition(s) of the life by the protagonist himself.[6] But even the earliest written rendition that we have now, a third-person biographical sketch by Mila's own disciple Gampopa (Sgam po pa), already mentions, for example, that there are many stories about Mila's time with Marpa (Mar pa) which Gampopa is not including in his own work.[7] In any event, like the hagiographies of other outstanding Tibetan Buddhist saints such as Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal (Ye shes mtsho rgyal), the story went through various transformations, and its elements were both repeated and developed in numerous versions over time, as laid out by Andrew Quintman (2014). Although several of the earlier versions are already replete with dialogue and interesting story twists, it is only in the hands of Tsangnyön Heruka that we get the brilliant novelistic rendering of Milarepa's life that it became. Quintman has also speculated on how Tsangnyön's presentation of the story as a first-person account allowed him the largess to imagine himself into the subjectivity of the protagonist, thereby enhancing his own—and his readers'—immersion in the drama. And so despite the fact that Tsangnyon far from invented the entire story out of thin air and in many ways drew on what was already in place, I will usually refer to the author of the *Mila Life Story* as Tsangnyön, both for convenience and in light of the significant literary embellishments that he introduced. On a few occasions I will refer to the authors in the plural, when the context warrants. I will also make reference where possible to earlier versions of the episodes I am discussing in this essay. But I will reserve for a future article a full study of the earlier versions and their exact wording in the original, in hopes of pinpointing the license Tsangnyön took in transposing, elaborating, and creating details.

In addition to its authors, we also know a lot about the reader reception of Tsangnyön's *Mila Life Story*, something relatively rare for Tibetan Studies. The book has been a superstar among Tibetans. Milarepa himself is extremely well known as a hero across the Tibetan speaking regions, regarded widely in Tibetan society as an amazing example of someone who gained enlightenment through extraordinary effort in one lifetime. His story is cited repeatedly in other Tibetan autobiographies as the inspiration for the author's own life, as well as in other genres of Tibetan writing over the centuries.

5. Quintman 2014.
6. The colophons to the *Tshe ring ma* song sections of the biography already mention Mila's participation in their commitment to writing: Quintman 2014, 200; 202.
7. Quintman 2014, 192.

The book's importance and popularity in Tibetan society was aptly confirmed for me, when, on my first visit to Lhasa in 1987, I came upon a crowd of people one evening, sitting right on the ground on Barkhor street. They were listening with rapt attention to the recitation of Tsangnyön's text by a reader perched on a pile of boxes. This was a moment of newly found social and religious freedom in Central Tibet, although it soon disappeared again after the uprising in Lhasa in 1989. But for a moment, Tibetan culture, after weathering the Chinese takeover and destructive Cultural Revolution, could be pursued freely even outside the traditional halls of the monastery. This particular group of people had chosen to spend their evening in the ancient center of the city, listening to an old but still so enjoyable favorite. On another evening soon after, I saw a very similar scene but this time someone was going through the crucial instructions in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* for his audience.[8]

Another somewhat random but also telling sign of the place of Tsangnyön's *Life of Mila* in the eyes of the Tibetan reading public came up more recently. Tashi Dekyid Monet of University of Virginia and I were engaging the contemporary poet and literary critic Chimay ('Chi med) in a conversation about the precedents for modern Tibetan literature, a conversation for which Tashi skillfully interpreted.[9] What kinds of writing does Chimay regard as fonts of inspiration, both for herself and, in her view, the movement of modern Tibetan literature in general right now? The first work out of her mouth was Tsangnyön's *Life of Mila,* prefaced by the Tibetan equivalent of "first of all and of course...although it hardly need be even mentioned...."[10]

In all honesty, the *Life of Mila* by Tsangnyön is low hanging fruit if you are looking for an example of the literary in Tibetan writing. But on the other hand, it is just so good, so well done, that it still bears detailed critical attention, even if most readers of this essay already know the book well. In what follows I've chosen a bunch of passages that still both puzzle and delight me after so many years of teaching the book. Each case provides us with an opportunity to explore a bit further just what we might mean by the literary. As we will see, the definition that I tried to sketch out at the outset above only begins to scratch the surface; at best we will see the principles I identified emerging in very different ways and on very different grounds.

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8. Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup and W. Y. Evans-Wentz certainly chose apt works to translate into English back in the early twentieth century when they first published their set of four classic Tibetan works. The set included both the *Mila Life Story* (Evans-Wentz 1928) and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Evans-Wentz 1927).
9. See https://uva.theopenscholar.com/writingtibetan/people/chimaypema-tso-འཆི་མེད་དམ་ཚྭ་འཛོམ། accessed August 2022.
10. She then added the *mgur* of Dodrubchen Jigme Denpa'i Nyima and Dza Patrul Rinpoche. I am in the process of writing an essay on the literary qualities of one of the *mgur* of Dodrubchen, along with Chimay herself and Tashi Dekyid Monet, which we three hope to publish in a future issue of JTL.

It's Real

I alluded above to the fact that literature draws power from the artfulness of life itself. The more authors and readers are attuned to the many artful ironies and sadnesses and multivalences that life presents to us, the more you get good literature. There is thus an important mirroring between literature and reality—even if all writing that faithfully depicts reality is not necessarily literature.

To be real is a necessary if not sufficient feature to make something literature. Theorists recognize it most saliently in novelistic writing since the mid-nineteenth century, but varying artful ways to represent reality can be found in poetry, epic, and religious scripture since ancient times.[11] For our purposes, we can say that there is something about good literature that is real and true in a deep or important sense. This can be so even with what is called magical realism, when things are being talked about that can only be fantasy.

Many of the episodes in the life of Mila ring very true, even despite their sometimes magical or extrasensory nature. When we think about such passages in light of the normative and standardized conventions of the Tibetan auto/biographical genre, *namthar* (*rnam thar)*, to which the *Mila Life Story* surely belongs—i.e., that this genre of writing is meant to inspire faith in the protagonist's enlightenment and portray their journey to enlightenment as a model for readers—we are astonished at how original and unconventional the *Mila Life Story* is. In many ways, it takes its place in the broad global movement we are calling "early modern," which over a period of centuries fostered a growing sense of individuality and resistance to idealized traditional norms.[12]

I say this because many of the realistic and everyday dimensions of the passages we will consider below are in some sense at odds with the normative and idealistic aspirations of Tibetan *namthar.* Realism often betrays imperfection—so often found in real people and circumstances—which is not generally part of the agenda of *namthar.* While it is not uncommon for *namthar* to portray childhood folly and error, these are resolved once the protagonist reaches enlightenment. Imperfections are also not often brought to the fore for the adult characters in the book, except as a moral lesson. It is rare to see the ironic and playful portrayal of human foible that we find in the *Mila Life Story.* In fact the realistic flourishes in the latter that I have in mind often have nothing to do with any moral lesson at all. They have nothing to do with the protagonist's journey to enlightenment. Importantly, they are not meant as models. In other episodes, as we will see below, realistic portrayals do indeed serve the hagiographical game plan but in ways that enrich the story

11. E.g. Auerbach 1953.
12. The development of autobiography is often associated with the birth of modernity; I have discussed the connection of Tibetan autobiography to such movements in Gyatso 1998. I have also discussed the category of the early modern in Gyatso 2011 and 2015. For a current slice of the academic interest in the category, see https://earlymodernworld.fas.harvard.edu/, accessed August 2022.

rather than drive it. In either case, such flourishes often provide delight for the reader, but they do inspire the question of why they are there.

Here is my favorite example of unmotivated realism from the *Mila Life Story*.

Mila has just successfully wreaked havoc on his family's enemies. His black magic has successfully caused a house to collapse while a wedding party involving these enemies was in progress, killing 35 of them. The survivors are furious. Meanwhile, at the request of his mother, Mila plans to do further damage by magically inflicting a hailstorm on the village, and travels there with a fellow magic student. He successfully makes the hailstorm rain down, badly damaging the crops, and "covering the entire valley three bricks deep. The whole mountainside was washed into ravines." The villagers are furious, and strongly suspecting that it was Mila who caused the hail, look for him and come dangerously close to his hiding place.

Mila's companion offers to pretend to be Mila, while Mila himself can flee to another place. The two agree to meet at the inn in Dingri in four days. Mila departs. The text has him recounting that "As I skirted the village of Nyanam, a dog bit my leg and I did not arrive at our meeting place on time."

Meanwhile, Mila's companion successfully serves as a decoy and then proceeds to their agreed meeting place at the inn. Mila is not there, but the companion later finds him sitting at a feast.

As the story relates, still in Mila's voice, "He came up beside me and asked, 'Why didn't you meet me yesterday?'"

And Mila replies to him, "Yesterday I went to beg and a dog bit my leg so I couldn't travel quickly. But it's nothing to worry about."

The two then proceed on their journey back to their magic teacher's home. Nothing more is ever said about the dog.[13]

I've left out a lot of the small details in this story. But I kept in the one I want to focus on: the dog.

Why add this detail about Mila's dog bite to the story? It adds nothing to the larger story whatsoever. The fact that the dog made Mila late in meeting up with his friend has no impact on anything. They managed to meet anyway. Nor is any explanation given of why Mila was bitten in the first place, such as a moralistic suggestion that it was a sign of Mila's bad karma or something

13. Summarized from Quintman 2010, 39–41. Quotes from Quintman 2010, 40; 41.

like that. Not only is nothing of that sort said, it is not even implied. The episode with the dog seems to be an entirely extraneous detail. It happened, but it had no meaning for anyone, except an inconsequential inconvenience. Except maybe that it added a little flair and color to the story.

A dog bite is an incident that one might expect on the Tibetan plateau, where the ferocity of its canines is famous. People not infrequently get bitten by dogs. It seems like an event that someone might simply add in seamlessly when recounting an exciting series of events, which surely the larger story around the dog incident were. Maybe it is a trace of an oral story, something indeed that Mila himself first said, although the episode only shows up in writing at a midpoint in the series of versions that eventually landed in Tsangnyön's masterpiece.[14] Whenever it showed up, however, it is the kind of flourish that the textual topos of a narrative affords: the addition of extraneous, but perhaps interesting or fun details.

We can agree with Roland Barthes that one thing realism does, and especially the kind of realism that may be deemed useless detail, is impart an aura of reliability.[15] In this case, however, I would not necessarily need to claim that the dog bite episode was added in intentionally in order to impart such an aura. What might have been in mind on the part of the author, I think, was simply his pure interest in the event. The details of life are personally interesting, often just for their own sake. As the writer Chimay told Monet and me, there is intrinsic interest for readers in the mundane details of people's lives. This might apply especially to happenstances, the things that happen that are both unexpected and out of our control. And what is wonderful is that the genre of autobiography and other sorts of first-person narrative become an occasion to slip some of those things in, writers started to realize, as they wrote what might otherwise have been rote or idealistically normative *namthar*.[16]

I said above that the literary draws attention to itself at a second-order level. I'm not sure I see that happening so much in this incident, although it is possible to say that the reader's attention might indeed have been drawn to the work *qua* literary writing in light of the incident's incongruence with the genre expectations of *namthar*. The more pertinent point to make here though is simply that the episode adds nothing of moral significance to the story of how Mila got enlightened. Rather, what would most have come into focus for the reader when receiving this incident was probably just a pure delight in the story. If we want to add a second-order dimension to that literary pleasure, we can speculate that reader feels glad she is reading this book when she gets to

14. Andrew Quintman, email to me dated 8/4/22: "...The story does not appear in the earliest stratum of large compilations and narratives ... that proliferated in the centuries after his death. These include the so-called Bu chen bcu gnyis, and the early Mdzod nag ma versions. It does appear, however, in a later stratum of Mdzod nag ma versions. The short/simple version is that it is found in a version published in the modern collection 'Bri gung chos mdzod. My estimate was that this version appeared... a generation prior to Tsangnyon."
15. Barthes 1989. Cf. discussion in Wood 2005.
16. Gyatso 1998, chapter one.

a delightful passage such as this. I certainly did—even though I would not have wanted to get bitten by that dog myself!

One of the virtues of the truly realistic is that it is also often quite funny, more readily so, I would venture, than something that is meant primarily to make a moral point. There are quite a few really humorous episodes in the *Mila Life Story*: for example, the hilarious episode where Mila mocks his sister's prudery by sewing a blanket she gave him into small sheathes that will cover only his ten fingers and his penis.[17] One of the reasons they are so funny is that they manage simultaneously to appear implausible and farcical, and yet remain quite realistic at the same time. The stories remind the reader of the inevitable follies of real people, in Tibet and lots of other places.

It's Real and Funny

Although there are many sad and painful scenes in the *Mila Life Story*, there are also many very funny ones. Even Mila the narrator himself characterizes his story as the possible cause for either laughter or tears as he begins to relate his life for its ostensible original recorder.[18] I dare say that a large percentage of the book's Tibetan readers and hearers—along with many other readers and hearers—have laughed and will laugh at these episodes. I only have space to talk about two of them here.

The first is a scene I have long fantasized making a film about! Although it is quite unusual, it is also a scene that you could imagine in real life. I'm thinking of the uproarious incident in which Mila's enraged mom, hot cooking utensils thrown down in fury, trips out of her kitchen, down her house stairs, and collapses in front of her singing, inebriated son. It comes up early in the story, when Mila and his family are still taking in the disaster that has befallen them. Although she is justified in being incredulous that her son is singing, the incident makes Mila's mom look comically out of control.

One day Mila is singing as he saunters home from a wedding party. His mother, cooking in her kitchen, overhears him, and is infuriated at her son for being so carefree in the midst of their most miserable days. She can't believe her ears. She comes rushing out of the house to confront him, but this does not proceed as seamlessly as she might have wished. The narrative rhythmically intones the action in an unusual litany of short phrases:

17. I presented a paper on this episode at a conference at Berkeley on humor in Buddhism some years ago.
18. Quintman 2010, 15.

Tongs tossed to the right
roasting barley to the left,
the rest of the barley was left to burn.

Grabbed a stick in her right hand
a bunch of ashes in her left,

Down she fell the long stairs,
Down she jumped the short ones,

And out she came.

She threw the ashes in my face,
and she banged me over the head
with the stick several times.[19]

Mila's mother proceeds to berate him and then promptly faints on the ground. Mila, who had been drunk from the party, is brought to his senses by her collapse. Although he was just singing for pleasure, he realizes how inappropriate it is to sing in his family's current state of suffering, and he bursts into tears.

The scene shows us a side of Mila's mom that is quite incongruous with the way she is usually presented. Normally she is painted as a very competent woman, a powerful force, and much beloved by her son, despite her sometimes rather vengeful plans. But here she is flummoxed and at wit's end.

And yet despite the incongruity the episode feels very honest and real. Indeed, incongruity is what you get when you try to portray reality. Not everything makes sense or is consistent. This is especially true of real people. In fact the very fine-grained complexity of the character portrayal of

19. My translation. Gtsang smyon Heruka 2007, 30–31: "*skam pa gyas su bor/ yos dkrugs gyon du bor/ yos brdod 'phro tshig tu bcug/ lag pa gyas su yog pa zhig khyer/ gyon du thal ba spar gang khyer/ skas ring ba la babs/ thung ba la mchongs nas phyir thon byung ste/ thal ba de gdong la btab/ yog pa de mgo la lan 'ga' rgyab....*" I have not attempted to reproduce in English the irregular metre—if it even is even that—in this passage. It seems to somewhere between verse and prose. Perhaps there is some resonance with a kind of chant, but I'm not sure.

Mila's mom throughout the book—and many other of the story's characters too, including Mila himself—makes for one of the very fine literary features of Tsangnyön's masterpiece.

Incongruity, in addition to being real, has also long been recognized as a principal basis for humor.[20] Not only do we see this in the realistically complex figuration of Mila's mom as a person, another kind of incongruity here that also makes the episode funny is between the material world and the world of intentions. The mom's accident shows how physical reality ineluctably gets in the way of the best of plans. Mila's mother is morally outraged and intends to communicate that to her son, but she fails to pay attention to the height of the stairs, and the heat of her cooking fire, and the rest of the physical world around her as she jumps up to reproach him. This makes for a profound disconnect between her intentions and her dignity and the order of her world. What ensues is good slapstick. And it also strikes us as a plausible scenario. People do fall and otherwise create havoc when they are overcome with anger and not paying attention.

Let us also note, finally, that like the dog bite, Mila's mother's disregard of her burning food and clumsy negotiation of the stairs does not contribute to the moral lesson of the story. One could say of course that Mila's shock at her dramatic reaction, not to mention the rightness of her rebuke, surely does function at a critical juncture in the story to get him seriously on the path to the Black Arts, and from there eventually on the path of Dharma. But it is the particular rendering of the mom's trip down the stairs and the detail devoted to it that we are talking about here. It would have been sufficient to mention her rebuke if we were just interested in the moral lesson. What I am struck by is how this detailed farcical rendering of her slip contributes to the artfulness of the story, and to our pleasure and engrossment in reading it, despite its sadness and pain at the same time.

There is often incongruity between our intentions and what the world deals us in real life. While realism is already in play in ancient literature, its increasing salience is part of a broader tendency in world literature and thought since the early modern period to disavow the ideal in favor of the everyday.[21] We already pointed out above the modern quality of dwelling on happenstance such as we found in the dog bite incident. In these and other ways, Tsangnyön's *Mila Life Story* trades on the tendency of reality to undermine our script. Try as we might, we can't evade it. But the effort to do so can look comical. The author of the *Mila Life Story* knows this very well.

Actually, though, some people are indeed able to overcome the physical laws of our planet. At one point later in the story, after Mila has become adept in yogic winds and heat, he gains the ability to fly.[22] Unfortunately, however, most other people remain enmeshed in the physical laws of the universe.

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20. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/#Inc Accessed August 2022.
21. For the importance of the everyday in modern thought and writing, one classic source is Taylor 1989, part 3.
22. Quintman 2010, 149. Cf. Gtsang smyon 2007, 175–6.

One day, in order to practice, Milarepa flew over a small village where a man and his son were plowing a field. The son notices the man in the air and shouts, "Father, look at that amazing sight. A man is flying!" and drops his plow to stare.

It turns out the two are related to a woman who was killed when Mila murdered the 35 wedding guests with his Black Magic. They are not very pleased with him, to say the least. The father snorts, "What's so amazing or such a great spectacle?" and orders his son to keep working. He is determined not to give Mila any more credit than he has already gotten for his powers. He is not going to acknowledge that a man is flying in the air.

But the father then goes on to warn his son not to let the moving shadow of the devious Mila touch him. And lo and behold, the father himself, afraid that the shadow might touch him, starts twisting this way and that to get out from under it too.

The father is afraid of Mila's power despite his impervious facade. His body belies his words. He is truly afraid of the specter of the spooky silhouette landing on him, and he is afraid of what Mila's power might wreak on him. In falling all over himself to avoid a mere shadow, he ends up acknowledging the astounding spectacle of Mila's feat after all.

The fact that Mila is flying is part of the moral lessons of the hagiography. It demonstrates Mila's power over the elements and his success at yogic agility. The fact that the father ends up demonstrating his fear and acknowledgement of Mila's power is also part of the hagiography. But the man twisting his body in a minor panic about a shadow while claiming not to be impressed is not. Rather, it is a slice of life. The detail makes the episode more real than if the father had immediately and simply expressed awe at the flying man. It admits the complexity and dubiousness of the very proposition that a man could fly in the first place. And again, it shows complexity, if not incongruity, in human character: denial, faith, anger, superstition, bravado. All at the same time. It makes the father's acknowledgement of Mila's power all the more sweet.

Multiple Points of View

Noticing incongruities leads me to notice that the Mila story often sets up pairs of things that are incongruous. We just saw a few cases where pairs of things facilitate complex character figurations of the same person (competent mom/out of control mom; imperious dad/superstitious dad). Paying more attention to such "doubles" draws our attention to other literary devices in the

work. There are actually a lot of them, and interestingly, they emerge both synchronically and diachronically.

The spatial and temporal topoi of a text allow a variety of figurations of the same person or object in adjacent or subsequent sections. That the author of the *Mila Life Story* is using such affordances of the text to increase impact is nowhere more pronounced in what we can name as the central problematic that the story dares to raise altogether, namely whether Mila's guru Marpa is actually enlightened or not, a qualified trustworthy guru or not. In fact we are given several points of view on that question, and at least two, if not more, figurations of Marpa. Here the realism, for what it is worth, is in fact intricately connected to the larger hagiographical agenda of the work, and cannot be strictly separated from it, in contrast to what I suggested for other episodes above. But that is in itself a quite interesting feature of the literary: the realistic complexities that the literary side of the story allows actually enhance traditional expectations about disciples and teachers.

As we will see later, the undecideability of Marpa's character is already set up when they first meet. But the issue emerges in earnest later when, famously, Marpa gives Mila the task to build a tower.[23]

Marpa keeps changing the tower's design, making Mila pull down what he had already built and start all over again. As this starts happening repeatedly, Mila becomes more and more skeptical as to whether Marpa knows what he is doing. Marpa even allows that he was drunk on previous occasions, but keeps reassuring Mila that his new version of the tower is the final plan. At one point Mila is driven to ask for Marpa's wife to witness Marpa's instructions. Meanwhile Mila is also losing faith that he will ever receive the tantric teachings he is seeking from Marpa. He suffers from exhaustion and sores on his body from the work, plus he has no funds for the initiation offerings he must give. Marpa even begins to be violent with him, slapping him and pulling him by the hair to eject him from the line of his disciples.

The episode is mostly recounted from Mila's first person perspective, but we are also told things that complicate that point of view. We learn that the tower has a strategic purpose beyond the purification of Mila: it is simultaneously going to allow Marpa to claim the land on which it will stand, in opposition to his relatives who are also claiming the land.

23. Quintman 2010, chapter 5.

This is the first in a series of information bits that could conceivably come from Mila's account of what he knew by the time he became an old man, when, according to the larger frame of the narrative, he was telling his life story to Rechungpa (Ras chung pa).[24] But as more details of the tower-building episode emerge, for example regarding certain discussions between Marpa and his wife, we can say that Mila would not have known about them at the time they occurred—and certainly not ever the blow by blow dialogue. As the episode proceeds, and we learn that Marpa's wife is starting to intervene on Mila's behalf, we realize that we are receiving information that Mila at the time could not possibly have known, since the very flummoxing to which Mila is being subjected would not work if he had known it.

In particular, Marpa is shown to have compassion and not to be the uncaring brute he is starting to look like from Mila's perspective. When his wife tells Marpa about the huge open wound oozing blood and pus on Mila's back, Marpa asks, in a pause in his show of bravado, "Does he really have a sore?" It appears he did not know! Marpa proceeds to summon Mila and examines him, and then encourages Mila to persist, giving him a pad to protect his back. When Mila appears to be accepting the device, our narrator tells us that Marpa secretly sheds tears and becomes convinced that Mila is an extraordinary disciple. Mila for his part is struggling between wanting another lama, just so that he could actually get some formal teachings, and being convinced that no one but Marpa has the true teachings to transmit. Two views of the same moment, from two different perspectives.

The fact that Marpa's tears are secret means that there is a difference in the story being told to the reader, and the story as it was unfolding for Mila the young student. So, double stories, both happening at the same time. Why? We can say it's a common feature of reality: things look differently from different perspectives, and different perspectives abound. And in this case the realistic figuration even has a function in the hagiographical agenda, complex as that is becoming.

Marpa keeps up his appearance to Mila of gruff determination so that his disciple will continue at his labors, but is shown to the readers to be concerned that his prize pupil will leave him. Once, when Marpa finds out that Mila has decided to run away and is already on the road,

> His expression turned dour and a tear ran down his cheek. "Kagyu lamas, dakinis, and dharma protectors," he called out, "turn around my fortunate son." Then, covering his head, he sat there quietly.[25]

For his part, the story never shows Mila fully losing faith in the lama's powers, but only the ques-

24. Quintman 2010, 11–15. The frame is reiterated at the start and end of the rest of the chapters in the book.
25. Quintman 2010, 67.

tion of whether he will ever grant teachings to him.[26] Even when Mila is finally informed of Marpa's concern for him, he is not convinced that the lama really thinks of him as his "fortunate" disciple.[27] But Marpa's actions do make us, the readers, wonder about his supposedly enlightened powers. On at least one occasion Marpa even falls asleep after drinking too much, much to his own detriment.[28] We also know that he was ignorant of the fact that Mila had left him, and that he was uncertain of what would happen.[29] It starts to seem that Marpa was not entirely sure of what he was doing at all. We also see him outraged when he learns that his own wife practiced deception to get Mila teachings. He is even on the verge of beating her, trying to gain entrance to the room where she is hiding, and failing that, finally covering his head with his shawl again.[30]

It is only when Mila is on the verge of suicide and all the other disciples are trying to protect him that Marpa fully relents. And that is when Mila is finally informed of his intentionality.[31] Marpa later recounts that:

> In order to purify your karmic obscurations, I repeatedly drove you to despair with many cruelties such as burdening you with constructing towers… and kicking you out of the initiation line. Yet you never gave way to wrong views.[32]

Apparently, part and parcel of this skillful means that there must be moments when Mila doubts his teacher, and struggles with his faith. But even there, interestingly, Marpa didn't anticipate his wife's intervention in his skillful means agenda, which eventuates in the outcome that Mila only went through eight of the intended nine incidents wherein he was brought to despair and confusion by Marpa's strange demands.[33] And that, in Marpa's words, means the following:

> Had I the opportunity to punish this son of mine nine times, he would have become a Buddha devoid of physical remainder and without need to take another human birth. Since this did not happen, some slight residue of negativities and obscurations remains, brought about by Dakmema's (Bdag med ma) foolishness.

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26. Quintman 2010, 63; 65.
27. Quintman 2010, 67.
28. Quintman 2010, 68. This was actually engineered by Marpa's wife Dakmema, as she knew she could use his drunken stupor to sneak one of Marpa's greatest treasures, the ruby rosary beads of his Indian master Naropa, out of their house, things that Marpa would never agree to give away if he was alert.
29. Quintman 2010, 69.
30. Quintman 2010, 78.
31. Quintman 2010, 82.
32. Quintman 2010, 85.
33. This detail is already in the *Bu chen bcu gnyis* biography: Andrew Quintman, email to me dated 8-4-2022.

> Still, your major negativities have been eradicated by means of eight great agonies and many minor adversities. Now I shall accept you as a disciple and give you the oral instructions that are like this old man's heart.[34]

The ingrediency of Dakmema's own teaching devices and intentions is another dimension of the narrative that deserves a separate essay, as do a slew of other episodes that betray fascinating and suggestive assumptions about gender. For now we can just say that it is an astonishing piece of the story that Dakmema harbors an unpredictable agency of her own that cannot be fully controlled or known by Marpa's supposedly enlightened wisdom and skillful means. Marpa attributes this to the fact she is a woman, and therefore has special compassion.[35] I myself am interested in the way that Dakmema's disruption of Marpa's plans illustrates once again the story's allegiance to a kind of reality—its uncontrollability, to be exact, and the separate points of views and intentions of other people.

The plurality of perspective achieved by the author of the Mila story is an example of what can be achieved when the textual topos is used to produce impactful literature. To tell a story, any story, one has to take up a perspective from which the story is seen and told. But if a second-order self-consciousness emerges of the affordance that this requirement entails, then perspectives can be played with—not necessarily to immediately go to the place of an omniscient narrator, but rather simply to multiplicity ... and perhaps irreconcilability.

Multiple perspectivalism mirrors the actual state of things. It forces the reader to wrestle with their own point of view. In this case we can almost say that the reader is put through a test of faith of their own. This is one of the ways that we can see kinds of realism that actually feed the hagiographical agenda. The reader does not have the same faith in Marpa that Mila did due to his karmic connection with the master and the anticipatory dreams that shored him up in times of doubt. Rather, the reader must wrestle with their own doubt in light of what they know, differently than does Mila the character. On the one hand, the reader will be alarmed at the harsh treatment that Marpa deals to Mila (as are Dakmema and others inside the story). And the reader will also be alarmed that Marpa seems to be able to make mistakes. On the other hand, the reader knows, simultaneously with the events unfolding, that Marpa loves his disciple and is performing an elaborate ruse out of compassion and an endeavor to use skillful means to heal and mature a very sinful disciple (Mila the murderer). Perhaps the reader proceeds to reach a lesson that tells them that in the real world enlightenment and skillful means are hard. That does not have to make

34. Quintman 2010, 83.

35. Quintman 2010, 82: "As for Dakmema, to begin with she is a woman. She also has tremendous compassion and could not bear the situation, so she too was correct. But forging the letter and sending the gift of religious objects were serious offenses."

the reader lose faith in Marpa despite his fumbles; perhaps they even admire him all the more for achieving such a great pupil even despite his own anger issues.

So perhaps we are made privy to Marpa's true compassion, despite his cruelty and anger, because we, the prosaic samsaric readers, are much more likely to doubt Marpa than is Mila. Mila has his own intimations and visions that work against the evidence of Marpa's unreliability.[36] In contrast, we the readers have to judge only on the basis of what the text tells us. And so perhaps we need extra help. In this way, the literary excellence of the text serves to teach and draw in the reader, as well as the characters in the story. And as Marpa continues in the passage just quoted above, he clearly suggests that Mila's faith will serve as a beacon for future would-be disciples of his own:

> Therefore, the disciples in your lineage will... have all the essential qualities of a student, including faith, diligence, wisdom and compassion. ... Finally they will become fully qualified lamas.[37]

This makes clear that Mila's "pure vision," the technical term for the Tibetan tantric Buddhist student's ability to see the pure side of the teacher as what is truly real, is a model for his future disciples, to which we can add the readers of the text. Mila's faith makes for the occasion for Mila's future lineage to have faith in their own teachers. In other words, perhaps the reader is put into training by the *Mila Life Story* for her future discipleship with a difficult teacher too—or maybe just an all-too-human one. And while we may need a little more help than the exemplar does, the overall logic explains why Marpa *had* to be portrayed as fallible. We will all have to deal with human teachers, and so we had better get ready for that now.

Clicks Into Place Over Time

We just followed a set of synchronic discrepant doubles—several simultaneous versions of the same story, and how they make the occasion for deep moral reflection on the part of the reader.

There are also ways that doubles emerge over time in the *Mila Life Story*, and are not simultaneous. Such asynchronous pairs serve in different ways to give the story depth, texture, and a heightened ability to impact, and even to surprise, the reader.

Even a small detail in the *Mila Life Story* can exemplify the temporality of this device. The following instance would be delightful if it wasn't so terribly sad.

36. Quintman 2010, 63.
37. Quintman 2010, 85.

As Mila the narrator recounts the fortunes of his early life, he remembers how "we two, brother and sister, had dangling locks plaited with turquoise and gold." He is reveling in how local folks admired their ornaments and prosperity.[38] But the death of his father turned Mila's life around 180 degrees: his relatives illicitly took over his father's patrimony, leaving his mother, his sister and himself in desperate poverty. As he describes their resulting misery—the same misery that so enraged his mother at his singing—he adds comments on the irony around those ornaments. "Our hair, once dangling in locks plaited with gold and turquoise, turned ashen and thin and became infested with lice. Sensitive folks who saw or heard us all broke down in tears."[39]

In some ways, the small irony of lice replacing the turquoise beads that formerly decorated their hair locks highlights the tragedy even more sharply than the far more significant losses of sufficient food and forced toil. It is a powerful literary device: the lice and the turquoise are so similar in size—almost doubles. Both are small bits of stuff, and both easily capable of getting entangled in one's hair. But over time one has changed dreadfully into the other! The preciseness of the incongruous juxtaposition that emerges over time—when jewels come to turn into worms—helps brings to the fore the disaster that has happened to Mila's family. Someone looking at them who was familiar with their former affluence would do a double take—and then break down in tears, as Mila said.

The fact that the juxtaposition only emerges over time serves to give the true significance of things an opportunity to unfold. As in the case of the synchronic doubles, it makes for depth in what is being portrayed, showing that there is more to things than immediately meets the eye. But it does these things in a somewhat different way. It is more final. Unlike two alternate synchronic points of view about which there is an important undecidability, once the outcome finally becomes clear over time, it takes definite precedence over the earlier portrayal.

Again, recall that these moves are made possible by the affordance of text, whereby the reader can turn and reflect back on the initial portrayal of something, juxtaposing now what one didn't know before about where it was going.

Perhaps the most iconic example of this temporal device would be the prophetic dream, whose significance takes time to fully unfold. There are several important such dreams in the Mila story. One is the auspicious and prophetic dream that Marpa has on the eve of Mila' arrival at his home

38. Quintman 2010, 19.
39. Quintman 2010, 22.

to beg his guidance. As if to confirm the truth of this omen, Marpa's wife also has an auspicious prophetic dream on the same night with some of the same elements. This doubling in itself would be synchronistic, but both only finally become clear over time.

Marpa knows that the two dreams are "in accord" but won't admit it to his wife, leaving both her and the reader hanging as to what to make of them.[40] In this instance, the dreams signal from the beginning that their significance will only unfold over time. And as we already saw, that unfolding confounds our expectations, since it seems Dakmema did not act entirely in accord with Marpa's plan after all.

Another case of things morphing and shifting in significance over time are the initial offerings that Mila makes to Marpa when they first meet. Marpa imperiously rejects his offerings and kicks them out the door, but does accept an empty copper kettle with four handles, banging it to make it ring aloud and filling it with melted butter.[41] And yet it is only much later, when Marpa finally accepts Mila into his circle, that Marpa discloses the auspiciousness of each of the details on the kettle's design and quality, what it means that it was initially empty, and why he filled it with ghee.[42]

The significance of both dreams and offerings are common tropes in Tibetan culture for the fact that auspiciousness and value can be anticipated but only fully actualized over time. But the final juxtaposition I want to discuss where something shifts over time is quite unusual in its structure, and a brilliant literary touch of the *Mila Life Story*.

Here the time it takes for the signs to resolve is much shorter than for the ones just discussed, which took months to unfold. This time the transition is complete in the course of a day. The episode comes up prior to the long process of Marpa's teaching method when Mila begins to build the tower. It concerns instead the very first few hours of Mila's first meeting with the master.[43]

Aware after his special dream that Mila will be arriving that very day, Marpa the Great Translator decides to meet Mila incognito. He goes out to plow his field, something he had never done before. Mila encounters him, but ignoring his deep instincts, assumes this cannot be the great Marpa. This gives Marpa a chance to test Mila's character. He gets Mila to finish plowing the field,

40. Quintman 2010, 48–9. He owns up to some of the significance of his own dream at Quintman 2010, 83.
41. Quintman 2010, 53.
42. Quintman 2010, 84.
43. Marpa's disguise for Mila as a farmer and subsequent revelation of himself as the great master is already to be found in *Bu chen bcu gnyis*, ff. 5a-b, but it is different and is sustained over a month. Among other details, the traces of mud on the master's face are missing in this early version of the story: Andrew Quintman, personal notes on *Bu chen bcu gnyis*, provided to me in an email dated 8/30/2022.

while he takes off. Mila is eventually led into the master's house and finds him seated on a set of cushions on a carpet. Mila recognizes the same man he had met plowing his field. He is different only in that he had cleaned himself up, although Mila notes that there are still traces of dirt from his day of plowing on his brow, nostrils, moustache and goatee. In any case, Mila still doesn't realize who he is looking at. He is still asking to meet the famous master, when the Lama himself, in some exasperation, has to finally identify himself verbally, and then orders the young man to prostrate.[44]

So here we have another set of doubles who, on the one hand, are totally different—one is a common laborer, the other a great master seated on a raised seat—and yet on the other hand are the same person. A single person has morphed significantly in a matter of hours. It all appears to be a special teaching device for Milarepa, who needs to learn how to see Marpa as a master. The device doesn't make it easy for Mila, however, and it marks the beginning of a series of challenges for Mila to discern who Marpa really is. (The reader, in contrast, is simply informed what is going on.)

I want to focus in particular on one curious detail in the story. Why are we told that traces of the plowing episode still linger on the cleaned up face of the Great Translator? These bits of dirt would seem to undermine the plan to confuse Mila with two different Marpas, the farmer and the cleaned up master. Instead, the dirt peeking out from the edges of Marpa's face bridges the two. They hint that the new man Mila is meeting is not entirely new after all. But the leftovers of the plowing escapade were apparently not even known to Marpa himself. At least the story gives no inkling that Marpa left the dust on his face on purpose. It is Mila the narrator who remembers noticing the tell-tale signs. And yet he himself doesn't quite grasp what they are telling him.

What really is being shown, then, is a puzzle. The dirt traces are in some senses symbolic. But are they telling Mila that Marpa is not fully liberated from "the dust of the world," a common Mahayana Buddhist trope, even though he is elsewhere in the story claimed to be a full buddha?[45] Or is the very fact that Marpa bridges samsara and nirvana in this way actually right in line with Mahayana theology, indeed par excellence? I don't mean to answer such questions here, but only to show how the literary details force Mila to confront them.

It is also the case that Marpa's imperfect disguise trades heavily on hard truths of material reality. The reality is that, after all, it is hard to get every last mote of dust off your face. What does that tell Mila—and/or us—about teachers and our paths?

The fact that Marpa did not make sufficient effort to wipe himself might just be showing a great master to be human, imperfect and flawed. Or it could be highlighting with approval

44. Quintman 2010, 49–51.
45. Especially Quintman 2010, 108.

the very fact that he had sweat and dirt on him in the first place—of course he did! In the end, whatever we make of it, the incident clearly opens up a set of thorny issues around what otherwise would surely be an inconsequential narrative detail. It reveals something about Marpa. And perhaps it also reveals something about masters in general. It is a point that could be stated outright, but works far better when its significance emerges gradually—both for Mila and for the reader as well, despite the extra help the latter has been getting from the narrator.

The incongruity between the various sides of Marpa needs to be reckoned minutely, and that takes time. Understanding of the guru needs to dawn deeply, and it requires consideration of everything from the nature of dirt to the most elevated Buddhist theory—and a lot of personal idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies in between. That deep reckoning is what has to happen for this story to make its impact; clunking either Mila or the reader over the head with some propositional claim would not have been enough.

Leaping Across the Chasm

Thus have we seen the realistic and to some degree modernistic details in Tsangnyön's *Mila Life Story* sometimes supporting the hagiographical underpinnings of the story, and sometimes subverting them. Either way, we have seen how literary flourishes and affordances deeply enhance the interest, the impact, and the pleasures of a narrative text.

I want to draw attention to one more device found in the *Mila Life Story* that lifts up the work of literature. It has to do with a kind of action in the narrative that mirrors the acts of writing and reading themselves. Like several of the foregoing examples, the device also has to do with the effort to understand things, and the fact that such understanding takes time to unfold. But in the following instances, the doubled things are especially explicit about their primary nature as (would-be) communicative signs.

The outstanding example in my opinion would be the highly amusing and satisfying episode that follows Mila's block-buster black magic killing 35 people at the wedding of his cousin.[46]

Mila's mother learns that her surviving relatives are plotting to kill both her and her son. She resolves to send money and warnings to Mila, who is still living at the residence of his black magic teacher. She finds a pilgrim in transit, and decides to use him as a messenger. She provides the

46. Quintman 2010, 36–39; The episode is already mentioned in very brief outline in the *Bu chen bcu gnyis* f. 3a: Andrew Quintman, personal notes on *Bu chen bcu gnyis*, provided to me in an email dated 8/30/2022. But it is much elaborated in Tsangnyon's version.

pilgrim with hospitality while she mends his cloak, securing at the same time seven pieces of gold under a black patch, and embroidering over it, on the inside of the cloak, a design of white stars resembling the constellation Pleiades. Then she gives a letter to the pilgrim, who proceeds to find Mila and deliver the letter.

Problem is, the letter is "written in code." Nor does it directly mention the gold pieces, of whose presence in his cloak, for safety's sake, the pilgrim messenger was of course unaware.

The letter advises Mila to look for provisions in the region of a black cloud and the constellation Pleiades, adding that the pilgrim/messenger himself lives in that region. Mila is desperate for provisions but flummoxed by this opaque set of instructions. So is his teacher. But his teacher's wife "possessed the marks of a wisdom dakini." She immediately knows what to do. Dulling the pilgrim with beer (something that Marpa's wife also does to Marpa) she becomes playful. Taking the pilgrim's cloak off his body, she dances around with it, saying "What fun it would be to wear such a cloak and travel around the countryside."[47] What a playful lady! Continuing to dance out of the room—and out of sight—she removes the gold pieces, mends the patch as before, and delivers back his cloak to the messenger. Later she hands the gold prize to Mila, and painstakingly unpacks for him and his lama each of the elements of the message's code. Mila and the lama are impressed, with the lama adding "They say you women are canny, and it is true."[48]

Once again, the details of this episode are hardly needed to convey the main events of the life story, which would be concerned merely with Mila getting his money so he could get on with his training. Why is it included? Certainly part of the answer has to be simply for the pure delight of watching two very clever and resourceful people in action. And that is not to mention the special pleasure that both are women, with at least one of them identified explicitly as a *dakini*. We might be put in mind of the famous "dakini sign language" over which women hold special mastery. But why would the author bring that in here?

I don't think that the trope of dakini sign language has an explicit or intentional role in Mila's progress towards enlightenment. We do see several other impressive instances of special female-sent messages adorning the *Mila Life Story* however. One more brief episode that exhibits some of the same dynamics, and equally brilliant in its resourcefulness, is another message sent by a woman to Mila, this time by Dakmema.[49]

47. Quintman 2010, 38.
48. Quintman 2010, 39. Cf. Gtsang smyon 2007, 47.
49. Quintman 2010, 73-4.

Mila is with Lama Ngok and trying to practice, but it has recently been revealed that Marpa has not given his blessing for Mila to study with him after all, and that an earlier letter from Marpa was faked by Dakmema. Marpa has invited Ngok to attend a celebration for Marpa's son, and has ordered him to bring the evil Mila along as well. The prospects don't look good for Mila to have to face Marpa, but Dakmema sends him a message at this point to encourage him to come and tell him that Marpa will now give him teachings.

One wonders how she can be so sure. That is what ends up happening, but not before a series of missteps that, given the way they are portrayed, seem unlikely to have been anticipated. But let's leave that question aside. For now, I am merely interested in the way that Dakmema sends the message. She writes it on paper and inserts it inside of a dice made of clay. She asks someone who was being sent to make arrangements with Lama Ngok to give this dice to Mila, who had previously left it behind. It is clear she wants to conceal the fact she is sending Mila a message—maybe because she does not want it to be known how much she is intervening in Marpa's treatment of him? But again, I am getting distracted. The really interesting part is *the way* Dakmema conceals the message, how opaque it is to Mila, and how Mila ultimately figures it out.

Realizing the die has come from Dakmema's hand, Mila receives it as a blessing. But after the messenger leaves, Mila finds himself desiring to play with the die, and starts to do so. And then he starts to reflect that he had never done that before in Dakmema's presence. And that probably her sending him a die means that she no longer cares for him, since dice are a bad sign for Mila. It was a result of dice that his ancestors had to leave their homeland in disgrace, bringing about much hardship. Swinging it above his head Mila slams the die to the ground. It breaks and out tumbles the rolled paper message. "Son, the Lama is set to give you initiations and teachings, so come with Lama Ngok."[50]

50. Quintman 2010, 4. Cf. Gtsang smyon 2007, 91.

You have to be impressed with Dakmema's resourcefulness in getting Mila to find a piece of paper stuffed inside of a small clay die, and you have to be impressed with how the narrative portrays the way this unfolds. Mila is shown going through a series of reactions from gratitude, to desire to play, to puzzlement and finally to anger.[51] In the course of trying to figure out why Dakmema sent him something in which he had never shown interest in her presence, he remembers the connection of dice to his own difficult family history, when gambling caused the impoverishment and homelessness of his ancestors. That makes him angry, suspecting that she is taunting him. And that makes him hurl the die to the ground. And that causes it to break open.

And that is what Dakmema wanted to happen. Indeed she is taunting him, cannily realizing that Mila will go through exactly the uncomfortable emotions that he does, but that doing so will get her secret message delivered. And of course once he reads it he realizes she does indeed remain deeply on his side. The text does not lay this out explicitly but it is easy for us readers to realize it.

If we can transpose the trope of messages and their decodement to the more general act of reading, one of the things that both these two last passages mirror—two messages sent across distances and time and in coded fashion—is the difficulty of reading signs altogether, and the need for ingenuity and imagination to get from sign to signified. Ingenuity is required of the original sender, or author, and ingenuity is needed by the recipient. And the medium itself—be it sewn cloth, clay, or bits of bark or paper—affords an extenuated process of unfoldment that ultimately delivers something important. A train of thought goes circuitously from author to sign medium to recipient, bringing along associations and second reckonings and self-reflection. Incubation; stewing; embroidering over; and maybe in the process a glimpse in the mirror. In other words, the work of literature. Perhaps the story is showing us people undergoing what the story itself aims to do. And so we recognize another one of the ways to detect literary self-reflexivity in the *Mila Life Story*. It leads us to appreciate and enjoy the text.

I don't think that any of the authors of these wonderful passages had such an aim explicitly in mind. Rather, I would just say they were delighting in the arc of the story, and the details that powerfully engage its telling and hearing or reading. But in order to do so, they would also, at some level, have to be reveling in the very affordances that story-telling provides to develop such details. And they would also have to have a fine appreciation of the sense of reality of it all. This is a reality that only comes from attending to details, details that may not always be conscious or explicit, but eventually ring true, and lead to a better understanding of the world and how it works.

In my book, that qualifies as part of the Buddha's dispensation, whether it was ever named as such or not.

51. Translator Kazi Dawa Samdup made clear that Mila's hurl of the die was an act of anger. Evans-Wentz 1928, 122.

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Distilling Joys and Woes: An Appreciation of Contemporary Tibetan Women's Writing

སྐྱིད་སྡུག་བསྡུལ་བའི་དེད་རབས་བོད་མོའི་བརྩམས་ཆོས་ཚྭང་རོལ།

Lama Jabb

Abstract With the exception of a few remarkable female luminaries, traditional Tibetan literature hardly has any room for the public voice of Tibetan women. Women have been mostly excluded from and totally marginalized in the Tibetan republic of letters, which has been a men's world for an extremely long time. The Tibetan intellectual scene and Tibetan language literary production are unfortunately still dominated by men. However, Tibetan women writers are making welcome inroads into these exclusive male reserves. In recent decades there has been a refreshing proliferation of Tibetan women's literary voices. By giving artistic utterance to the many joys and woes of Tibetan women from all walks of life, contemporary Tibetan women's writing not only diversifies and enriches Tibetan literature, but also helps us appreciate Tibetan history, religion, culture and society anew through fresh and critical perspectives and insights.

This lecture will give an overview of contemporary Tibetophone women's writing and highlight some of its predominant themes that critique major socio-cultural norms and complex repressive structures. Through the exploration of specific poems and short stories it will demonstrate how Tibetan female writers address exploitative relations between men and women, domestic and other forms of violence against women, and the marginalization and exclusion of women from education, employment, artistic production, political power and the economic system. Alongside bestowing delight and insight, in their creative hands literature functions as a mode of redress that gives expression to the repressed and counters oppressive forces and injustices.

What follows is the keynote I delivered at "Tibetan Women Writing Symposium: A Celebration of Tibetan Women's Literature," University of Virginia on Friday April 8, 2022. I am extremely grateful to the organisers and the funders for their efficiency, hospitality and generosity, and to the speakers and attendees for their eloquence, insight and kindred spirit.

ཨོཾ་བདེ་ལེགས་སུ་གྱུར་ཅིག

ཚུ་འཛིོན་དཀར་པོའི་གླིག་ཁེང་དུ་བ་ཅན།།

མཁའ་ཡི་མཛེས་བྱེད་འདྲ་བའི་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་མ། །
དྲི་ཟའི་ན་ཚུང་དབུས་ན་འཛོ་སྐེག་མཁན། །
རིང་ནས་བཙེ་བའི་ལྷ་མོ་ད་ཚུར་བྱོན། །

པཎ་ཆེའི་བཞིན་ལ་གཡོ་ལྡན་བྱང་བའི་མིག །
མཐོན་མཐིང་རལ་པའི་རྩེ་ན་འོད་དཀར་ཅན། །
རོལ་སྐེག་གར་གྱིས་འགྱིང་བའི་དབྱངས་ཅན་མ། །
ད་དུང་བདག་ལ་ངག་གི་དབང་ཕྱུག་སྩོལ། །

རོལ་རྩེད་གར་གྱི་ཉམས་ལྡན་རི་དྭགས་མིག །
མིག་གིས་བལྟ་བས་མི་ངོམ་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་མ། །
མ་ལྟར་བཙེ་བ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་བདག་གི་ངག །
ངག་དབང་ལྷ་མོ་ཉིད་དང་མཚུངས་པར་མཛོད། །

སྟོན་ཟླ་རྒྱས་པའི་དཔལ་ལས་ལྷག་པར་མཛེས། །
ཚངས་དབྱངས་སྐྱན་པའི་གདངས་ཀྱང་ཟིལ་གྱིས་གནོན། །
ཟབ་ཡངས་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་འཇིང་ལྟར་དཔག་དཀའ་བ། །
དབྱངས་ཅན་ལྷ་མོའི་སྐུ་གསུང་ཐུགས་ལ་འདུད། །[1]

Let me begin with Je Tsongkhapa's sublime poetic praise to Yangchen Lhamo, Sarasvati, the Goddess of Melody. May she bless us and our symposium with her grace, compassion, wisdom and eloquence!

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the magnificent organizers and the University of Virginia for pulling off this unprecedented symposium against all the odds. As one of the initiators I have been privy to the incredible amount of time, energy and hard work you have put into it over two years. We owe you an immense debt of gratitude. I would also like to say a heartfelt thank you to the organizers for inviting me as a keynote speaker to such a rare and novel occasion.

1. Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa 2018 kha, *"Sgra dbyangs lha mo spyan drangs nas bstod cing gsol ba gdab pa/*, 259–260.

Introduction: Silencing Women

In recent decades there has been a refreshing yet long-overdue proliferation of Tibetan women's literary voices. By giving artistic utterance to the many joys and woes of Tibetan women from all walks of life, contemporary Tibetan women's writing not only diversifies and enriches Tibetan literature, but also helps us appreciate Tibetan history, religion, culture and society anew through fresh and critical perspectives and insights.

Today I will be focusing on a few dominant critical themes that relate to the female condition. However, it must be stressed that contemporary Tibetan women's writing is neither confined to these topics nor consumed by merely female related issues nor finding faults with Tibetan social reality. It covers a multiplicity of subject matters including many aspects of the Tibetan civilization worthy of celebration. These include Tibetan history, shared myths and memories, religious practice and wisdom, cultural riches, language, sacred landscape, and of course, women's artistic creativity and intellectual acumen. My contemplation of the critical dimension is by its nature reductive, but it does bring into sharp relief some of the serious socio-cultural challenges we Tibetans must address.

As in most cultures and societies, the silencing of women's voices in the public and private space was and is still a common phenomenon in Tibetan communities. It pains and shames me to acknowledge this, but with the exception of a few extraordinary female luminaries, traditional Tibetan literature hardly has any room for the public voice of Tibetan women. Women have been mostly excluded from and totally marginalized in the Tibetan republic of letters, which has been a men's world for an awfully long, long time.

Sharing the sexist attitudes of many traditional societies Tibetan women have been ordered not to speak in public. Women—especially new brides—are frequently instructed: མི་མང་ནང་ནས་ལ་མ་མང་། "Don't run your mouth in public!" མི་མང་ནང་ནས་ལ་མ་གྱགས། "Don't open your mouth in public!"[2] Tibetan maxims advise men: བུད་མེད་ཀྱི་ཁ་མ་རྒྱགས། བུད་མེད་ཀྱི་ཁ་མ་ཉན།, which can be translated literally as: "Don't run after women's mouths!"[3] "Don't listen to women's mouths!"

Even the cherished མི་ཆོས་གཙང་མ་བཅུ་དྲུག *The Sixteen Pure Human Laws*—highly influential ethical codes attributed to the Emperor Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po)—contains a principle that proclaims: སྒོས་ཀྱི་ནང་དུ་བྱད་མེད་ཀྱི་ལ་མི་ཉན་ཅིང་རང་རྐྱགས་འཛིན་པ། "In deliberations one should uphold independence and should not listen to women."[4] Elsewhere, this code is for-

2. All the translations are by the author.
3. A less literal rendition would be: "Don't follow women's words!"
4. Cited in Tashi Tsering Josayma 2017, 117. Varying ways of listing the Sixteen Pure Human Laws are found in Tibetan historical sources. Some of these different enumerations neither contain exactly sixteen codes nor feature a specific principle advising against consulting women. On the origins of these famous laws and a comparative analysis of their variations see A tsar+ya khang dkar tshul khrims skal bzang 1985, 250–262 & Roesler 2015, 389–409.

mulated more palatably as ངན་པའི་གོས་མི་ཉན་ཞིང་རང་ཚུགས་འཛིན་པ། "One should uphold independence and should not listen to the counsel of bad people." But even then, "bad people" are often conflated with women in subsequent interpretations.

The silencing of female voices in public speech and the exclusion of women from collective decision-making go hand in hand with the downright misogynistic portrayals of women as deceptive, dangerous, untrustworthy, and ruinous, (e.g., སྐྱེ་རིང་མ་དང་བློ་ཐུང་མ། "Woman has long hair and a short mind," བྱད་མེད་ལ་བློ་མ་འདྲི། "Don't consult women!," བདུད་མོ། "demon/devil woman," སྐྱ་ནག་མ། "inauspicious/ruinous woman," etc.) that pepper Tibetan literary works. Contradictions abound in the Tibetan production of stereotypical images of women. Often in barely one textual breath, women are celebrated as paragons of liberating love and wisdom and simultaneously represented as seriously detrimental to men's spiritual pursuits and as a powerful samsaric trap.[5] Revered spiritual masters give out instructions such as: སྐྱ་མང་བྱད་མེད་འཆལ་བས་སྐྱ་མཆུ་ཉུང་ཅིས། "Moderate your chattering lips, for chatty women are wicked!"[6] Overall, such language and ingrained prejudice against women are on the wane in the 21st century, but they do still persist in both Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora.

The Tibetan intellectual scene and Tibetan language literary production are unfortunately still dominated by men. Tibetan women writers are making welcome inroads into these exclusive male reserves, and we gather here today to celebrate this auspicious fact! The silencing of Tibetan women's voices and sustained generation of negative stereotypes are, of course, intermeshed with and enabled by major socio-cultural forces and complex repressive structures. These include exploitative relations between men and women, domestic and other forms of violence against women, and the marginalization and exclusion of women from education, employment, artistic production, political power and the economic system.

Contemporary Tibetan language women's literature addresses all these aspects of the male subjugation of women as well as other concerns and creates a powerful female public voice. In their creative hands literature functions—to borrow from Seamus Heaney—as a mode of redress that gives voice to the repressed and counters oppressive forces and injustices.[7] In what follows I will first present a very brief overview of recent Tibetan women's literary production in Tibetan. Then I will introduce you to some of the recurrent themes and issues by employing Palmo's (དཔལ་མོ།)thought-provoking poem ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན། "I Am Who I Am" as a framing device.[8]

A quick note of caution and qualification—Tibetan literature still remains an uncharted territory that is unfathomably vast and varied. Although I am supposed to be an expert, my knowledge of it is woefully limited. The current flourishing of Tibetan women's writing enriches and

5. For examples of such negative stereotypes of women see Tashi Tsering Josayma 2017, 116–117.
6. From a piece of advice to women attributed to Padmasambhava. Quoted in Tashi Tsering Josayma 2017, 118.
7. Heaney 1995.
8. Dpal mo 2020, "*nga ni nga yin.*" https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lDLfKUeNdWHwBqS-8WAByA

further complicates this ever-evolving field. What I offer here is a short and imperfect appreciation of contemporary Tibetan language literature by women. I apologise if I fail to do justice to their intellectual and emotional richness, imaginative fecundity, technical excellence, and perceptive observations of life.

Works: The Milking Toggle

Ever since the 1980s, female Tibetan intellectuals have been making their presence felt within the sphere of literary creation. Their substantial contributions to today's Tibetan literary production display both literary continuity and creativity, and reflect the rapid socio-economic changes taking place in Tibet and elsewhere. More and more female writers and poets are questioning and challenging the male domination of Tibetan society, culture and literature. In recent decades this reinvigorating female literary presence has become more accentuated with a flurry of creative activities either initiated or inspired by women writers. Different forms of publication including traditional print media, e-books and social media have facilitated and accelerated the production process and broadened the reach of literary works.

There are far too many publications to list here but I will mention a few landmark examples. In addition to countless individual contributions, since 1996 popular literary journals such as Drangchar (*Light Rain,* སྒྲང་ཆར།) and Gangyen Metok (*Snow Flower*, གངས་རྒྱན་མེ་ཏོག) have set up occasional special sections for women's writing. Palmo—an esteemed professor and poet whose poem I will be presenting soon—edited the first ever anthology of poems by contemporary female Tibetan poets evocatively named Zholung (*The Milking Toggle,* བཞོ་ལུང་།), which was published in 2005.[9] Palmo immediately followed this up by editing the first collection of women's critical essays in 2006.[10] In 2011 she expanded *The Milking Toggle* and produced two more compilations of women's writing covering prose and fiction.[11] Palmo has continued to publish her own and other women's works in book series dedicated to Tibetan women's writing.[12]

Paltsek Böyik Penying zhimjuk khang (Palzek Research Institute of Old Tibetan Scriptures, དཔལ་བརྩེགས་བོད་ཡིག་དཔེ་རྙིང་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ཁང་།) launched an anthology series called Samthö Bumo (*Plateau Daughters* ས་མཐོའི་དུ་མོ།) in 2008 dedicated to the female writers working for this pro-

9. *Bzho lung* is a traditional milking device attached to a woman's sash which latches onto the handle of the milking pail. It is also an adornment accessory and an auspicious symbol that signifies, among other things, life-sustaining female labour and the abundance of dairy products.
10. Dpal mo 2006. *Dpyad rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*.
11. Dpal mo 2011. *Snyan rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*, *Sgrig rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*.
12. Palmo is a prolific poet and prose writer. For collections of some of her exemplary writings see Dpal mo 2014 & 2012.

lific publishing and research organization.[13] Another truly monumental contribution is Khandroi Chödzö Chenmo (*The Great Dharma Treasury of Dakinis*, མཁའ་འགྲོའི་ཆོས་མཛོད་ཆེན་མོ།). A committee of Larung Gar nuns collated and edited this 53-volume collection of works mostly by Tibetan Buddhist women, which was published in 2017. This trailblazing compilation is a treasure trove of great socio-religious, historical and literary texts. As such it is an invaluable and unavoidable resource for the exploration of Tibetan literature in general and Tibetan women's literature in particular.

It is almost impossible to keep track of online and social media literary activities, but judging by my own reading experience cybersphere is the most vibrant, fertile and innovative ground for Tibetan literature. In 2013 when I was completing my PhD thesis there were at least two websites and two newspapers established for the specific purpose of publishing Tibetophone women's writing. Since then some of these platforms have become defunct. However, they have been replaced by a mushrooming of forums for Tibetan women's writing on social media.

For instance, many WeChat literary platforms either publish only women's writing or frequently facilitate the posting of only female authored works. One Tibetan literary website that I should mention here is Chömé bökyi tsomrik drawa (*Butter Lamp Tibetan Literature Website*, མཆོད་མེ་བོད་ཀྱི་རྩོམ་རིག་དྲ་བ།). This popular website with an international readership has promoted special selections featuring works by individual female writers as well as separate collections of women's poetry by different groups of poets. There are other events that supplement this flurry of literary activities such as well-publicised and well-attended conferences and awards ceremonies dedicated to the literary voices of Tibetan women.

Contemporary Tibetan women's writing disseminated through all these mediums feature a variety of genres, ranging from poetry and fiction—including short stories and novels—to factual prose writing such as literary and academic essays and social commentary. Whilst displaying innovative modern qualities this diverse body of works bears the influences of Tibetan literary and oral traditions. With regards to content, it is unique in its attention to subjective female experiences and in its acute sensitivity to the issues affecting Tibetan women.

Themes: "I am Who I am"

A wide range of themes and issues engage contemporary Tibetan women's writing. Allow me to underline only a few of these here through Palmo's thought-provoking poem Nga ni nga yin ("I Am Who I Am," ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན།). On top of being an acclaimed poet and a distinguished professor of Tibetan literature, Palmo is an influential feminist cultural critic and social activist for women's

13. This anthology series is formed of four volumes published between 2008 and 2012.

health, education and empowerment.[14] As I have noted already, she is also an accomplished and prolific editor of Tibetan women's works. This fine poem is more apt for a female voice, but this is how an appreciative male reader recites and translates it:

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་སྐྱེ་དམན་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
སྤེན་རྟགས་ཆེ་བའི་འཕྲོག་མོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
ངས་ཁྲེལ་གཞུང་གི་སྒངས་ཐང་ཡངས་པོའི་ངོས་སུ
ལས་ཀྱི་ཝེ་ཏོག་རང་བྱོན་དུ་བཞད་པར་ཡུ་ཚུགས་བྱས་རྗེང
ངའི་ཤང་སེན་ལ་ཝེ་ཏོག་གི་བཀག་མདངས་བྱགས་དུས
ང་ནི་དྭངས་གཙང་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་སྐྱེས་མ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
སྐྱིང་སྟོབས་ཞན་པའི་བོད་མོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
ང་རང་ཉི་འོད་ལ་ཐྱོགས་ཏེ་བཞད་རྗེང་ལ་གྲང་ངར་ལ་རྒྱལ་ཏེ་འཁྱག་ཀྱང་རྗེང
ནམ་མཁའི་འཇའ་ཚོན་བགེ་གོས་སུ་འཛག་པའི་སྟོང་སེམས་བཅངས་ཏེ
ངའི་ལང་ཚོ་ལ་མཇོས་སྡུག་གི་རླབས་ཟེང་འཕྱོ་དུས
ང་ནི་སུ་ཏེག་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་མནའ་མ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
བྱན་གཤིས་ཟབ་པའི་གཡོག་མོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
འགོས་ཆུང་བའི་ངང་གཤིས་ཀྱི་མཚོའུ་རྩིང་ནང་དུ
བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱི་པད་དཀར་ཕྱམ་མེར་འཁྲུངས་པར་རེ་སྨོན་བྱས་རྗེང
ངའི་མི་ཚེ་ལ་ཆུང་མ་ཞེས་པའི་ཁ་བྱང་བྲིས་དུས
ང་ནི་འཆིང་ཡིག་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་བུད་མེད་ཅིག་ཡིན་ལ
རྩིས་ཐང་ཉམས་པའི་འཕྱོན་མ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
འདོད་ཆགས་ཀྱི་གད་སྐྱིགས་གང་དགར་བྱོ་སའི་ཡོལ་གོར་ངེས་ཆོག་ལ
དྲག་སྨྱོད་ཀྱི་རལ་གྲི་ཤུབས་ནས་ཕྱུང་སྟེ་དམར་གསོད་བྱས་ཀྱང་ཆོག
ངའི་ལུས་རྐེན་ལ་རྩེར་སོན་དང་འཕགས་ལམ་མེད་ཅེས་ཐམ་ག་བརྒྱབ་དུས
ང་ནི་ཚོང་ཐོང་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

14. For an introduction to Palmo and her social and intellectual work see Robin 2015, 153–169.

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་བཙུན་མོ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
བུ་སྣོད་ཀྱི་གསེར་བུམ་ལ་རིགས་ཀྱི་ཁྲིའུ་བཞད་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཡུམ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
ཐུ་རྟོད་ཀྱི་གནའ་སྲོལ་བཟང་པོ་སྤྱིགས་དུས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུན་ལམ་ལ་མི་འཚོར་བར
ཤུགས་བསམ་གྱི་གདུང་ཀ་མི་འགྱེལ་བར་གྱེན་དུ་འདེགས་པར་བཟོད
ངའི་ཚེ་སྲོག་ལ་ཉེ་དབང་དང་འདྲ་མཉམ་སྦྱད་དུས
ང་ནི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན

ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན
ང་ནི་མཛའ་མོ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ལ
རིགས་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ས་བོན་འདེབས་སའི་གཤིན་ས་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན
རྟེན་འབྲེང་གི་ལས་འབྲས་རྩོལ་དུ་མ་བསྒྲུར་བར་དྲང་བོར་བསྒྲངས་ནས
བཙེ་དུང་གི་དུས་ཚོགས་ལ་འགྱུར་སྟོག་མེད་པར་དོད་ཁོལ་སྟོལ་ཅིང
སྣང་སྲིད་ཟུང་འཇུག་གི་འཁོར་འོ་གསང་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་འཁོར་དུས
ང་ནི་ཤེས་རབ་ཅིག་ཀྱང་ཡིན[15]

I am who I am
I am an inferior sex
And also a very foolish nomad woman
I have hoped against hope that the flowers of karma would naturally bloom
On the surface of the vast grassland of loyalty
When the brilliance of the flowers is painted on my toes
I am also a pure thing

I am who I am
I am a childbearing mother
And also a fainthearted Tibetan woman
I have bloomed facing the sunshine and have also frozen swimming in the bitter cold
When the beautiful waves of my youth surge
Fantasizing about weaving the rainbow in the sky into my wedding dress
I am also a pearl

I am who I am
I am a bride

15. Dpal mo 2020, "*nga ni nga yin*." https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lDLfKUeNdWHwBqS-8WAByA

And also a servile maid
I have wished for the vibrant blossoming of the white lotus of karmic merit
In the little pond of my humble nature
When my life is labelled as the little mother[16]
I am also a contract

I am who I am
I am a woman
And also a disgraced prostitute
I can be taken as a platter for pouring out the waste of lust at will
And can also be murdered unsheathing the sword of violence
When my body is sealed asserting that it possesses no excellence and noble path
I am also a commodity

I am who I am
I am a queen
And also a nurturing mother within whose gold vase womb blooms the young of the race
I dare to hold up the pillars and beams of altruism without letting them fall
And without losing the good ancient traditions of Tibet to the killing of the degenerate times
When my life is given rights and equality
I am also a country

I am who I am
I am a female lover
And also a fertile field for sowing the seeds of the lineage
If the karmic justice of dependent origination is not feigned but justly upheld
I bestow warmth without the season of love suffering any change
When the wheel of fused appearance and emptiness revolves esoterically
I am also wisdom

Palmo's subsequent explanatory note makes it apparent that the poem was inspired by the age-old

16. *Chung ma* is another word for wife. Here a more literal translation is adopted so as to underline its contrast with the matriarch of the family—*a ma*. It can also be rendered as "little women" and "little wife."

Tibetan practice of male discrimination and violence against women.[17] The horrendous murder of Tsewang Lhamo by her estranged husband in 2019 in Tibet breathes horror through it.[18] Palmo's poem also shares some of the common themes and issues that make contemporary Tibetan women's writing stand out. The Tibetan women authors expose and amend many silences and shortcomings of Tibet's masculine literary tradition. Among other issues, Tibetan female poets and short story writers tackle motherhood, including maternal love, pregnancy and child rearing, the untimely loss or deprivation of youth, domestic violence, lack of education and employment opportunities for girls, male dishonesty and fickleness, the betrayal of love and dereliction of paternal obligations.

Motherhood: The Gold Womb

As evident in Palmo's poetic image of "the gold vase womb" one predominant theme is motherhood, treated in its entirety as a complex spectrum that includes pregnancy, birthing and childcare. One of the earliest Tibetan writers to pay nuanced and sustained attention to these issues is the acclaimed writer Dekyi Drolma (བདེ་སྐྱིད་སྒྲོལ་མ།). Her famous poems on her own pregnancy ཟླ་ཐོ་ཆུ་མོ་དགུ་མདུད། "Nine-eyed Knot: A Monthly Record" and on the infancy of her child ལོ་ཐོ་བསྐོ་བའི་ཞགས་ཐག "Lasso of Love: A Record of a Year" are exemplary.[19] These motherhood poems are rich in their poignancy and a sensibility lacking in works by male writers. Displaying the poetic imprints of the past they are deliberately crafted and written in the style of classical metrical composition. However, the detailed treatment of the intimate experiences of a pregnant woman and a first-time mother is totally unconventional.

Dekyi Drolma's pregnancy poem is probably the first Tibetan poetic text that describes minutely the physical and psychological changes a woman undergoes during pregnancy. It chronicles nine months of intense happiness, pain, fear, anxiety, uncertainty and wonder, bracketed within the cessation of menstruation and the onset of contractions. It introduces male Tibetan readers to a range of experiences throughout pregnancy from morning sickness and loss of appetite to constant hunger, crushing weight, and cramps and pains.

Dekyi Drolma's infancy poem is equally detailed in description as she gives a vivid personal

17. Palmo released "I Am Who I Am" as a social media post first on its own. Following its popular reception, she reposted it accompanied by an explanatory piece entitled "*snyan ngag 'da'i rgyab ljongs greng ba* (On the Background of this Poem)," Dpal mo 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lDLfKUeNdWHwBqS-8WAByA

18. Tsewang Lhamo (a young Tibetan nomad mother) was mutilated and stabbed to death by her runaway husband on October 23, 2019, when she refused to accept him back into her life. This callous murder sent shock waves across the Tibetan language social media and generated a passionate conversation about Tibetan male violence against women led by Tibetan female intellectuals including Palmo.

19. Bde skyid sgrol ma 2011, 43–47, 48–65.

account of caring for her baby boy. Throughout day and night she guards the newborn baby with eternal vigilance and gets little sleep. His incremental growth is noted with tireless attention and joy. The baby's every movement is monitored and his behaviour examined for signs of distress. It is a poem that vividly paints maternal love, patience, self-sacrifice and the constancy that entail motherhood. Tellingly man as father or husband is absent in both of these poems apart from "the caressing hand of the husband" in the pregnancy poem.

Another highly original and illuminating work on motherhood is the 2019 award-winning short story སྐྱེ་ཟུག "Birth Pangs" by the young emergent writer Karma Drolma (ཀརྨ་སྒྲོལ་མ།).[20] It is unique and audacious in its candid and explicit treatment of childbirth at a modern maternity unit in Lhasa. Through consummate blending of the literary and spoken Tibetan word, Karma Drolma makes us feel the fear, pain, hope and joy of an expectant mother as she is subjected to the Foucauldian medical gaze. She directs the readers' gaze to the birthing scene in an impersonal medical setting that reveals both the power and the powerlessness of the young mother. I have just finished reading this with my second year MPhil students, who are all male. We were delighted and very relieved with the happy ending and were in total awe of the new mother after witnessing what she had to endure, confirming the empathy-deepening quality of contemporary Tibetan women's literature.

Marriage: Souring of the Rainbow Wedding Dress

Another common theme that preoccupies contemporary Tibetan women writers is marriage and all the challenges and issues it entails. To borrow Palmo's imagery—the dream of the rainbow wedding dress turns into a nightmare when the new bride is "labelled as the Little Mother" and forced into "a contract" of domestic servitude. I will use Dekyi Drolma's work again to demonstrate this point – this time drawing on a short story of hers called ཆུང་མ་ཞེས་འཆི་ལའི་སྡེབ་བརྗོད། "The Tragic Statement of a Dying Wife".[21]

In this fictional suicide note of a young mother called Drolma, the protagonist gives the reasons for taking her own life. As a young teen Drolma leaves school and marries her lover disregarding the advice of her parents and teachers. Her unnamed husband, who is a government official, then abandons her as soon as she gives birth to a girl. He returns home only once, which results in a further pregnancy and the birth of a second daughter. Drolma is left nursing her sick mother-in-law and toiling in the nomadic countryside. Constant overwork and single motherhood take its toll and she is hospitalized. As a result, the family has a fleeting reunion in the county town. How-

20. Karma sgrol ma 2019, "Skye zug" at https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/d-SmjIbSIt-ZSWQT_by2aw
21. Bde skyid sgrol ma 2008, 42–49.

ever, one night the husband returns drunk and subjects her to severe beatings. He yells at Drolma and her daughters: "Get out, you bitches! What's the point of a wife who can't bear sons!" The following day, Drolma, covered in wounds and caked in blood, returns to the pasturelands with her daughters. Her husband subsequently has an affair which results in an out of wedlock son.

Drolma finds the situation unbearable when she learns that her husband has gambled away their livestock, herself and their daughters. After suffering nine years of hardship working for her husband's family this becomes the final catalyst for her suicide. The traditional misogynistic notion of preferring the birth of boys to that of girls forms the ideological linchpin of the short story. Through the last will of a mistreated and overworked bride it exposes the alcohol abuse, gambling addiction, spousal abandonment, dereliction of paternal duties and domestic violence that plague Tibetan communities. It hammers home an observable social pattern in Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora where many wives or brides almost singlehandedly undertake childcare, household chores and agricultural work whilst suffering verbal, physical and mental abuse from their husbands and parents-in-law.

The Sword of Violence

Male violence against women—what Palmo's poem with sinister sexual undertones refers to as "the sword of violence"—is another recurring theme. All forms of violence committed by men, including rape, are increasingly tackled in Tibetan women's poetry and fiction. Yet few Tibetan male cultural or literary critics draw our attention to this most serious social issue. The depiction of rape and sexual abuse might be fleeting in some cases, but male dominated social structures and masculine norms that permit such aggression lurk deep within many female authored texts.

Just to mention a few standout works by some of the Tibetan writers from Tibet and India we are fortunate to have with us today: Chimay's (འཆི་མེད།) poems འབྲོག་ཁྱི། "The Tibetan Mastiff" and དེ་ཁྱོད་ཀིད་ཡིན་ནམ། སྒྲོལ་མ། and "Is that you, Drolma?" address domestic violence, servitude and imprisonment;[22] Tsedronkyi's (ཚེ་སྒྲོན་སྐྱིད།) short story ཉུ་སིམ་པའི་ས་སྤོད། "The Silent Dusk" treats arranged marriage, marital abandonment, and sexual abuse;[23] and Nyimatso's (ཉི་མ་འཚོ།)chilling short story ཟུར་ཞིག "A Fragment" deals with the abuse of the teacher-student relationship and a drug-facilitated rape that results in pregnancy.[24] These and similar daring works might make uncomfortable reading for some, but they form a timely critique of the Tibetan patriarchy. They open the eyes of us male readers to the ingrained masculinity that has negatively impacted women's bodies, speech, and minds for so long, causing so much suffering and so many injustices.

22. 'Chi med 2012, 129–202, 180–183.
23. Tshe sgron skyid 2014.
24. Nyi ma 'tsho 2009, 12–19.

I hope I have managed to show today, be it only in glimpses, that contemporary Tibetan female writers weave their art out of the raw material of their lives. As such, an appreciation of their creations makes us see and feel aspects of Tibetan life that lie behind male-induced silences. In her extraordinary novel *Middlemarch*—which, according to Virginia Woolf "is one of the few English novels written for grown-up people"[25]—George Eliot alerts us stony hearted mortals to the roar of tragedy that frequents, numbs, and silences our ordinary existence. At one point she directs our attention to the heroine Dorothea weeping six weeks after her wedding with these immortal words:

> That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.[26]

Contemporary Tibetan women's writing opens our hearts and minds to common sufferings that trouble ordinary lives. It awakens readers—especially male readers—to the hardships, challenges and sufferings experienced daily by women, thereby giving new insights and engendering empathy.

Conclusion: The Wisdom Women

Palmo's poem "I Am Who I Am" ends on a profound note with the last line proclaiming: "I am also wisdom." This is an apparent allusion to the feminine dimension of Buddhist esoteric wisdom. But it can also serve as a declaration of Tibetan women's worldly wisdom. Tibetan literature is an artistic mode of expression that imparts Tibetan women's unique experiences of and sharp insights into life and their many and varied ideals, joys, and woes.

If we Tibetans desire individual, national, and universal liberation—which I believe we do—then it is high time we men started to listen to and learn from the public and private voices of Tibetan women including their literary creations, which we are here to appreciate this weekend. Until we are ready to do so with humility, openness, and humanity, our collective thinking, words, actions, and wisdom will remain impoverished and incomplete.

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25. Cited in Byatt 1999, v.
26. Eliot 1999, 216–217.

For this reason –

ཀི་ཧི་ཧི···· བོད་མོའི་རྩོམ་རིག་རྒྱལ་ལོ།

Victory to Tibetan women's literature!

Thank you for your attention.

ཕྱིད་ཆས་པས་གཟབ་ཉན་བྱས་པར་ཐུགས་ཆེ།། ཁ་དོ།། བཀྲ་ཤིས།།།།

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Interview with Gedun Rabsal

On March 18, 2022, the editors of *The Journal of Tibetan Literature* Andrew Quintman, Kurtis Schaeffer, and Tenzin Dickie met with Gedun Rabsal on Zoom to discuss the origin story of his new Tibetan rendition of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road (Lamla)*, his fascination with Ernest Hemingway, his approach to the practice of translation, and the importance of modern English literature for a Tibetan reading audience. The first portion was conducted in English, with the remainder translated from the Tibetan.

Journal of Tibetan Literature: Rabsal la, we know that you had a long and good relationship with your friend Elliot Sperling and we understand that he suggested or maybe requested that you translate *On the Road*. Can you tell us the story of how the translation began?

Gedun Rabsal: Before I answer your question, I would like to draw on some background information. In my younger days in Dharamsala, there was a sense among the Tibetan readers and writers that there was a real need for works in Tibetan translation. Amnye Machen had a project to translate books into Tibetan. Some of the works selected were Gandhi's works, and Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, *Seven Years in Tibet,* and other books as well. When I came to Indiana University, my students wanted me to provide them with reading materials, not classical materials but more contemporary materials like fiction and novels. And there really wasn't much. We had Döndrup Gyal and some things, but I sensed that we needed much more. Especially in terms of children's books, there are books here like the Dr. Seuss books and *Winnie the Pooh* books. And these books are very useful for teaching language. So in 2013, I went to Dharamsala and I sought an audience with His Holiness the 17th Karmapa and I reported such need, and a potential project, with him. And in 2015, His Holiness Karmapa and some of us gathered in Latse Library and from there we set up the 108 Translation Project. That is just some background information.

When I started my teaching career at Indiana University, I was in my thirties and I wanted to learn English more for my work. At that time, there was a friend named Mary Peterson who studied Tibetan language with me, so I was teaching her Tibetan and she was teaching me English. A lifelong high school teacher, she was a superfan of Hemingway. And she was crazy about *The Old Man and the Sea*. I taught her Shantideva's *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* and she taught me Hemingway. Sometimes it was like an oracle had possessed her, she got that excited about Hemingway.

And so we read Hemingway together, and then I translated *The Old Man and the Sea* after that. At first, I couldn't get the copyright to publish it. So here and there we tried, and then I got in touch with Tenzin Dickie and she managed to get me the copyright. And then *The Old Man and the Sea* was published by *Tibet Times*.

I gave a Tibetan copy to Elliot Sperling, and as soon as he saw that, he came back to me saying, you have to do *On the Road*. Now I didn't have any knowledge of *On the Road* and I also didn't have any interest in it. My main concern then was to finish more of Hemingway because I was familiar with his language now. But Elliot came to me, and he gave me this task for two reasons. One, his journey to Tibetan Studies began because of Kerouac. Because reading Kerouac's *On the Road* pushed Elliot on the road, to Asia, where he ended up meeting with the Tibetans—so his Tibetan Studies journey started like that. Two, another thing was that there's too much reading with classical Tibetan texts. Elliot thought we need texts with more simple readings. Elliot wanted texts with some simple language, texts with more colloquial and spoken language, and he thought a translation of *On the Road* could do that. So that is the reason I ended up translating *On the Road*.

JTL: So when Elliot suggested to you the work of translating *On the Road*, at some point you must have read it for the first time. What was your experience of reading it for the first time?

GR: This is another long story. This was ten years back at least. I don't recall exactly what my experience was at that time but reading an English book as a second language learner, and reading *On the Road* for the first time, I thought there were so many new styles and new vocabulary. What happened is that Elliot promised me he would go over my translation once I had finished it. Between then and now, for all of us who engage in translation work, when we do a translation project, you just have to put yourself into the project. Somebody else cannot lead you to do it, you have to do it. So I took that approach, and I thought that later I would have plenty of time to go over the translation with him. I read the book for the first time, and I prepared the books for myself including making all kind of notes. I read the first edition. I watched the movie. The audiobook was so helpful, because there are many cases where when you read a section of it you don't understand it but when you listen to it you understand. I listened to the story one time, a second time, during walks, during drives, especially on long drives such as to Chicago, etc. It's a long drive and you can listen to the book all the way through. That is the way I studied this book. Now, the emotional part of this translation is that I couldn't offer this translation to Elliot in person. Sorry. [Gets emotional] So it was a long process, it took a long time, and now it's finally come out and he's not here to receive it.

JTL: He would be very proud. I have a different question, it's also a background question, and it's

really about the Beat authors. Kerouac was part of a famous movement and a new generation of American authors and poets who were real models for a new kind of writing in American literature. It was a new moment in American writing when people were really experimenting, trying new things, and it has a lot to do with the specific American context of what was happening at that time in the 1950s. I wonder what you think the genre of Beat literature, and specially *On the Road*, has to offer a Tibetan reading audience. Why is *Lamla* important for Tibetan readers?

GR: That is a question for Sperling. It was his job to explain why *Lamla* is important for Tibetan readers, I think. He thought that *Lamla* could liberate the Tibetan language. He specifically asked me to use colloquial (spoken *phalké, phal skad*) in my translation. Now first of all, I am not an expert in the Beat generation and Beat literature at all, it was my first time hearing about them and I am really naïve in my understanding of these things. Second, as I mentioned earlier, I think my generation's reading of American literature and English literature is more limited. I hear that John Steinbeck changed the language of American literature away from British writing. But that kind of knowledge, when I am reading *On the Road* I am not going to get it. To me, what I notice is that he uses a lot of slang and dirty words. That's it. Now, I think the future Tibetan generation can go deep into what the language of Kerouac has to offer to Tibetans.

As for me, I was looking at the references of Tibet, the references of Buddhism in *On the Road* itself. And as you know Kerouac wrote a lot on Buddhism. *The Dharma Bums* even uses Tibetan terms such as *yab yum*, although I don't know how much he understood it. The foreword to Kerouac's *Life of the Buddha* was written by Professor Bob Thurman and he judged Kerouac's knowledge of Buddhism. He thought Kerouac had a limited knowledge of Buddhism. But anyway, I was looking at Kerouac's Buddhist references. He mentioned Holy Lhasa one time, and he had the reference to countless lives and countless deaths, and those I think we can take as Buddhist theories of things. He talked about emptiness and other Buddhist philosophical ideas in *On the Road*. And when he reached the US and Mexico border at New Laredo, he saw that place as Holy Lhasa. Now the reference to Holy Lhasa doesn't exist in the original 1951 version of *On the Road*, but only in the 1957 printed version, so I think he studied Buddhism during those years in between. And in *The Dharma Bums*, there are a lot of references to Tibet. Did I answer your question, right?

JTL: It sounds like, you suspect this work is important to Tibetan readers because of its engagement of Buddhist ideas. Is there something about life on the road as an act itself? Is something about story telling itself important? Something beyond the Buddhist aspects?

GR: As I mentioned to you before, I don't know much about *On the Road*. I don't see or know any urgent needs of Tibetan translation of this book. However, as I mentioned earlier, this translation project happened because of Elliot Sperling, because Elliot thought that *On the Road* could liber-

ate Tibetan or that it could bring Tibetan to a new level in terms of the novel. That is the reason for this translation.

On the Road goes from New York to Chicago, to Denver, through Arizona to San Francisco, and concerns what they did, what he saw, who he met, what they talked about, what they drank etc. In terms of format, Tibet has that kind of literature—Milarepa, for instance. The *Life of Milarepa* and the *Songs of Milarepa* are about Milarepa on the road, traveling from Gungthang to Lhodrak. And these are very close to *lamyik (lam yig)*, the tour guides, such as Katok Situ's *Ütsang lamyik,* which tracks his travels to Lhasa and Samyé, etc.

But in terms of content, that was not the point of me translating or of Latse undertaking this project. We are not interested in bringing new content or new subjects into the Tibetan language per se; we are just interested in giving Tibetan readers more resources to read. That is our goal.

Years ago, I was a language teacher in a Tibetan Children's Village school in Dharamsala for a year and my job was to teach Tibetan language to Tibetans who didn't know how to read Tibetan. And one student came to me and said, "Genla, when I hear *Kungao*, *Kungao*, *Kungao* ["Ānanda"], I get bored!" She didn't want to read Buddhist literature or she was just interested in something new in Tibetan. So providing Tibetan readers an alternate text can promote Tibetan language greatly.

JTL: Following that question, Elliot asked you to use phelké in your translation and you did it. Can you talk more about that?

GR: One time, in a conference in Denver, Dr. Lama Jabb did a presentation on Tibetan repetitive words such as *gang mang mang* and *gang nyung nyung*. I tried to pay attention to that in my translation, to the music of the Tibetan language, to the usages of the adjectives.

In terms of the language and bringing more spoken into the written, in some parts I really intentionally tried to do this. For the cowboy dialogue in *On the Road*, I tried to match it with the way Khampas or nomads may speak. And the language of Southern aristocrats, that I tried to convey using the Lhasa dialect.

Now the big question is, is my attempt there in the final version? No, no it isn't. My editors had a heavy hand in the final manuscript. Many people helped me with the book. When I was working on it, I placed the English and Tibetan side by side in the manuscript. I read it again and again, and I used color codes on the manuscript. Red meant I must ask a native speaker about this passage. Yellow, blue, etc.—I had color coded the text, and after that, I had meetings with others. I asked most of my questions to Kristina Dy-Liacco, who was very helpful. I also spent much time with Dr. Nancy Lin, and Jim Canary and Dr. Jerry Jesseph, who were all very helpful. After that I took all the English out, and left the Tibetan alone, and I submitted the text to Pema Tsewang Shastri and Dhondup Tashi Rekjong; the two of them edited the Tibetan translation. There was

also a Tibetan translator in Chengdu, who edited the text as well. Gen Pema Bhum and Tenzin Gelek also edited it. So, because the translation passed through all these different people, I don't know if the language I used is still there!

JTL: As part of the translation process, you undertook a cross-country journey following in the footsteps of Kerouac in *On the Road*. Why was this important for you? What did it add to your work of translation?

GR: After I translated the book, I really wanted to see America. Also, I was translating part of the book during the pandemic and during the pandemic we couldn't go anywhere. So afterwards, because the book was all about America, I wanted to see it! Reading about the travels in *On the Road* made me want to get on the road. So I went down to Virginia Beach, saw the ocean, and then went to DC and picked up Shingza Rinpoché, the head lama of Ragya Monastery, and then we traveled together. First we went to Tennessee, then Arkansas, then Oklahoma, and New Mexico after that. And after that it was Arizona, then we entered Utah, then Idaho and Wyoming. And the landscape over there, especially in Wyoming, was so much like Tibet—it's rivers and mountains, forests and water, and even the flowers are like Tibetan flowers. In the valleys there were trees just like the trees in my hometown, Rebkong. From Montana to Iowa, then we came down to Illinois and Michigan and West Virginia.

I realized that in the south and in the east, America is more or less flat. Then as you go west, as you pass through Virginia and so on, the forests grow tall and the grass grows tall, and then as you continue, the trees get smaller and smaller until eventually they disappear. In Oklahoma, there was so much fir and juniper though. In Arizona and New Mexico, you will see the red soil, and as you continue, then you start to see fir and juniper trees. It was useful to see all this. It was useful to see the geography with my own eyes.

For example, Iowa is long and rectangular and has the Mississippi river on one end and the Missouri river on the other end. Kerouac has many descriptions of these rivers, and it was useful to actually see them. I have another example: on my travels, I was able to identify a grass, sagegrass, that Kerouac talks about. I was consulting dictionaries and I had been phonetizing "sage" in the Tibetan translation. But going over there and seeing it, I realize, it's sage, it's *khanpa*! We have *ganden khanpa*, white *khanpa*, black *khanpa*—the difference is that ours is more like grass, and here it's a mix, some of the sage here even have branches. This kind of identification was very helpful, and especially seeing the geography of America with my own eyes.

JTL: You have written a memoir in which you describe how you yourself undertook a major journey to India from Tibet into exile in 1987. Did that experience (either the travel or the writing about it) influence or inspire your work on *On the Road*?

GR: To me these works are different. So I don't know how to answer that or what kind of influence there was, but maybe you are right, maybe that did inspire something.

When I wrote *Let's Go Into Exile*, I was thinking, how can I best tell this story? What was I worried about, what was I not worried about, what did I do when I had anxiety and worries on the road, that's what I needed to tell the reader. When translating *On the Road*, I was just thinking about the choice of words, of vocabulary.

Reading a text and translating a text are totally different experiences. I was inputting a *namthar* [biography] into the computer and I had to be careful about even a *tseg* [the interpunct], and be so mindful of the spelling and all that. Afterwards as I was thinking about the *namthar*, I realized not much of it has remained in my mind. It's not like when you are reading, and your overall understanding of the book is very clear in your mind. Translation is the same, every comma, every capitalized word, every quotation word, every dot, every detail—I have to pay minute attention. So that after the translation is finished, there's almost a state where, if you ask me what is in *On the Road*, I almost have to think about it.

When I am writing I have ideas that I am putting down on the page. When I am translating, I don't have my own ideas in my mind, I just have vocabulary in my mind. There is also certain vocabulary that the author coined. You will notice it when you are translating it. I encountered such cases in both *On the Road* and in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. I came across a word that the author has just made up, this word actually did not exist in English language, and it's likely you won't notice this while you are just reading the book, only when you are translating it.

JTL: Speaking of new words that authors made up, Kerouac and other Beat authors were experimenting with new kinds of language and new modes of narrative and expression. What was it like to render this in Tibetan? Did you need to invent new terms or neologisms?

GR: Now for these new words that the author made up, which I have to put into Tibetan, that was not a problem. For example, in *On the Road*, one word invented by the author is "dingledodies." Because we know what the author meant, and so I ended up using an existing Tibetan word that is similar to the meaning of this word.

For English, there are so many resources in English, dictionaries of course, and all kinds of online resources. There are many online resources for *On the Road* as a classic text. Say for example, that the protagonists Dean and Sal went from one place to another, they went to a restaurant, or they ate a meal. Now when there's a problem there, if you don't know what a word is, you can find out and then the problem is solved. But where there are ideas or concepts, then it's very hard. For instance, when Sal goes with Dean to Chicago and then ends up in Detroit, he has no place to sleep so he sleeps in a movie theater...and as he's watching the movie, he gets all mixed up in his mind. Now he's talking to people inside the movie, now it's as if he were in a previous life,

so when it's like that, translating that state of mind, then it's difficult. Ideas are hard, conceptual descriptions are hard.

Language about music, for instance, is very difficult to translate. Tibet didn't have many words to do with musical notation—so how to translate that? The word "blow," that was very challenging. To blow a trumpet, to beat the drums, these were difficult.

In *On the Road*, they were looking for something, but what was this thing they were searching for? They just called it "IT"—they said, "he got it, we are going to get it." If we want to really find out what "it" means, it seems to be nirvana or enlightenment or some great bliss, so these were difficult to translate. English has so many nouns, so many objects, and many many words with so many meanings. For instance, the word "wild" as in wild animal, wild street, wild market, wild music—am I able to render that into Tibetan according to its different context? Another word, "kick"—the book says, he got kicks, we will have kicks. Now what does that mean? It's used sometimes as a verb and sometimes as a noun. It's a difficult thing, translating the full meaning of the English word into the Tibetan.

And "the Beat generation"—how to translate that fully into Tibetan? It's not possible! Kerouac's word "beat" has so many meanings—heartbeat, drumbeat, I am beat up, I am down, upbeat—all of these as well as the "beat" of the Christian "beatific." There's no way that a word can somehow contain all these different meanings in Tibetan. The word I used for "beat" at first was *pham dung*, a neologism if we had ended up using it, incorporating the *pham* of defeat and *dung* of beating the drum. But I had a lot of debate back and forth with my editors, and we debated and debated, and I lost. So now it's just *pham pa*, and I just put a note in the book with a detailed explanation of the term. When you are translating from one language to another, there's only so much you can do. You can't get everything fully into Tibetan. Now the word for "generation"—in Tibetan, the word *mi rab* does not really refer to a group of people, only to an actual generation. Also the word "beat" has had different translations in Tibetan. One problem we Tibetans have is the problem of standardization. We cannot standardize. As we are translating so many new words into Tibetan, as we need lots of new terms, every translator uses their own word and has their own reasons for that usage. Well, as time goes on, some of these new words and usages will stick and others won't. Time will tell.

JTL: Can you talk about translating the title? Kerouac's title *On the Road* seems to suggest a journey, or even a way of being in the world. How did you come to translate this as *Lam la* (which could also be construed as *In the Road*).

GR: First, the way Tibetan books are titled and the way books in English are titled is very different. For instance, modern Tibetan titles look like this: *The Frost Bitten Flower*, *The Waterfall of Youth*, *The Heartbeat of a New Generation*. It's all nouns, you don't see prepositions. *In the Road*, *Off the*

Road, *On the Road*—that's not how Tibetan titles work. And trust me, I thought about this. If it took me ten years to translate *On the Road*, during those ten years I thought about the translation of the title. How do I translate *On the Road*? I tried different things. *Lam ('grul bzhud)*. *Lam la kyod pa*. *Lam*, just *Lam* by itself. Life on the Road. *Lam La* and *Lam Du*. Linguistically, grammatically, they are just the same. But really, when you think about it, *Lam Du*, that is literally *On the Road*. So there were all these different options, and after considering all of them, the title I selected was *Lam La*. Well part of the reason why is that this book is not a Tibetan book, it's an American book, and its foreignness is part of this book so I wanted to convey that in the title. Besides that, *Lam La* is easy to say, it's easy to spell, it's a nice title that rolls off the tongue. And it conveys the meaning. Now this title would never otherwise exist in Tibetan, a Tibetan book would never be called *Lam La*. But it's not a Tibetan book. Look at *Seven Years in Tibet*; Tibetan titles don't work like that. It should be *Bod Nang Lo Dun Dé Pa, Living in Tibet for Seven Years*, but again that is a foreign book so the translated title *Bod Nang Lo Dun* makes sense.

JTL: How was translating Kerouac's *On the Road* different from translating Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*? These were such different books.

GR: Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* was short, and Kerouac's *On the Road* was very long! In terms of the linguistic differences between *The Old Man and the Sea* and *On the Road*, to tell the truth I really can't tell the differences. Now when you ask me about the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama or the writings of Tsongkhapa, that's easy for me to say. There's something lacking in our understanding of English literature that is very hard to overcome. You really need to have English as a working language—you live by it, you die by it—that's what you need. Now the way I began translation, I can't really say it's a choice. I mean of course I chose to translate but I was almost pushed into it by the situation.

Anyway for Hemingway, after I translated *The Old Man and the Sea*, we printed several different editions of it, so each time I edited it completely. The very first time I was editing after translating it, I was just focused on accuracy. But the later times when I was looking at it, I was just looking at readability. The structure of English is the subject + verb+ object structure, and anything you say, that's the structure. In Tibetan, perhaps in fifty percent of the cases, the subject is implied but not explicit. Someone says they went to Tibet and what did they do there? Not much, there wasn't much to do but they ate some momos and that was it. In Tibetan, it's not explicit but rather just understood who went to Lhasa and ate the momos. Now when you take the subject + verb + object structure and translate it like that, it doesn't read well in Tibetan at all.

"My key is on my desk near my computer beside my book." That's a perfectly normal sentence in English. Now if you tried to say that in Tibetan, it's got way too many "me" and "my;" it just

sounds totally wrong. So you know, the Hemingway, I edited once, then I edited again and again. As for *On the Road*, others edited it, and I was on the receiving end of their edits. Of course I had the final say but often I chose to accept their edits.

JTL: How much did you think of yourself translating ideas, or a world, beyond the words and sentences? Are these ideas important for Tibetans?

GR: My job is not to judge the book; my job is to carry the message into Tibetan language. But of course, the ideas are important. Every comma is important and has to be delivered properly into Tibetan. In the same way, the ideas were important and needed to be delivered properly into Tibetan.

There are many concepts or ideas that might be interesting to Tibetan readers. Now there's a quote from *On the Road*, "Anonymity in the world of men is better than fame in heaven, for what's heaven? What's earth? All in the mind." Now this "all in the mind" has to do with Buddhist philosophy, I think. There are these four schools of Buddhist philosophy, which are Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Madhyamaka. The Chittatmatra is the mind-only school, and this line of Kerouac's seems to reference the philosophy of the mind only school. Now that's interesting and relevant to Tibetans. He also talks about the princes of dharma and he wrote *Life of the Buddha*—these are all very relevant to Tibetans.

There's also a line about being in a high place somewhere and meditating before in a previous life. Now this is the first time that *On the Road* has been translated into Tibetan. Kerouac died when he was young, quite young, and he had actually studied a lot of Buddhism. He had read many texts. He read Milarepa's biography, Marpa's biography—he wrote the *Life of the Buddha*. He read a lot of Buddhist works, he read the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Lankvatarasutra*, and most importantly, the *Dhammapada*—that Gendun Chopel translated into Tibetan. And I think that we can see the influence of all these texts in *On the Road*.

There's a place where Kerouac's talking about a madman who is building a house. And he wants another house built by the side and he calls the contractors and construction workers and makes them build this house, and then after this house is finished, he doesn't like it and wants it demolished. Now what does this remind us of? If Kerouac were alive, we could ask him if he was indeed referencing Milarepa's trial by Marpa. But we don't know! So we can't really say. I have read reviews where people really emphasize that Kerouac is a Christian writer, that his religion is Christianity. Whether he's Christian or Buddhist, I don't know and it doesn't matter to me, I don't need to say that he is Buddhist.

JTL: What was your training in Tibetan literature? Where and when did you get this training?

GR: This is a long story, but I will try to tell it as briefly as possible. When I was living in a monastery in Tibet, this was in the 1980s. Ten years before, there wasn't much Tibetan studies going on at all. In 1976, Chairman Mao died, and then Tibetans were allowed to study Buddhism. And all of a sudden, there was a big interest in the Tibetan language, everyone was very interested in studying Tibetan and studying Buddhism. And we began to learn grammar and spelling—for example, the spelling manual *Wingbeats of the Butterfly*, we just memorized all of it. And we also studied Buddhist philosophy in the monastery. My teacher always liked to say, don't hold on to the branch while letting go of the root. They meant that we mustn't get so interested in poetry and the arts that we forget to study Buddhism! With my teacher, I studied literature and poetry. Tseten Shabdrung was very famous then, and I read Tseten Shabdrung's works such as *Instructions of Thonmi on Grammar* at that time.

By the time I came to India, my Tibetan was pretty good. In India, I had a job at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Varanasi where I was a research fellow. My research project then was to write about the history of Tibetan literature. And that's how I really began to look into the Kangyur and Tengyur and the collected works of the Buddhist masters, in order to study the influence of *kavya* on specific texts. Before the translation of the *Mirror of Poetry* came to Tibet, we did have figures of speech, what in Sanskrit is called *alamkara* or "figures of speech." Tibet had so many scholars and writers. What do we see in their writings? What figures of speech do we see in Sakya Pandita's writings? What figures of speech in Drogön Chögyal Phakpa's (1235–1280) writings, and in his writings there were so many. Of course, these were both written before the translation of the *Mirror of Poetry*. And later there were so many other examples, especially during Jé Tsongkhapa's time, so many that we can't even count them. So I was just taking samples and looking at them and studying them. That's my brief history of the study of figures of speech in Tibetan literature.

Before I used to really like writing poetry, like many of my generation. But as I read and studied, I willingly became someone who observed poetry rather than someone who wrote poetry. There were so many who were writing, and I didn't want to write like them. And at the same time, I couldn't write anything different from them!

JTL: You have extensive training in nyen ngak (*snyan ngag*), *kavya,* or "ornate poetry." When you read Tibetan literature, either poetry or prose, do you bring ways of reading and interpretation from your training in *kavya*? How does *kavya* theory influence your reading and interpretation of non-*kavya* Tibetan literature?

GR: That's a really open question. I can say anything, I think. On the one hand, it had everything to do with it. Now even when I read a biography, I can see the *kavya* applications everywhere. Pro-

fessor Nicole Willock and I worked on something together on this subject, and it concerns Lotsawa Chenpo Chengchub Tsemo. Lochen Jangchub Tsemo and Tselpa Kunga Dorjé, the author of *The Red Annals*, were contemporaries, and this was during Phagmodrupa's time. Now Jangchub Tsemo came to Lhasa quietly, visited the Potala and Jokhang and then left Lhasa. Tselpa Kunga Dorje wanted to meet him, but Jangchub Tsemo just came and went! So Tselpa Kunga Dorje has this one very poetic and pithy verse: "*phebs ma thag tu phebs zhes bdag la sbron*" meaning "As soon as you arrived, you left." "*Phep ma thag*" means as soon as you arrived, and "*pheb*" means you left. So you see, even when I am reading *namthar*, I can see the usage of *kavya*.

Is ornate poetry translatable or not translatable? It's a very important question. The sense of art in the poetry, can you translate that into another language? Take a look at *Jatakamala*. Its characteristic wordplay in Sanskrit, which is called *shabda alamkara*, can be rendered into Tibetan. But can the wordplay from the Tibetan or Sanskrit be rendered into English? I think it's very difficult. Maybe you can try, but I think there's no right or wrong answer. You can translate something from one language into another, but your readers can understand it very differently.

There's a line in the scriptures: The Buddha said that sound is impermanent. Some people understood that to mean that sound is empty, and others understood it to mean that sound is not permanent. Now which is it? Which interpretation is right? I guess it's art.

JTL: Did going deep into Beat literature change your thoughts and feelings about any examples or ideas in Tibetan literature?

GR: I don't know how to answer this question. This question is too deep for me. Because I don't know much about Beat literature, the only thing I translated is *On the Road*.

Quite frankly, I tried to read Kerouac's poetry, his *Book of Haikus*. I don't understand it. When you read his book of haikus, this is a random line:

> Cloudy autumn night
> —cold water drips
> in the sink.

This is what it sounds like in Tibetan:

> སྤྱིན་པས་གཡོགས་པའི་སྟོན་ཀྱི་མཚན་མོ་ཞིག་ལ།
> ཆུ་གྲང་མོའི་ཐིགས་པ་འཇོགས།
> བུམ་གཞོང་ནང་ལ།
> [laughs]

JTL: What about translating *On the Road*? Did that change anything about the way that you look at Tibetan literature?

GR: That may be a really good question. I don't know, I really don't know. I tried to compare *On the Road* with texts in Tibetan literature. I tried to compare it to biographies, I tried to compare it with the *lamyik* guidebook genre. Did it change my way of thinking about Tibetan literature? I didn't have any eye-opening idea about it.

The crazy part is that *On the Road* was such a great success, to the point that it changed a generation. It changed people, like it changed Sperling. That kind of narrative success and narrative influence, can it occur in Tibet? I don't know. Maybe a book that we can think of is *Grains of Gold: Tales of a Cosmopolitan Traveler* by Gendun Chöphel. That book got me interested in learning languages, especially Indian languages; it made me want to learn the details of those languages. That was *Grains of Gold*'s influence on me. What other text has such an influence? There is Döndrup Gyal, who's very influential. People talk about him a lot.

But maybe we Tibetans don't have such narratives, maybe we just have too much Buddhism, and too much "Om Mani Padme Hum." So we don't have a book that can change a man's life, a man's view. Because I think the Tibetan mind is already formed in a box, and it's not ready to change. For instance, if you look at *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, it teaches us: If you can fix it, why do you worry? If you cannot fix it, what can worry do? That kind of logic and narrative, you can apply that anywhere, and that validation is so strong. Don't you think so?

JTL: What should Tibetans read in their own literature to better appreciate *On the Road*? And what should English-reading audiences read in Tibetan literature if they are interested in *On the Road*? Are there works of Tibetan literature that you think would pair well with *On the Road*?

GR: Some parts of these questions, I already answered, I think. In *On the Road* there are some parts that I really love. For instance, the part where he goes to Mexico, I love that part. Sal is in Denver and Dean is in New York, and all of a sudden, he learns that Dean is coming. And there's a vision of Dean—his car is roaring, there's a tempest of clouds, behind him, the road is on fire—it's such a clear description. And, just for example, we can see that same clarity of description in Milarepa's biography too. When Milarepa's mother sends him to learn black magic, he goes and gets drunk instead. When his mother sees him drunk and singing, she gets so angry that she beats her *chupa*, and holding a spatula in her hand, she comes roaring towards him. The text says, she jumps on the longer steps and runs on the shorter steps, and this scene is laid out so well that you can see the scene so clearly.

In the first chapter, there's a story of him and a Mexican girl, and I really love that too. Overall, perhaps he has a loyalty to his own people but he also has a deep respect for other people. As for

Black people, he says he wishes he were a Black man, that he is sick and tired of being white. Take his love for music and for musicians, mostly Black musicians, like Charlie Parker and the jazz musicians. In San Francisco, when he and his friend Dean go to a bar, Dean sees a musician as a "god." These examples show there's much in the book that's important for Tibetans, and I think Tibetans can understand it right away.

JTL: What has been the Tibetan response to *Lamla*?

GR: The answer to this question is a bit complicated. Now when *Lamla* came out, non-Tibetans said *Tashi Delek*, congratulations, and told me that it's a big accomplishment. Among Tibetans, the first thing they point out is what is wrong with the book. During the event launching the book, I heard the title of *Lamla* is not quite right. On Facebook, the first response is that the translation of the term "Beat generation" is wrong, and the second is that the translation of the title *Lamla* is wrong.

Our book culture and western book culture—the reading of books and using books as a source of education—is quite different. In English, I know that people write reviews, they read the books, they congratulate the author, but it's all done according to a set timeline. When someone first opens the book, they congratulate the writer. When they open it next, they read it. When they open it a third time, they review it. And the review has both positive notes and negative notes. But it's a natural process. For the Tibetan audience, I don't think it's like that. That's the difference between the English speaking world and the Tibetan speaking world. In the Tibetan world, the very first time they read something, they want to criticize it right away. And there are two reasons. The first is that people want a platform to show that they know something. The second is that if they want to make a valid criticism, then it's very useful and helpful. And that process takes time. But they don't take that time. And the third is that Tibetans have an assumed reality, and the assumption that they have is that the Kangyur and the Tengyur translations are the most perfect translations of all time. And anytime any new translation comes out, they compare it to the translation of the Tibetan canon. And the translation of the canon is perfect, that's just assumed.

Now Marpa spent twenty one years in India. His language skills are expert, and his translation is perfect. But there are other translators of the canon who barely speak any Sanskrit. Nobody so far has done the research on their comprehension, on how much some of these weaker translators understood or not. If you take the case of *The Life of Buddha*, the *Buddhacarita*, the translator spent a couple of years in Nepal and did the translation. Now the *Buddhacarita*, which is such a famous classic poem and a great Buddhist literary work, never gained any reputation in Tibet because of its poor translation. Rather, in Tibet it was *The Bodhisattvavadanakalpalata* by Kashmir Pandita Ksemendra that became the beloved classic. Why? Because its translator was highly expert in

kavya and in languages. And Tibetan readers don't know that, for instance, in the Kangyur and Tengyur, some Indian translators who barely knew Tibetan have made Tibetan translations.

When TCV students say "male yak" and "female yak," they are made fun of, but did you know that in Atisha's translation, he wrote about "male sheep" and "female sheep," "male horse" and "female horse," and no one makes fun of that? Instead people just prostrate at the feet of Atisha. Anyway what I mean to say is that there are there poor translations in the Kanygur and Tengyur but people don't see that way. We just think it was all perfect. Anyway, I don't need someone to read this and say it's great. What I hope is that someone will read it and try to understand this American Beat generation and to read some Tibetan!

JTL: Do you have any advice for translators of Tibetan-language literature into English?

GR: I was just asked that question recently. This happens a lot with Tibetans. Older people give advice to younger people and give them guidance. I don't think this is the right approach, at least for me. I don't have anything to say except work hard, do your job, spend your time. I do want to make this note. I really want to credit the contributors who helped me with *On the Road*, who helped read my manuscript, who helped me understand paragraphs and problems. There were a lot of people who spent time and attention on it. It's not only my work, it's many people's work. So that's the main point. I don't know if this is advice, but this is my take. You do not need a perfect translation. You should just try to deliver the message your own way, and you get plus points if you can go through the Tibetan translation rules, regulations, and norms that were set out in the 8th century and later on. If you can do that, that's wonderful! Just follow that. Unlike other languages, Tibetan has a whole set of rules and regulations, of translation theories and translation studies. We have plenty of that. If you can follow that, it's great. Otherwise, well, mistakes happen. You can't ignore mistakes, that's for sure. You should try to avoid mistakes but don't be afraid of making mistakes. If you are afraid of making mistakes, then you are not going to do anything.

You have to understand ,what I am trying to do, what is right for my generation—it's not necessarily right for the younger generation. We are just trying to create reader materials. The younger generation may have other things to do to make Tibetan literature more beautiful, more poetic, more readable, and more likeable, including putting space between the words!

When you go to do anything, there's not just one challenge but there's a hundred thousand challenges and there's a hundred thousand solutions, and one person's solution may be right for one person but not for another. And for *On the Road*, there were different solutions for each problem. The most important thing is, you have to do something. You have to do something. If you don't, then you are not doing your duty. No matter what, you have to do something.

JTL: What are you working on now?

GR: When I was at Varanasi, I was young, energetic and arrogant. I was writing a history of Tibetan literature. And one thing I did good work on was the period of the early dissemination and the works produced then, such as the Kangyur and the Tengyur, and the *Lhenkarma Catalog* (also known as the *Denkarma Catalog*). I also studied Sakya Pandita very well. But I didn't do enough research on the period between Sakya Pandita and Jé Tsongkhapa, which is a two hundred year period. It's the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, going into the fifteenth century, this period I didn't cover well. Actually I wrote a book covering the thirteenth century. When we talk about the five minor sciences which includes grammar, poetry, and composition, Sakya Pandita initiated their study, he started it all. Sakya Pandita's generation, and Shongtön Dorjé Gyaltsen and Pang Lotsawa who were in the generation after him—these were the generations I previously covered.

Now I am covering the next generation: Pang Lotsawa's nephew Lotsawa Jangchup Tsemo, Sakya Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen, also Longchen Rabjampa, Gyalsé Thokmé Sangpo, etc. What work have they done for Tibetan grammar, poetry, composition and literature? After them comes the generation of Jé Tsongkhapa. So that's what I am writing a book about. Basically, I am tracing the lineage of the *Mirror of Poetry*.

I am a little tired of translating now. When you are translating, you are in a box. When you are writing you have so much freedom! You can write whatever you want. Before I wrote an essay on each person, an essay on Pang Lotsawa, an essay on Shongtön Dorjé Gyaltsen, an essay on Drogön Chögyal Phakpa. Now I am thinking maybe I should just do a line on each subject. So that's my ongoing project. And after this I am going to Amdo, I mean, in terms of study. I am going to study the lamas of Rebkong.

Transcribed and partially translated by Tenzin Dickie. The contents of this interview have been lightly edited for style and clarity.

Conference Notes on the Tibetan Women Writing Symposium: A Celebration of Tibetan Women's Literature

གངས་ཅན་སྐྱེས་མས་རྩོམ་རིག་གྲོང་བ། བོད་མིའི་རྩོམ་རིག་མཛད་རྩལ་གཟེངས་སུ་བསྟོད་པ།

Tashi Dekyid Monet

The Tibetan Women Writing Symposium brought prominent Tibetan female authors from across Asia and North America to the University of Virginia from April 8 to 10, 2022 to celebrate and explore the renaissance of Tibetan female writers in recent years in Tibetan cultural areas, other parts of Asia, and the broader global diaspora. While women writers prior to the twentieth century were undervalued and overlooked by Tibetan Studies scholars, the last few decades have witnessed an explosion of powerful literary works across many genres by new generations of Tibetan female writers. Even so, they have received far less public and scholarly attention than their male counterparts in the West. This symposium thus intended to offer an international venue for leading women authors to come together from across the globe and dialogue with each other, as well as with prominent scholars of modern Tibetan literature. During the three days, after two opening keynote speeches by Professor Janet Gyatso (Harvard University) and Dr. Lama Jabb (Oxford University), the writers, translators, scholars, and students participated in a series of sessions to offer readings of the women's works in Tibetan and English, literary analysis and socio-culturally situated interpretation, and wide ranging discussions and reflections between the authors and their commentators. Most works were originally composed in Tibetan while a smaller number were original English and Chinese compositions. The events concluded with a fascinating roundtable discussion reflecting on the last six decades of developments in modern Tibetan literature, as well as the future prospects for women authors.

Visiting Authors

Visiting Tibetan authors included Chimay (འཆི་མེད།) and Tsedronkyi (ཚེ་སྒྲོན་སྐྱིད།) from Tibet; Min Nangzey (སྨིན་སྣང་མཛེས།) and Nyima Tso (ཉི་མ་འཚོ།) from India; and Tenzin Dickie (བསྟན་འཛིན་བདེ་སྐྱིད།), Tsering Wangmo Dhompa (ཚེ་མ་ཝ་ཆེ་རིང་དབང་མོ།), and Kelsang Lhamo (བསྐལ་བཟང་

ལྷ་མོ།) from the United States. Additionally, an essay by Baimanazhen (དབྱི་ལྷ་མཛེས།), who lives in Lhasa, and video interview with the author were presented virtually.

Chimay is a poet and Tibetan language teacher from Rebgong, Amdo. She has published two books of collected poems, *The Dreams of the Moon* (ཟླ་བའི་རྨི་ལམ། 2012) and *The Youth of Water* (ཆུའི་ལང་ཚོ། 2016). Her poems were awarded highest recognitions for Tibetan literature in China including the 2015 Wild Yak Prize for Literature and the 2017 Annual Award for Nationalities Literature from China Writers' Association. Tsering Wangmo Dhompa is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Villanova University. She is the author of three collections of poetry: *My Rice Tastes Like the Lake*, *In the Absent Everyday,* and *Rules of the House*. Dhompa's first non-fiction book, *Coming Home to Tibet*, was published in 2016.

Tsedronkyi is a short story writer and Tibetan language teacher from Chapcha, Amdo. She has published two books of collected short stories, *A Melancholy Drama* (སྐྱོ་སྣང་གི་ཟློས་གར། 2005) and *Clinging* (ཞེན། 2016). Nyima Tso is a poet and short story writer from Labrang, Amdo; she now lives in Dharamshala. She has published two books of collected poems and short stories respectively: *The First Journey of This Life* (མི་ཚེ་འདིའི་འགྲོལ་བཞུད་ཟིངས་དང་པོ། 2003) and *A Fragment* (ཟུར་ཞིག 2007). Kelsang Lhamo is a writer and translator from Lhokha; she now lives in the US. Her publications include *Dreaming at the Sage's Abode: Biographical Sketches of Four Living Tibetan Nuns*, *Biography of Great Kalayanmitra Geshe Yeshe Topden*, *Collection of Contemporary Writings of Tibetan Women*, *A Maiden's Wandering Westward*, and *Sogyal Rinpoche's The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Tibetan translation).

Baimanazhen has published two novels, *Tara Reincarnated* (复活的度母) and *Love in Lhasa* (拉萨红尘), along with a number of collections of essays and poetry, as well as non-fiction stories and graphic novels for children. Tenzin Dickie is a writer and a translator. She is the editor of *Old Demons, New Deities: Twenty One Short Stories from Tibet*, an anthology of short stories published in 2017. Formerly an editor at the *Treasury of Lives*, she is currently the communications officer at the Buddhist Digital Resource Center. Min Nangzey is a poet and essayist from Golok; she now lives in Dharamshala. She has published *Princess of the Snow Mountain* (གངས་རིའི་སྒྲས་མོ། 2006), a book of collected poems, and *Songs of Emotions* (ཚོར་བའི་གླུ 2015), a book of collected lyrics.

Due to it being the largest such international event to highlight Tibetan female authors from around the globe, it attracted prominent scholars from across the United States and Europe. In addition to the keynotes by Gyatso and Jabb, scholars participating in translations, presentations, and discussions included Rekjong Dhondup Tashi (རིག་འཛུང་དོན་གྲུབ་བཀྲ་ཤིས། Northwestern University), Pema Bhum (པད་མ་འབྱུམ། Latse Project), Françoise Robin (Paris's National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations), Holly Gayley (University of Colorado at Boulder), Lauran Hartley (Columbia University), Annabella Pitkin (Lehigh University), Nicole Willock (Old Dominion University), Jue Liang (Denison University), Andrew Taylor (The College of St. Scho-

lastica), Tashi Dekyid Monet, Erin Burke, Charles Laughlin, Kurtis Schaeffer, and David Germano (all from the University of Virginia).

The events were co-organized by University of Virginia graduate students Tashi Dekyid Monet and Erin Burke, along with earlier help from Eben Yonetti, and former graduate students Jue Liang and Andrew Taylor, while current graduate student Heather Moody, Tibet Center Associate Director Ariana Maki, and Tibet Center staff Rongwo Lugyal offered additional assistance. Faculty advisors Janet Gyatso, Lama Jabb, Françoise Robin, David Germano, and Kurtis Schaeffer provided support throughout the lifespan of the project beginning in 2019.

Opening Ceremony and Keynote Speeches

The symposium opened ceremonially with a reading of Chimay's poem, རྒྱང་རིང་གི་སྐར་མ་འོད་ཆེན། "The Brilliant Star from a Distance," read by Tsedronkyi in Tibetan and David Germano, who translated it into English. It was followed by Tashi Dekyid's reading of her Tibetan translation of "My House is the Red Earth" by the Indigenous poet Joy Harjo as an extended Land Acknowledgement. Next were the keynote speeches by Janet Gyatso and Lama Jabb. Lama Jabb's keynote was entitled "Distilling Joys and Woes: An Appreciation of Contemporary Tibetan Women's Writing (སྐྱིད་སྡུག་བསྣལ་པའི་དེང་རབས་བོད་མོའི་བརྩམས་ཆོས་སྒྲོང་རོལ།)," (published in this issue of the *Journal of Tibetan Literature*), in which he gave a brief survey of the development of women writers in Tibet. Though he recognized the continuities between contemporary writing and many aspects of classical Tibetan literature, he noted that women writers are providing new perspectives and experiences to the reading public. Chief among these were subjective female perspectives and rich depictions of issues affecting women, such as motherhood, domestic violence, and access to education.

Janet Gyatso followed him with her remarks, "What – and How – Do We Learn from Tibetan Women's Writing? Questions for the Symposium." These questions highlighted the emerging status of Tibetan women's writing, with its readership and critical reception still under development. She covered a vast number of topics from the subject matter of women's writing to how we should understand the category of Tibetan women's writing itself, citing theorists of gender studies Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous. The audience took up many of these questions in the discussion that followed. Given the emphasis on love and motherhood in both of the keynotes, one person asked if nuns would be included in this category. Another cautioned against expecting women authors to move beyond the issues of gendered experience when women writers were only just beginning to depict their own experiences. Both speakers bolstered the feeling that the participants were taking up a critical conversation at the intersection of Tibetan, literary, and Indigenous studies that was igniting around the globe among artists, readers, and scholars.

Reading and Discussion Sessions

The main part of the Symposium then consisted of four reading and discussion sessions. Each session presented the work of two writers, which included 20 minutes of reading in both original and translated languages per writer, followed by 40 minutes for a joint discussion with both writers.

The first reading and discussion session featured powerful readings of the poems ཨ་ལོང་། ("The Ring") by Chimay, originally composed in Tibetan, and "Somewhere Else" (ས་ཆ་ག་གེ་མོར།), originally in English, by Tsering Wangmo Dhompa. The translators, Lama Jabb and Dhondup T. Rekjong, read their translations in English and Tibetan, respectively. Moderated by Kurtis Schaeffer and Lama Jabb, the poets then discussed how their poetry writing has been nurtured by their life circumstances and traditions of storytelling such as the Gesar epic (in Chimay's case), the intricacies of narrating or writing one's belonging to and longing for the distant homeland (in Dhompa's case), and the importance of a Tibetan voice, particularly the voice of Tibetan women, in literary discourses and telling the stories of Tibet.

The second reading and discussion session presented readings of Tsedronkyi's short story ཁུ་སིམ་པའི་ས་སྲོད། ("The Silent Dusk"), with a collaborative translation in English by Erin Burke and Eben Yonnetti, and Nyima Tso's essay ངའི་ཨ་ཕ་དང་ཨ་ཕའི་ལག་ཤེས། ("My Father's Dexterity") in Tibetan, with Nicole Willock's English translation. Moderated by Holly Gayley, the authors discussed the role of place and nature in their works. The rich, shifting scenes of dusk in Tsedronkyi's short story reveals emotions and desires of the character, while the settings in Nyima Tso's essay are primarily inside her home and in her childhood memory. Both authors, as writers of short stories, also commented on the possibilities that the form of short story offers them. For example, for Tsedronkyi as a full time teacher and a single mother, she often writes at night and finishes one story in a single sitting.

The third reading and discussion session presented readings of three excerpts of poems from དྲང་སྲོང་བསྟི་གནས་ཀྱི་རྨི་ལམ་ཡུན་ཅིག (*Dreaming at the Sage's Abode*) by Kelsang Lhamo and 出家的德吉, ("Dekyi, Who Left Home") by Baimanazhen. Dhondup T. Rekjong presented his Tibetan translations of the poem excerpts, and Jue Liang and Andrew S. Taylor read their English translation of the essay. Moderated by Lama Jabb, Kelsang Lhamo commented on her experiences of writing romantic literature while she was still ordained as a nun. Baimanazhen's pre-recorded interview included responses to questions on the meaning of *chujia* (出家), "left home," an explanation of how the character of Dekyi the nun reacted to her writing when the essay was shared with her in spoken Ütsang Tibetan, and an outline of plans for future writing projects.

The fourth reading and discussion session featured the reading of the essays "The Lottery" (རྒྱན་ཤོག་དེ།) by Tenzin Dickie and ཨ་མའི་ལག་རྩམ་དྲན་པ། ("Remembering My Mother's Handmade Tsampa") by Min-Nangzey, together with their Tibetan and English translations by Dhondup T. Rekjong and Annabella Pitkin, respectively. Moderated by Françoise Robin, the authors commented on using ordinary objects in everyday life such as a *tsampa* box as a lens or frame to tell

stories of longing, struggles, and aspirations of Tibetan diaspora communities. Participants in the audience such as Janet Gyatso and Pema Bum also commented on the particularity of writing ordinary objects in great detail and discussed whether that skill was specific to women authors.

Concluding Roundtable Discussion

The symposium concluded with a long and fascinating roundtable discussion with all authors and translators serving as discussants. Moderators Janet Gyatso, Tenzin Dickie, Françoise Robin, and Charles Laughlin each shared a brief comment before the floor was turned over to the discussants. The writers commented on the importance of role models and support from fellow women authors for emerging women writers. Palmo (དཔལ་མོ།), a poet and professor from Northwest University for Nationalities, and Tsering Wangmo Dhompa were celebrated as such examples in Tibet and the US respectively.

Chimay shared a detailed account of how her first poem was published through encouragement from a female author whose work was the first publication of modern literature by women that Chimay had read. Chimay's account of how she promoted her own very first publication of a poem (in the newspaper *Khrims lungs tshang par*) raised a lot of laughter in the audience—she would approach each new person and show them the newspaper, which she folded into the size of a matchbox and carried in her chuba pocket. Chimay also commented that, originally, dedicated spaces for women writers were very important at a time when women authors were few in number. However, now that the quantity of Tibetan women writers is no longer an issue, it is important to focus on the quality of their writing and to hold it to the same criteria of excellence applied to writing by male authors. All participants offered their appreciation for the symposium and acknowledged the importance of continued opportunities for reading, discussions, and gathering for and with Tibetan women writers.

Post-symposium Tours and Publication Plans

Finally, due to the deep interest in the symposium, Harvard University, Columbia University, and University of Colorado at Boulder arranged follow-up talks and convenings for a subset of the authors from Asia at their own campuses over the following weeks after the UVA events. A volume is currently being prepared as an outcome of the symposium that offers a bilingual collection of contemporary Tibetan women's writings, which will be the first of its kind. Plans for other forms of publication such as an English-language collection of writings by Tibetan women writers that could reach wider audiences are also being discussed.

Artist Statement

Tenzing Rigdol

There are two terms that immediately come to my mind when thinking about art. The Tibetan word *gyutsel* (sgyu rtsal) and the Sanskrit term *chitrakala*. The Tibetan word *gyutsel* comes from the word *gyuma* (sgyu ma)—meaning, illusion, magic, or magical—and *tsel* (rtsal)—meaning skill, dexterity or craftsmanship. There is a strong recognition within the term *gyuma* that emphasizes the element of magic or illusion, and implies that art is that which involves magical dexterity. It isn't just craft or technique or the imitation of imitation but has an extra element of magic, or at least an awareness of it as an illusion.

Similarly, the Sanskrit term is also a fascinating one. The term *chitrakala* comes from *chitta*—meaning consciousness or awareness—and *kala*—meaning death, empty, past/future, time. Here the activity of art is understood as an act of consciousness weaving through time. In both instances, there is an implied recognition of a prerequisite condition or certain quality of awareness needed from the one who is experiencing in order to elevate his activity to the level of art.

When I ask myself, "What is art?", I wonder how differently I will respond to the same question when asked at different stages of an art process or practice. If I am in Hong Kong at the Rossi & Rossi Gallery, standing next to a painting I made, I might have a different experience of the artwork and therefore a different response than if we move back a bit in time and pose the same question when I am making the painting.

Furthermore, if we move farther away in time, away from the physical act of the painting and say I am only contemplating the composition of the painting, I think at that moment, I will have a very different response. I believe that for an artist, there are many doorways to experience the nuances of art but most of our discussion on art these days tends to revolve around the fruits, the artwork, or the product.

I feel that if the artworks are experienced only from the product-oriented way, then sometimes it destroys the very possibility for the viewer to partake in the process of making art. Therefore, I consider the whole journey, from the beginning of thought to the interweaving of the thought to a form, to the arrival at the final sense of fruition as many gateways to experiencing art.

Nowadays, I even find that many artists have alienated themselves from active participation in the process of making their own artwork. I think this has something to do with our natural preference for the product over the process of creating it—when instead the practice of art should

be treated like the practice of retreat or hermitage. If you treat the practice of art like a three-year retreat, then you have something interesting to tell, and to express and share with the world.

The story of Gautama Buddha's encounter with a musician illustrates this. Amongst many things, the Buddha was said to be an accomplished artist and a musician. One day, when Buddha was walking in a forest, he met some people on his way. One amongst them was a musician, and he had his flute tied around his waist. The Buddha upon seeing the flute asked the musician if he could play some tunes on it. The Buddha then gently took the flute and softly placed it between his lips and played an extremely beautiful melody with his eyes closed.

When the melody ended, he opened his bow-shaped eyes and acknowledged that to his own surprise he had become a much better flutist. Upon experiencing such a magical performance, the musician knelt before the Buddha and requested him to be his music teacher. To which the Buddha replied, "If you want to play the flute well, then pay less attention towards the flute and more attention towards the one who is playing it."