# The Lottery (क्रुन्रॅन्प्रें)

## Tenzin Dickie नमूत पदें त नने भ्रीन

(Translated from English by Dhondup T. Rekjong)

**Abstract:** "The Lottery" describes a historical event that transformed the fate of thousands of Tibetans in exile in the early 1990s. The story centers on the disorientation that accompanied the departure of the author's parents, who left the author and her brother in a Tibetan boarding school in India. It explores themes of displacement, emotional repression, cultural transition, and the awakening of existential awareness as understood through a child's inner world.

Keywords: displacement, memory, separation, childhood

#### **Translator's Introduction**

One of the major reasons why Tibetan Buddhism and culture hold an important place in global civilization is the tremendous translation of Indian Buddhism that Tibetans performed for centuries. Tibetans established their own translation dictionaries early on; one of the first bilingual lexicons is called *sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* ( ), which is concerned with translating Sanskrit into Tibetan. This text includes a primary translation guide, emphasizing the significance of understanding the meaning of the original text as

well as making it accessible in the target language. This theory has been the beacon of Tibet's translation culture for thousands of years, still sustaining its relevance when translating something from a foreign language into Tibetan. This principle might appear simple, but it is difficult to fully embrace in practice, as I have tried to do here.

I enjoyed Tenzin Dickie's essay, which narrates an important historical event in exile through an individual's experience. This single event transformed the fate and future of thousands of Tibetans in exile in the early 1990s. Since I had the great joy of reading it in English first, I thought I should generate the feeling of that enjoyment in Tibetan, but that wasn't an easy task at all. The act of reading is different from the work of translating; the translation is inevitably different from the original.

In the process of translating this essay, my first challenge was translating the foreign fictional characters into Tibetan because, in my estimation, Tibetan language readers are not familiar with fictional characters such as *Lady Bird, Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, or the Little Mermaid*. If Tibetan readers do not have any sense of those characters, allusions to them mean nothing because they don't have any relevant memories or experience in their cultural and educational environment. Thus, when translating the fictional characters, I mostly translated their meanings and even kept the English names in parentheses.

Capturing irony was another major challenge. The question was how to produce the humoristic and sarcastic qualities in Tibetan that are seen in the original English. The writer's discussion of the gendered dimensions of the English mistranslation of the French word *verre* is hilarious. However, the nuance and subtlety of this humor attached to a technical word can't be captured in Tibetan, except by providing the context for Tibetan readers. Thus, I retained the words *verre* and *vair* in my Tibetan translation to keep their visual representation. Not only that, but there are layers of irony within the writer's own observation of westerners' delicate and distinctive smell, like decaying rose tissue, and their worldview of accepting kindness when they did not need it. I think I was successful at capturing these qualities; I am quite sure that Tibetan readers will burst into laughter when reading those parts. Having said that, one's own cultural sense, psychosocial view, and even linguistic utterance are the core of understanding humor. I think humor is best understood in its own culture.

After China's occupation of Tibet, the standardization of Tibetan language terms has been a major problem amongst Tibetan scholars and language experts, both in and outside Tibet. The question is often whose translation we should consider authentic and authoritative: the translation of new terms standardized inside Tibet under China or those used in exile under the Tibetan government. In both cases, the impossibility of standardizing Tibetan terms for the new foreign terms is inescapable. Foreign terms, such as *PowerBalls* and Thumbs Up don't have standardized Tibetan terms yet. I think this is not a challenge of translation for this particular essay so much as a national challenge going forward, as long as Tibetans do not have complete sovereignty over their own language.

These challenges are not necessarily only true when translating from English to Tibetan or other languages; when translating from Tibetan to English, we might face the same kind of problems. My final observation is that a translation is neither the original work nor a replication of it. A translation is only a translation, nothing else.

### **The Lottery**

We called it the lottery. The lottery to go to America. It was a list of a thousand names. How did the Tibetan government officials decide who got on this list? Did they fold thousands of names into thousands of tiny rolls of paper, mix them up for good measure, and pick out a thousand lucky winners?

Before the lottery, the only lotteries we knew about were school raffles which my brother Tendor had a knack for winning. His luck held through several years of raffle drawings before it vanished abruptly and he stopped winning. One of the last things he won was a pair of beautiful black ankle high leather boots that all the female teachers had their eyes on. Later they came to our apartment to try them on—the black leather boots with small heels—elegant, comfortable, enduring. The leather was soft and flexible, and the zip smooth and seamless. The shoes must have been Italian. Back then even if you had the money for such luxurious items, which of course none of the teachers had, you couldn't have found shoes like that anywhere in India, even in bazaars in Delhi. One by one, each woman tried to slip a bare foot into a shoe and one by one, each gave up in resignation—the toes were too narrow, the arch too high, the ankle too tight. The shoes would not fit anyone. "Cinderella's shoes," my mother said.

I knew all about Cinderella and her shoes from the Ladybird books that my mother brought me from the school library. I knew about Snow White too and Sleeping Beauty and the Little Mermaid—beauties with skin as white as snow and hair as black as ebony or yellow as silk or red as sunset. None of these princesses looked anything like any of the women I knew. My mother put the shoes away. We'll keep them for you when you grow up, she promised. I arched my feet and smiled with secret delight. I was eight. I had years to grow into my Cinderella shoes but I knew that when I did they would fit. They fitted no one else but they would fit me. I know now that in the original French fairytale, Cinderella's shoes weren't glass at all but fur. The translator mistook the word 'vair' for 'verre' and transformed fur to glass—the translator must have been a man, a woman would know that glass shoes are for looking at and not for wearing. Still, this blunder rectified a detail, transforming the shoes from ordinary fur to transcendent glass. Fur after all can be stretched, while glass shoes must be made just for you. Different objects have different symbolic value. Imagine Eve or Snow White biting into a mango. It just doesn't work.

So those were the lotteries we knew, school raffles in which the most you won was a teddy bear or a pair of shoes that fit no one. Lotteries such as my friend Sonam buys now, the PowerBalls with tens of millions of dollars for the winner, and the Scratch tickets that my mother likes to buy and scratch out, the meager winnings always slightly less than the initial outlay, these were unknown then in India. Shows such as *Kon Banega Crorepati*, the Indian version of *Who Wants to Become a Millionaire* (a *crore* being ten million rupees), were unthinkable. India was still recovering from the economic slumber of its Socialist Nehru years, its markets opening slowly with

hairline cracks to the world. Coca-Cola, which you could find all over Kathmandu, had yet to come to India. On the rare occasions that we could afford soft drinks, we drank the local imitation Thumbs Up and wondered how it measured against the original. India was poor and Tibetans poorer still. The idea of a lottery that made you rich, a lottery that gave you a new life, was not just ridiculous but subversive.

And then it came. The lottery to America, the lottery that split our future. We were refugees. We lived in exile in small Tibetan villages dotted across India. We knew our future—we would have our parents' refugee lives, our parents' exile futures. We would grow up, graduate from our Tibetan boarding schools, go off to Indian colleges in the great subcontinental cities of the heartland (Chandigarh, Delhi, Bangalore), make friends with Indians but not too well because it wasn't for us to make love or war with them, and then return to our Tibetan settlements in the north or south to work in our own schools and communities, our own government. With America came the possibility of living outside these settlements, the possibility of unsettling. With America, the future split infinitely.

America. *Chigyal*. Outside Country. Abroad. *Nubchok*. The West. The west was a composite, the land of the yellow-haired, blue-eyed *Injis*. We were inordinately curious about them, that mysterious charmed species that stepped through India so lightly, smiling at complete strangers and taking their photos. We couldn't help but be infected by some of the obsequious reverence the Indians had for these *Injis*, so lately their overlords. The confidence with which they acted like people for whom things went right all the time was awe-inspiring for us, a people for whom things had gone so wrong. They

were a people who had a place not just in their own world but every other world they chose to enter, whereas we had no place anywhere, not even in our own world. Whether the *Injis* came from England, America, Germany, or France made no difference to us. They were *Injis* with their yellow hair and colorless eyebrows, skin pale pink like that of baby mice. They had a smell too, not rancid like the Indian smell but rather delicate and distinctive, something faintly sweet, like decaying rose tissue. It was not an unpleasant smell.

There were very specific things I knew about *Injis*. I knew they were a proud people who could accept kindness only when they did not need it. We had had two *Inji* guests at a special school dinner once. Before the dinner our principal made an announcement to the entire school: one of the two *Injis* was blind but not one of the teachers or the students was to help him because he would be insulted and offended. What a proud and narrow-minded people, we thought, who would take kindness for contempt. But we knew they could be kind. Machen Phuntsok, the cook and the only person at Patlikuhl who had travelled abroad, insisted on their kindness. In fact, he hadn't travelled so much as he was shipped abroad, with a cardboard notice hanging around his neck with his destination written in a foreign hand, while helpful yellow-haired strangers bore him along through different airports to the correct arrivals gate in Switzerland where he was joyfully retrieved by his relatives.

Another time a group of *Inji* tourists stopped by the school on their way to Manali. They had these strange cameras slung around their necks. They took a few photos on the playground and handed out these photos, right then and there, to the overjoyed subjects. Of course

they got mobbed. They spent the rest of the afternoon taking portrait pictures of us one by one. I jostled my way into the line. I had been in family pictures before, but never in a photo just by myself. For many of my schoolmates, it was their first photo of themselves. After I had my picture taken, I held the square grey-white sheet of paper by its tip, watching the grey-white fog color into an image of myself. I looked startled, as if I had been there all along and I was only now noticing it.

For all that the lottery changed my life, I don't remember how I heard about it. Did I hear it from my parents? The other staff children? One week the conversations in the staff room were about the new Hindi movie in the cinema and the love affair between Miss A and Gen BC and the next they were all about America. Who wanted to go, who did not want to go but was going to sign up anyway because regret always came too late, who would survive, who would have to learn English, who thought they would be unhappy but what was there in Patlikuhl for them anyway, with a pay that was just enough to last from month to month with nothing saved towards your future, your children's future.

Years later I would learn the specifics. It was Representative Barney Frank, a Democrat from Massachusetts, who introduced the Tibetan provisions to the 1990 Immigration Act to allow one thousand Tibetans entry into the country. For fear of Chinese displeasure, the American government would not give either refugee or immigrant status to Tibetans, but Congress had finally settled on a compromise: Tibetans would be recognized as 'displaced' rather than 'refugees' and given 1,000 immigrant visas. Then all we knew was that the American

government had said to our government, we'll take one thousand of your people.

An expanded version of this essay appears in *The Penguin Book of Modern Tibetan Essays* (2023).

## ক্সুবংর্পিশ'ন।

द्यं स्वार्क्स क्रिन स्वेर्स्य स्वार्म्स स्वार्म स्वार्मिस स्वार्म स्वार्

क्षःचेनः तर्वे निर्वे क्षृत्व क्ष्य क्ष्य

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<u>रश्राक्षात्राचन्त्राचेशः क्षेत्राच</u>्देर् न्द्रोश्याद्देन् त्रश्राद्योहरार्धेन् न्द्रदे सुन् सेन् नुहुत् स (Lady Bird) 'धे'नेन'पिन्'नक्कुन'त्रस्य' सेत्'ङ्चेत्रस्य'स्य' (Cinderella) न्दःसेंदे' ॱॿॣॺॱख़ॱख़॔ॸॱॺॊॱऄॣॕॸॱऄॄॺॱॻॖऀॱऄ॔ॸऻॗ ॸॺॱॺऻॸॺॱॸॄग़ऻॸॱॿॣॱऄ॔ॱ (Snow White) ॸ॔ॸॱॺऻड़ऀॸ॔ॱ र्नेर सहें अ'स (Sleeping Beauty)। युदि तु से रहर हुर (Little Mermaid) ॲ्याश.बशश.२८.७१४.ग्री.लूरी प्रिट.क्षुपु.यारश.क्षेत्र.रेयोत्र.खुर.४हश.सपु.भ्री.क्षेयाशी क्री. कुट वया स्.के. ये.पु. श्री. प्र. स्थार के. ये.पु. श्री. श्री. श्री. श्री. ये.पु. श्री. देश सं. श्री या श्री प्रट क्रॅं महिमाग्रहारस्य ने या सदी सुना येना क्रें निया महिमा स्वर्भ स्वर्भ स्वर्भ में निर्माण सदी स्वर्भ स्वर्भ में जैंशानु के मार्क्या या शास का साम साम मार्क्या में मार्क्य मार्व मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्व मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्क्य मार्क्य बेस्। द्वेःस्टावीःहेरागाः अर्वेवायाः उत्याद्यादाद्वययाः क्रेंद्राउत्याद्यया। देःदुयादार्यादा नकुर्-डसप्पेत्र। शेद-श्रेश-देश-प्राप्ते-ध्रुस-कुर-र-उ-र्दि-रिप्यश-श्रुव-र्वेश। देव-ग्रमा ने र्में वर्षे पुरा कें पुरा कें प्राप्त का सुरा ने मालवर शे.जलट.सूट.ची.श.पुटी ट.ज.सूट.ची.पुट.चशश.शूटा ट.क्रे.टश.सुश.कूट.जी हूचा. धेव'सर'र्गे'नश'नर्डेश'न'रेट्। देव'ग्रह'। धेव'नङ्कुर'न'ट्रेश' म'सूट्' vair हे' verre यहेशस्र में निर्माण वर्षुर निर्माण क्षेत्र स्वाप्त निर्मेश्वर स्विता क्षेत्र स्वाप्त निर्मेश स्विता क्षेत्र स्वाप्त स्वापत स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्वाप्त स्व

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यर हिरा पर्ने रचा वे र के अपन ૡ૽ૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼૼઌૢૻ૽૽ૼૢૼૡૻ૽૽ૼ૱ૡ૽ૼૼૹઌ૽૱૾ૺૹઌૢ૿૽૽ૼૼૹ<u>ૢ</u>ૹૢઌ૽૽ૡ૽ૺઌઌ૽૱ૹ૾ૢઌ૽૽ઽૡઌૡ૽૽૱૽ૺૡ૽ૼૼૼૼૼ नवे खूब क नाडेना थू नु रेन् देरे में नु स्थे में नु स्थान स् ၛႍႜႍႍၛၛႃႚ (PowerBalls) ৼৢ৽৻ঀৢ৽ৡ৾৽ঢ়ৢ৻৽৻ঢ়ৼৢ৾য়৽৻ড়৽য়ৣ৾ৼ৽য়৽৻৽৻য়য়ৢ৽য়ৢঀঢ়৾য়ঀ৽য়৾য়৽য়৾য়৽ नःऍन्ॱसदेःनेवाशःन्दः अदःदः अःशःशः यवाशःग्रेशःर्हे नविदःसदेः यवाः प्रदेनः क्रुदःर्वेवाः Crorepati क्ष.तु.क्षे. शु.भ.प्यदे.चन्वार्से.ळवाश.वर्नेन्.नस.चेन्.च.क्ष.तु.दे.नेवाश.दे. नर्भात्रास्त्राच्यात्रात्र्वाच्यात्रेत्। भूनर्भात्रेत्त्वः वार्त्रः श्रे व्यव्याद्यात्रः वी *ॸॹ*ॎढ़ऄॖ॔ॸॱढ़ॺॱॻॖऀॱॺ॓ॱॸॕय़ऀॱॸॖॣॺॱक़ॕॸॱॺॺॱॷॖॸॱॴॗऄ॔ॱॲ॔ॸॱॸॿॎ॓ॺॱॲ॔ॸॖॱढ़ॆॸॱॸॗॺॱढ़ऄॖ॔ॸॱॻॖऀॱ <u> ફ્રિંસન્સન્યાના સત્તર્સા શૈન્યના શ્રુન્કો. મુંત્રુની</u> તતા. ભેલા છે. ક્ષેત્ર, જાતુ. ચોન્ય જાત્રુન ક્ષેત્રેના ક્ષેત્રેના ક્ષેત્રના ક सदः वर्धरः के.धि.वया.के.यो.लरः की.यार.ज.र. येटः श्रीयका श्रो श्रीयका जय रहरारः स्ट्रीर यर नशेयातु त्रवुर नते में भूनश यें र केर र केंश्य मात्र श की Thumbs Up सू तु त्बिर.बुर.रे.तबर.के.र्.स.रर.ह.तेर.वर्सर.रब्स.रव्यून.यदे.सूर.तायममार्थे.वर्षर.बुर। मी. यार वे र्श्वेत कर र त्रुव र्यो प्रेत वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र स्व स्व स्व र ते र र तुर प्रदेश वर्षेत्र वर्येत्र वर्य वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र वर्षेत्र व ल्यानी क्षेत्र क्षेत्

द्याश्चान्य व्यवस्त स्थान्य स

च्रास्त्रम् वित्रक्षेत्रस्थाः (Swiss) याः श्रेनसान्त्रस्थाः स्वित्रस्थाः स्वत्यस्य स्वत्यस्यस्य स्वत्यस्यस्य स्वत्यस्य स्वत्यस्यस्य स्वत्यस्य स्वत्यस्यस्य स्वत्यस्यस्य स्वत्यस्यस्य

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## नड्न र्ज्ञियार्निन्नालुन्यान्र र्वेशार्नेन् स्री किया स्रून्या सेन्यायेत्र यो प्येत्र वेन्याने सेन्

(र्गिट्र-पी-पेंट्-प्यगुर-पे-प्येंवर-र्हें अ: क्रिया-पेंदि: क्षत्र-पा-विषा-प्येता वर्षे वर्षे अ: प्रदेश अ: प्रेंत्र-पेंद्र-भेंद्र-(Penguin) द्वे: भ्रुव-पिट्र-पीअ: द्वर-पेंद्र-पे