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བོད་རིག་པའི་ཁོད་བོད་སྐད་ཡིག་གི་བྱང་ཉམས་གཙོ་སྤྱིང་དུ་འཛིན་པ།



A Journal of Tibetan Literature, Art and Humanities

Vol. 4, No. 1 (2024)

Special Issue

བར་དོའི་ཐོད་ལམ་བརྒྱུད་འབྲེལ་ལོ་རྒྱུ
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Translating Across the Bardo:
Centering the Richness of Tibetan Language in Tibetan Studies

Guest Edited by Huatse Gyal and Charlene Makley

Cover Image:

KULHA, ལྷུང་ན། Vitality (2023)
Acrylic paints and canvas, 30x40 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Yeshe: A Journal of Tibetan Literature, Arts and Humanities is an open access, peer-reviewed, annual journal that publishes academic articles, reviews, and interviews related to Tibet, as well as poetry, performance, prose, art, and fiction. It was co-founded in 2020 by Dr. Patricia Schiaffini Vedani and Dr. Shelly Bhoil with the support of Tibetan Arts and Literature Initiative. *Yeshe* also welcomes proposals of themed-based special issues.

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ISSN 2768-4261 (Online)

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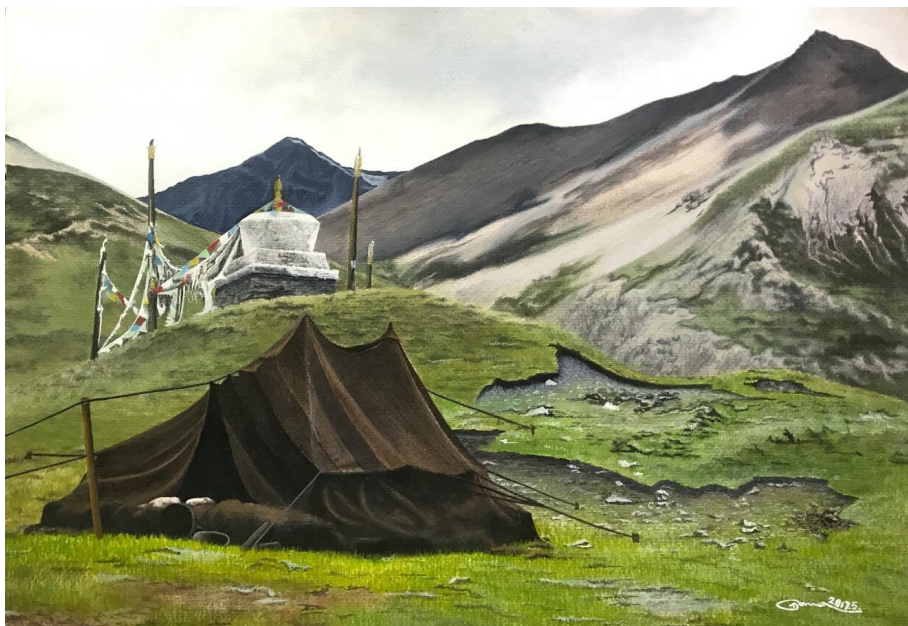
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KULHA, ཐུ་ཁུ། Decline ང་ན། Vitality (2023)
 Oil paint and canvas, 35x40 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

Introduction: Translating Across the Bardo

དཔལ་ཅེ་གུལ། *Huatse Gyal*¹

This special issue about centering the richness of Tibetan language in Tibetan Studies is born from a roundtable for the 16th International Association for Tibetan Studies seminar in Prague, Czech Republic, in 2022. Inspired by the pathbreaking works of two non-western scholars of literature, Lama Jabb in Tibetan Studies and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in African Studies, we invited both senior and emerging scholars in the field to engage with the works of these two scholars and consider how we might center the Tibetan language in Tibetan Studies in general and in our translation practices in particular. In order to include a wide range of voices and free discussion, we invited our participants to offer concise thought pieces in a roundtable format instead of a panel in which scholars read standard academic papers. The fleshed-out essays in this special issue take up our initial concern to spark conversations on language and translation in Tibetan Studies.

1 I thank Charlene Makley for tirelessly working on this collaborative project with me, especially during times when I was not able to directly set the project in motion due to external circumstances. My heartfelt thanks to the authors, who shared their insightful thoughts on issues of translation and centering Tibetan language in Tibetan Studies. Deep gratitude to Lama Jabb for inspiring us to embark on this project in the first place. I also thank two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback, comments, and suggestions. Many thanks to Shelly Bhoil and Patricia Schiaafffini Vedani for their editorial assistance, intellectual labor of love, and the curation of the entire issue.

As a first source of inspiration for our roundtable, Dr. Lama Jabb's publications on Tibetan language and literature and his series of lectures on translation in recent years have heightened Tibet scholars' awareness of translation as a highly fraught, "liminal bardo zone" (2024) between languages, in which translators must navigate a life-and-death process of partially dismantling both languages in order to bring about the felicitous rebirth of new texts. He tells us that the journey of translation from the Tibetan language is like crossing the *Bardo*, full of potential pitfalls and even the possibility of destructive violence, the erasure of the very memory of an already threatened Tibetan language and culture. And yet, he argues, if one pays arduous attention to the formal beauty and complex histories of the Tibetan language, one can produce translations that support the "continued life of the original" (2024).

Lama Jabb's work has been a constant source of inspiration for many Tibetan scholars both in the West and in Tibet. Young Tibetan scholars and students from Tibet particularly find his work inspirational because one can viscerally feel in his analyses of Tibetan literature and language the richness of Tibetan language not only at the level of meaning but also musicality and form. The richness of Tibetan language that Lama Jabb endorses in his publications and lectures starkly contrasts with many western analyses of Tibetan language literature, which reduce it to a few terms, or merely treat it as a means to extract data, or as the object of certain theoretical frameworks.

In his keynote speech delivered at the 14th International Association for Tibetan Studies seminar in 2016, Lama Jabb stated, "Language is not just a mere mode of communication. It does not only convey thoughts, feelings, and information but it also affects the ability to think, feel and communicate in profound ways at both individual and social levels" (2016). Thus, taking language seriously also means taking the speakers of that language seriously, including how they think and feel, both collectively and individually. By pointing out some of the flaws of his seminal book on Tibetan literature, *Oral and Literary Continuities in Modern Tibetan Literature: The Inescapable Nation* (2015), Lama Jabb emphasized the importance of honest critique aimed at bettering our scholarship and creating a more just society. For example, in his speech he

acknowledged that Tibetan literature is not immune to issues such as gender inequality and patriarchal injustices—themes, he said, he had not systematically and rigorously addressed in his book. Perhaps with a Tibetan audience in mind, Lama Jabb insisted, “Our scholarly pursuits would be more rewarding if we confront our many social challenges ahead, such as gender inequality, tribal and sectarian disputes, rampant gambling and alcoholism, environmental degradation, corruption of the clergy, and the power of elite intellectuals.” His speech struck a deep chord with both Tibetan and non-Tibetan scholars in the audience.

Besides Lama Jabb’s powerful statements on the status of Tibetan Studies and its future development in his keynote speech, the audience, particularly the Tibetan audience, was also deeply inspired by his passion, vivacity, command of both English and Tibetan, the seeming ease with which Tibetan poetry came to him, as well as his creative oral delivery of musically arranged Tibetan words—all of which contributed to what we mean by the richness of Tibetan language, or of any other languages. Languages in practice have a formal beauty of their own beyond any referential meaning they may convey.

The second source of inspiration for our roundtable was the renowned Kenyan scholar and writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s book, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). Ngũgĩ writes, “Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next” (15). Ngũgĩ’s central argument, or to put it more aptly, his main cause is that African writers would have to write in African languages if they were serious about decolonization. In a similar way, the contributors to this issue of *Yeshe*, especially the Tibetan scholars, have concerns that go beyond the merely beautiful translations of Tibetan literature into English, for such an effort is narrow, offering more to the ever-expanding metaphysical empire of the English language while adding little to the vitality of the Tibetan language.

After the publication of *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ himself bid farewell to English as a vehicle for his thoughts and feelings, and until this

day, he has been committed to writing in his mother tongue, *Gikũyũ*. In a 2018 interview, Ngũgĩ said, “We the older generation, the wrong thing we have done is we have made the languages of Europe as if they are the only ones which can bear knowledge, intelligence, and everything else. This is very wrong.” Ngũgĩ argues that if only English or French are learnt, decolonization of the mind could never take place because “knowing only English and French creates an attitude that knowledge comes from outside. That all that is good and everything else comes from outside and you can see it has created a mentality in Africa where even African leaders look for validation from the West. If initiative comes from within the country, they are suspicious of it unless there is validation, and it is never the other way around.”²

The perspective of the decolonization of mind vis-à-vis languages foregrounds to us the inseparability of the very language we use in our work or translation and the unequal power and prestige of world languages. We thus invited the participants to be in conversation with current prevalent paradigms related to decolonization with a special focus on the Tibetan language, while acknowledging the hegemony of the English language or other dominant languages in Tibetan Studies’ translation practices.

In this special issue on Translation in Tibetan Studies, we offer a variety of perspectives on translation and center the richness of the Tibetan language in scholarly work. We deliberately kept the essays short and pithy to maximize their accessibility to wider audiences. In the following sections, we do not aim to summarize all the creative and caring ways in which the authors presented their methods of engaging concepts, theories, and methodologies contained in the treasury of the Tibetan language, in order to grapple with and explicate unequally situated Tibetan and non-Tibetan epistemologies in their respective fields. We leave the pleasure of discovery and in-depth exploration to the readers.

2 Quotes in this paragraph are from Ngũgĩ’s 2018 interview, entitled, *African Languages Need to Talk to Each Other* <https://www.dw.com/en/ngugi-wa-thiongo-african-languages-need-to-talk-to-each-other/a-44297656> (Accessed in January 2024)

ལོ་རྒྱུ་དང་དབང་ལྷན་གྱི་འཕྲིན་ལྷན། Translation and Power Relations

In Tibetan Buddhist canons, great Tibetan translators are often referred as the “eye of the world” (འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་མིག), a term of great respect for the translators and their profession. This societal respect was often accompanied by institutional support over a long period of time. The rich Buddhist texts that we see today thereby should be seen as a product of certain historical and political institutions with resources and support. Who has the resources to translate? In whose interests do we translate? Who has the power to shape and wield translations? Whose works qualify as worthy of translation? Both Charlene Makley and Sarah Jacoby draw our attention to the politics of translation and unequal power relations. Jacoby, for example, claims that the Tibetan Buddhist studies has paid scant attention to Tibetan Buddhist women’s writings, while mainly translating the works authored by male Buddhist elites. Makley critically reflects on her own position as an American anthropologist and a tenured professor with access to resources for translation as a reality afforded by colonial institutions and powerful nation-states. What stands out in their respective essays is their humility and courage to find limitations within their (also our) collaborative translation projects by acknowledging the ever-expanding empire of the English language, and how that could shape our thinking in ways that we take for granted.

ལོ་རྒྱུ་དང་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བྱེད་སྒྲུབ་མེད་བའི་ཆ། Translation and Untranslatability

Translation is an open-ended process, and no translation can be said to be perfect. Whether we can replicate one language’s distinctions with all its complexities into another language is a perennial question. Cameron Warner poignantly reflects on the question of untranslatability and incommensurability as an essential feature of translation. For example, a single term in one language may retain irreconcilable meanings resolvable only by introducing or even imposing a coherent order absent in the original language (Hanks and Severi 2015). What factors then influence the decisions of a translator? Warner argues that the audience plays an important role in our translation practices, and there

is no perfect translation that can satisfy all readers. By focusing on his efforts to translate *Collective Topics* (བསྐྱུས་གྲགས་), a genre of Tibetan scholastic writing focused on epistemology, Forman shows us how interactions and a certain degree of mutual intelligibility can proceed in translation, and that translators can also gain insights from seeing the ambiguity and the open-endedness of translation not as something to resolve but as its precondition.

ལོ་རྒྱུ་སྤྱི་ཆེད་དུ་བྲིད། Translating for whom?

In an interview in 2018, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o says, summing up his philosophy: “If you know all, and I mean all, the languages of the world and you do not know your mother tongue, that is enslavement. If you know your mother tongue and add all the languages of the world to it, that is empowerment”. Of course, we should understand that there are many people who do not have the opportunity to study their mother tongue due to reasons beyond their control. We should also ask a difficult question, that is, by translating literatures from marginalized languages into dominant languages such as English, are we actively contributing to the ever-expanding reach of the English language while at the same time reinforcing the attitude that the English language is the only one that, in Thiong’o’s words, “can bear knowledge, intelligence, and everything else.” (2018)

As Makley points out, in recent years, with the rise of Black Lives Matter and Indigenous Land Back movements in the United States and other indigenous cultural and political revitalization movements beyond the North American context, many academic institutions and associations are discussing and developing ways to center native and marginalized voices and cultures. An important part of that larger discussion is to develop ways to do university research that can support communities in which we work and the cultural treasures that we study.

Another important context to understand is that the Tibetan scholars contributing to this volume, all of whom are sons and daughters of Tibetan nomads and farmers, went into academia as a means of helping their people, no matter in what field, and they are aware of their privileges and rare access to world-class

universities with a deep sense of personal and collective responsibility. In that respect, the ethical and political protocols that inform our academic practices can be said to be a little different from those of non-Tibetan scholars.

For example, Tsehuajab Washul raises the importance of translating non-Tibetan academic research methods and writing into Tibetan by inviting both Tibetan and non-Tibetan scholars to create more knowledge (and can we also say a different kind of attitude?) in the Tibetan language. Tashi Dekyid Monet invites us to think of research or scholarship as an opportunity to act within an ethical and place-based network of reciprocal relations. My contribution to this volume calls into question some Tibetologists' lack of respect towards Tibetan language teachers and Tibetan language pedagogies as well as the common practice of non-Tibetan scholars' reading, translating, and analyzing some of the most sophisticated Tibetan Buddhist texts after they have learned Tibetan just for a few years.

ལོ་རྒྱུ་དང་ས་གནས་བརྟེན་པའི་འཛིག་རྟེན། Translating Land-based Lifeworld(s)

Since the Maoist years (1950s-1970s), the reframing of Tibetan land as the sovereign property of the Chinese state has also entailed a process of erasing the Tibetans affective and historical relationships to their ancestral land. Today, the Tibetan-inhabited landscape is blanketed with state nomenclatures and definitions of land; land is translated in fundamental ways that affect its inhabitants everyday lives and subjectivities. Even in academic writings, for example, one can commonly find administrative terms such as province, prefecture, county, township, and village, all ranked in a hierarchical and spatial order. Eveline Washul claims that place names carry histories, memories, social relations, and relational ties to more-than-human beings. She points out that a place name like Golok is more than just a label that can be easily translated into languages such as the English, as it embodies a particular land-based articulation of a world. Washul's article is also a call for Tibetan studies scholars to be conscientious of the ways in which we translate place names and all the memories and histories ingrained in them.

Today, Critical Indigenous Studies scholars see the revitalization of Indigenous ways of relating to land and language as essential to the mission of empowering Indigenous communities and unmaking settler colonialisms (Perley 2012; Tuck 2014; Morten-Robinson 2016; LaDuke 2016; Simpson 2017; Kimmerer 2022). Drawing insights from this strand of scholarship as a source of inspiration, Tashi Dekyid’s paper powerfully shows the affective relationship between the Tibetan people, their ancestral land, and their language. She is also concerned with the ways in which our translations could erase Tibetans’ particular relationality with their ancestral lands. Her own decision to leave untranslated the invocation text of her community’s ancestral mountain is powerful because if one truly would like to understand this land-based relationship, then one has to attend to not only the meaning of such a text but also to its formal musicality and the affective experience of reciting it. It’s also a way of saying that we are not going to translate everything for you unless you take the richness of Tibetan language seriously. One may disregard such analysis as just an act of romanticization, but for many Tibetans this is largely about raising awareness of indigenous histories and place-based existences as part of a continuing struggle against external powers.

Conclusion: Adding Vitality to the Tibetan Language

Our translation practices are inseparable from our respective ethical commitments. For example, some may claim the importance of translating Tibetan Buddhist texts into English with the aim of spreading the Buddha’s teachings to a larger audience, or simply advancing human knowledge. Others may claim the need to translate the works of Tibetan women into English with the goal of representing marginalized voices. All are meaningful ethical commitments. For many Tibetan scholars and students, we would like to point out that adding vitality to the Tibetan language by translating a wide range of subjects *into Tibetan* is of urgent need and should be a deep ethical commitment in the increasingly fraught political context.

To conclude, as Lama Jabb pointed out in his keynote speech, “Without serious engagement with Tibetan language in all its expressive complexities,

our attempt to understand how Tibetans think, feel, dream, imagine, act and live will suffer.” Somehow, our ancestors on the Tibetan plateau managed to live a life with dignity and resilience in one of the coldest places in the world. In spite of the external threats and pressures that we face today, finding a way to flourish is the task for a new generation of Tibetan Studies scholars. Adding vitality to the Tibetan language through critical, collaborative translation practices is one crucial way forward.

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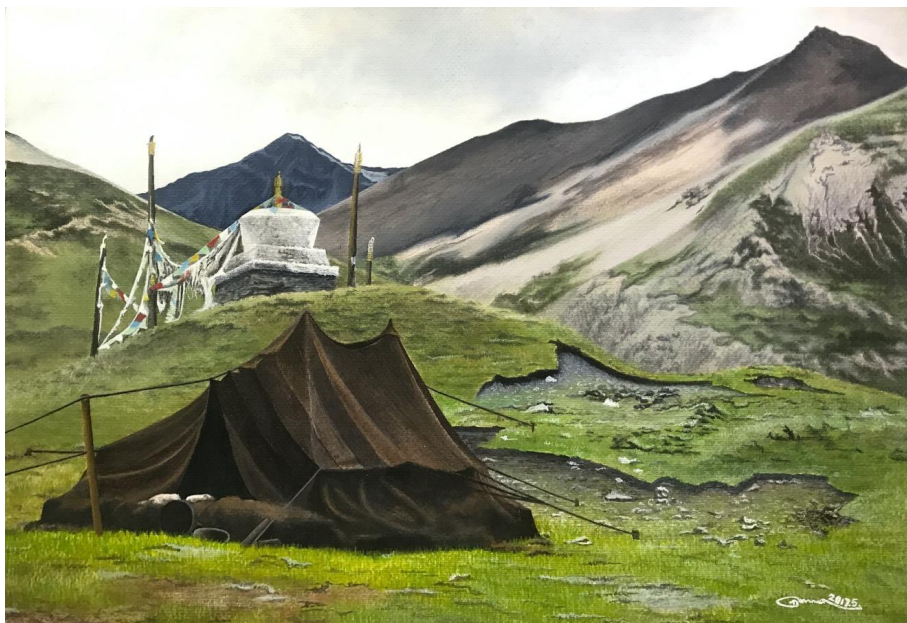
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Artist Statement I

སྐུ་ལ་ཡག *Kulha*

(Collected and translated by བཟ་ཤེས་བདེ་སྐྱིད། Tashi Dekyid Monet)



KULHA, སྐུ་ལ་ཡག། Decline ང་ཉ། Vitality
(2023) Oil paint and canvas, 35x40 cm
Courtesy of the artist

རི་མོ་འདི་ནང་དོན་གཙོ་བོ་ནི་མི་རིགས་ཉམས་སྐྱད་ལ་འགོ་བཞུགས་པ་སྟེ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་དེ་རེད། གནམ་
མཁའ་སྒྲིན་གྱིས་བཏིབས་པ། དྲངས་མོ་མེན་པ། རྒྱབ་སྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ཁོར་ཡུག་འདི་ལའང་སྤང་ནས་གྱིན་པའི་རྣམ་པ། ས་འདི་
ཉམས་ནས་འགོ་བཞུགས་པའི་རྣམ་པ། མཆོད་རྟེན་དང་དར་སྟོག་ཀྱང་ཞིག་ཅུལ་དུ་སོང་བ། དར་སྟོག་ཟད་པོ་གསར་དུ་
བརྒྱས་མེད་པའི་རྣམ་པ་སོགས་བྲིས་ཡོད།

སྐུ་ནག་ཡིན་ན་རྒྱུད་བཞུགས་པའི་རྣམ་པ་སྟེ། ང་ཚོའི་ས་ཡུལ་ན་བྱིས་ཆང་དར་ནས་བསྐྱད་ཡོད་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ན།
སྐུ་ནག་འཐེན་ནིའི་བརྩོལ་ལ་བལྟས་ན་ཤེས་སྤྱད་ཟེར་སྟོན་ཡོད། དེ་བས་འདི་ནི་སྐུ་ནག་སྤྱབ་པ་ཏ་ཅང་སྟབས་བདེ་དང་
མར་ལོག་ལ་ཉེ་བའི་རྣམ་པ་ཞིག་བྲིས་ཡོད། མཐར་སྐྱག་ན་ཆ་ཆང་གིས་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པ་མཆོན་པ་ཞིག་བྲིས་ཡོད།

The primary focus of this painting is to evoke Tibet's declining cultural traditions. This is shown in a cloudy and dim sky, eroded meadow, decaying stupa, and old and torn prayer flag. The black yak-fur tent itself is also in poor condition—in our hometown, you can tell if a family is flourishing by the degree to which their tent is tightly stretched and upright; here the tent is pitched simply and is about to fall. Essentially, everything portrays the state of decline.

ལོ་ལྔ་དང་དབང་ལྱགས།

Translation and Power Relations

The Politics of Translation: Centering the Richness of Tibetan Language in the Anthropology of Amdo

*Charlene Makley*¹

Abstract: In this essay, I reflect on the nature and stakes of translation politics in my anthropological and historical research in Amdo as a way to reconsider asymmetric relations among Tibet scholars and their interlocutors. I draw on my most recent research project, working with a team of Tibetan co-translators to collect and translate oral history interviews on the Tenth Panchen Lama's post-prison tours of Amdo, to offer five "reflections" on what

1 My heartfelt thanks to Huatse Gyal, who spearheaded this initiative to gather Tibet scholars around the theme of translation and the richness of Tibetan language. I also thank the panelists, my co-authors in this special issue, for their insightful comments and willingness to share their struggles and concerns. I am deeply grateful to the brilliant Amdo Tibetan woman painter Kulha for her willingness to share her amazing work with us on the cover and inside of this issue. Thanks as well to Rekjong and to Shelly Bhoil for their encouragement to reprise and flesh out our IATS roundtable for this special issue. Finally, my gratitude to Shelly Bhoil and Patricia Schiaffini Vedani for their careful editing and curation of the issue.

it would mean to truly center the richness of Tibetan language in Tibetan studies research and writing practices.

Keywords: Tibet, language, translation, decolonization, collaboration

In recent years, especially since the rise of the Black Lives Matter and indigenous Land Back movements in the United States, “decolonization” has been an important rubric for calls to center native and marginalized voices and cultures in academic projects. Yet, critical theorists have long expressed skepticism at invocations of “decolonizing” as a mere metaphor for the appearance of diversity. Such theorists argue instead that decolonizing academic practices entails recognizing the ongoing legacies of colonialism as well as the potentially painful complicities of well-intentioned scholars’ research. As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith famously put it, in her now-classic book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, “‘Research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (1999, 1). Decolonizing academia for Smith and others requires long term work for structural change that would re-make institutions for marginalized communities and actually de-center colonial prestige, power, and epistemologies.

I consider translation practices as the heart of these politics in Tibetan Studies’ past and present. Here, I offer five reflections as I rethink in this light what centering the richness of Tibetan language in my own translation practices might mean. I draw on examples from my long-term collaborative project with several Tibetan co-researchers, on oral histories of the Tenth Panchen Lama’s 1980s post-prison tours of Amdo (now part of Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces in the People’s Republic of China). We have been working on this since 2016, and our team has collected and begun to transcribe and translate over hundred Tibetan-language interviews with a variety of Tibetans in Amdo and now, abroad.



The Tenth Panchen Lama arrives in Chabcha, on the first leg of his post-prison tours of Amdo, 1980. Photo displayed at the Tenth Panchen Lama Memorial Temple, Tsekok, Amdo, 2018. Photo by the author.

Reflection I: Privilege and Collaboration

Centering the richness of Tibetan language in this collaborative work highlighted the great privilege of my own position as a white American-born native speaker of English with access to graduate training in linguistic anthropology and a tenured professorship in the United States. In graduate school, I learned all sorts of abstract theories about language politics, the unequal power and prestige of world languages amid colonial institutions and nation-state standardization projects, as well as the importance of competing linguistic ideologies in shaping those relations.

But none of that training, I realized, meant anything until I entered into collaborative translation work with Tibetans. Any theory and practice of

language and translation I have developed have been collaboratively created with them. That work taught me, or better, made me inhabit and recognize what many anthropologists still erase in their English-language publications: the extreme complexity, interpersonal and epistemological messiness, and differential stakes of translation. “Collaborative” here does not mean smooth or harmonious transfers of mere information. As the Native American linguist Wesley Leonard reminds us, advocating for what he calls “relational accountability,” (231) language communities do not necessarily share the same notion of collaboration, and interlocutors in academic settings are often asymmetrically positioned in terms of access to authority and resources. The terms of any such work thus need to be explicitly clarified rather than taken for granted.

Reflection II: Challenging Translation Ideologies

Centering the richness of Tibetan language entails challenging globally dominant translation ideologies, which erase the geopolitics of languages and claim the capacity to seamlessly extract and deliver content as useable information across widely different language worlds. We live in a world facilitated by the universal language utopias first widely modeled in English-only sci-fi franchises like *Star Trek*, or now (seemingly) manifest in AI-powered digital translation machines like Google translate.

By contrast, the linguistic anthropologist Susan Gal points out that the term “translation” in fact covers a wide variety of communication practices aimed, problematically, at comparison, commensuration, even equivocation among languages and contexts. Translation is for her a socially embedded “metasemiotic activity,” in which translators take a segment of discourse and objectify and reframe it in a different semiotic system, all while seeming to “keep something about it the same” (2015, 227). In this view, no universal language is discoverable in translation work, only a “staggering number” (236) of conversions across all levels and kinds of linguistic and semiotic forms.

Thus, to ground ourselves in the richness of Tibetan language requires attention to both the complexity of form (including non-verbal features so difficult

to convert into others' languages) and to Tibetans' own ideologies of language and translation. As Lama Jabb (2015, 2016) and others have argued, with the intensifying modernization pressures of the 19th century Great Game and the Chinese Communist Party takeover of Tibet, Tibetan linguistic and translation ideologies have placed great value on particular traditional and contemporary genres of poetry as key mediums of Tibetanness under increasing duress. This point highlighted for me the very high stakes of the translation work we do in our Panchen Lama project.

Across such great distances of meaning and context, and as my own unspoken translation ideologies lead me to select, reframe or objectify certain things over others, I very often feel that I fail and betray the Tibetan sources even as I try to focus on rendering the complexity of Tibetan poetics in English. I did this, for example, by translating lyrics of lament songs for the Panchen Lama that were devoid of the original music; or by highlighting in my first essay an elderly monk's *kartsom* (ཀའ་སྟོན་, alphabetical poem) about the Cultural Revolution, while effectively downplaying our huge corpus of oral narratives; or by deciding to give up on rendering in English the crucial meter of contemporary nine-syllable *gur* (མཁུར་, Buddhist song) poems.

But I am also aware that in the geopolitics of translation ideologies, Tibetan and English meet as almost polar opposites. The unprecedented global dominance of English has positioned it as a universalizing language, a seemingly transparent medium of capitalist rationality, statist monoglot standards, and proper cosmopolitanism (Seargeant 2008). In Tibetan-English commensurations then, an exclusive focus on the "poetic" in Tibetan discourse, given mainstream, modernist assumptions that marginalize or exoticize things labeled "poetic," risks ethnicizing Tibetan language as a merely local niche medium, irrelevant in larger scale contexts and debates—Tibetan language in practice is not all about poetics.

Reflection III: Translating Contexts and Stakes

There are other richnesses of Tibetan language that must be addressed in translation practice: the multilayered complexity and potential stakes of cultural,

political, and historical contexts. This work on the tenth Panchen Lama's afterlives has shown me, on so many levels, how socially and culturally embedded all language is (which is why I think of all my co-translators as my teachers). There is nothing abstract about language; it is embodied and made manifest, meaningful, and real only in and through interactions. Thus, for example, all of our translation work on Panchen Lama stories emerges through ongoing conversation and debates about competing histories and their implications, about the nature of truth and evidence, or through our own personal narratives that were elicited by the various commensurations we tried.

In this, I had to check my own ontological assumptions about ideal objectivity and embrace the specific nature of my Tibetan co-translators' and interlocutors' reverent relationships with the Panchen Lama. And that in turn taught me about how different the stakes are for me than for my Tibetan colleagues, several of whom continue to navigate the political dangers of escaping Tibet. For example, our conversations with a well-known dissident poet now living in exile about his relationship with the Panchen Lama unexpectedly sparked for him traumatic memories of his imprisonments at the hands of Chinese and Tibetan security officials in Amdo. And when we turned to translating his poems, he had to grapple with the political and emotional stakes of drastically scaling up his audiences (and his exposure) to transnational English speakers.

Reflection IV: The Tensions of Intra-Community Translations

We also had to address richness in Tibetan language that is potentially uncomfortable for us to navigate together because it risks drawing attention to our mutual complicities in unequal social relations: the blendings and tensions of what we could call intra-community translations. By that I mean, the complex conversions we negotiated among for example, different varieties or registers of Tibetan that are often loaded with differential evaluation and moral discourses, such as differently valued regional varieties, elite urban vs. marginalized rural dialects, monastic vs lay lexicons, or claims about “pure Tibetan speech” (ཁོང་

སྐད་གཙང་མ་) vs “mixed speech” (སྐད་མ་སྐད་) incorporating Chinese language elements (cf. Thurston 2018).

In our work, intra-community translation politics shaped the awkwardness we often encountered in entextualizing oral Amdo speech into standardized written Tibetan. I saw this in my work with a lay male Tibetan colleague to translate the interview I did with the tenth Panchen Lama’s nephew, himself a respected lama. My colleague struggled with the dissonance of the lama’s high status, the relatively prestigious, sacred, and authoritative nature of written texts for Tibetans, and the great deference the lama was due, in contrast to the lama’s highly colloquial Amdo speech in our interview, the informal register he adopted with me, and his penchant for using Chinese loanwords.

Reflection V: The Lion and the Dog

Centering Tibetan language in our work compels me to see the complexity and messiness of translation not as inevitable failure to be erased or disavowed, but as a necessary and pervasive process to be highlighted and accounted for in and outside of our explicit scholarship—academics are not the only ones translating! Translation work is in fact pervasive and socially generative (for better or for worse); it builds social worlds and boundaries among them, including helping to create the very languages translators often presume to preexist their work as bounded entities. So, my question is: what social worlds and realities are we complicit in producing through our translation practices? We co-produce many things in our work, not the least is versions of Tibetanness and Tibetan language (and in our case, of westernness, Americanness and English language) but also power-laden social relations among translators and their interlocutors.

For example, as Susan Gal put it, “the direction and purpose of translation matter in creating boundaries” (2015, 231). Our work on Panchen Lama stories, like most of Tibetan studies, has been unidirectional; English, and the larger audiences it reaches, are the targets. Does our unidirectional translation practice thereby recreate boundaries between asymmetrically positioned lan-

guages? What counts as an extractive or exploitative translation practice versus a beneficial one? To whom? As the Panchen Lama himself famously argued in his scathing 1987 speech to the CCP Standing Committee in Beijing, translation in the other direction (e.g., into Tibetan) does not necessarily decolonize. Like western Christian missionaries' Tibetan translations of the Bible, Chinese state Tibetan language textbooks were explicitly aimed at cultural and political assimilation of Tibetans.

Finally, in our Panchen Lama work, my control of the funding and privileged access to resources derives from long colonial histories, requiring me to rethink authorship and the nature of our collaboration such that my co-translators feel recognized and fairly compensated as expert scholars and authors in their own right. I am haunted here by Gendun Chopel's scathing critique of the Russian scholar George Roerich, who employed him in the early 1940s to translate the Blue Annals, only to grossly undercompensate him and effectively take all the credit (cf. Bogin and Decler 1997, Lopez 2006). In "Sad Song", Gendun Chopel's eleven-syllable *gur* poem about his unequal relationship with Roerich, he bitterly lamented that,

ཤེས་བཅོན་ཐོས་པ་ཅན་གྱི་ཉམ་ཆུང་གི་ཁ་སྒྲབས།
སྤྱན་པོ་ནོར་རྒྱལ་ཁུར་བའི་དབང་ཤེད་ཀྱིས་བཅོམ་སྟེ།
ཆོས་མཐུན་བཀའ་སྟེའི་བཅུགས་གྲལ་གོ་ལྟག་ཏུ་བསྟེན་ནས།
སེང་གེ་བྱི་ཡི་གཡོག་ཏུ་འཁྱར་ཚུལ་འདི་སྟོབ།
(1990, 395-399, 401).

The abilities of a humble scholar, seeking only knowledge,
are crushed by the tyranny of a fool, bent under the weight of his wealth.
The proper hierarchy has been reversed;
How sad that the lion is made servant to the dog (Lopez, trans., 2006, 32-3).

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The རྟོན་འབྲེལ། *Tendrel* of Tibetan Translation

Sarah Jacoby

Abstract: This essay explores ways we can endeavor to center the Tibetan language in the process of translation, articulating this through a three-fold paradigm of attitude, intention, and methodology. Topics covered include virtual learning technology, the importance of translating Tibetan works produced outside of male monastic contexts such as secular works and works by Tibetan women, approaches to collaborative translation, parallel text publication, moving away from Wylie transliteration toward using the Tibetan script in publications, and finally reflections on the act of translation as an intersubjective relation that involves cultivating *tendrel* རྟོན་འབྲེལ། between author and translator.

Keywords: Tibetan translation, virtual learning technology, Tibetan women’s writing, collaboration, *tendrel* རྟོན་འབྲེལ།

Translating Tibetan into English without furthering the relative invisibility of Tibetan entails a delicate act of deep listening to what Gayatri Spivak has called “the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text,” referring to elements of language such as tropes and figuration that exceed the grammatical logic tying words together on the page (Spivak 2021 [1992]). It requires fidelity to Tibetan idioms and not mixing metaphors, for these map not only ideas but also Tibetan material and environmental worlds. At times it involves pushing anglophone readers to contend with the friction of unfamiliar modes of ex-

pression or untranslated Tibetan words (foreignization), as Lama Jabb (2023) has argued. Done thoughtfully, translation can provide a portal into and not an erasure of the Tibetan language. Achieving this requires a certain *attitude*, *intention*, and *methodology*.

Especially for those of us who translate from the vantage-point of non-native fluency in Tibetan and native fluency in English, centering the Tibetan language requires an *attitude* of humility in which, regardless of one's academic stature, one is perpetually a student of the Tibetan language. Being a Tibetan language student means always seeking out and fostering opportunities to continue Tibetan language learning instead of claiming mastery. On a curricular level, this means supporting not only elementary Tibetan language classes for non-Tibetans but also cultivating and participating in higher-level forums for discussing Tibetan-language works in Tibetan. For example, for two years at Northwestern University, we were fortunate to host a weekly Tibetan literature workshop taught by Tibetan writer Pema Bhum in Tibetan primarily for doctoral students who are native speakers of Amdo-dialect Tibetan. This would not have been possible without funding from the [Khyentse Foundation](#), which supported Northwestern's Tibetan language course offerings for five years.

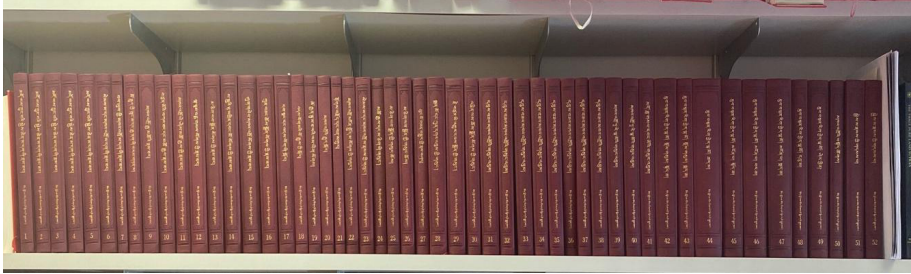
Contributing to the success of this Tibetan workshop is the post-pandemic prevalence of virtual classroom technology, which has allowed Tibetan-speaking students from different universities to come together more easily than they could have before the Zoom era. Tibetan language pedagogy is changing rapidly, by and large for the better, as a result of the expansion of virtual learning spaces. For instance, programs such as [Esukhia](#) in Dharamsala, India and [Rangjung Yeshe](#) in Kathmandu, Nepal provide Tibetan language teachers and learners with more online teaching and learning opportunities. Another largely positive outcome of the rise of virtual learning environments is the increased possibilities for universities to join together in offering more robust Tibetan language curricula. In the past, low student enrollment numbers have made Tibetan language instruction prohibitively expensive for most colleges and universities, but greater utilization of virtual classroom technology provides new and as yet under utilized potential for pooling resources across institutions to create more shared Tibetan language course offerings.

Particularly for those of us who are not native Tibetan speakers, centering the Tibetan language in our translations calls for an *intention* to transcend pre-conceived conceptions about the universality of English-language conceptual frameworks. The architecture of the English language shapes our thinking in ways we can't always recognize without immersing ourselves in Tibetan-speaking environments. It is not enough to translate written Tibetan without also learning how to speak it; without this fluency we cannot ask questions of the greatest Tibetan language experts. But this is not the only gain that learning to speak Tibetan brings for those of us who didn't grow up speaking it; building relationships with others in and through the Tibetan language reshapes one's sense of self, time, humor, hospitality, and much more.

As we consider the *intention* to transcend preconceived conceptions, we can extend that gesture toward reconsidering which Tibetan texts qualify as worthy of translation. Given the emphasis to date in Tibetan Studies on translating works authored by male Buddhist elites, it is now time to turn more attention to works authored outside of male monastic domains, for instance secular genres of writing, contemporary Tibetan women's writing, and other works featuring marginalized Tibetan voices. This movement is already underway, with several recent conferences at the University of Virginia, UC Boulder, Northwestern, and INALCO about contemporary and historical Tibetan women's writing.

Whereas scholars interested in Tibetan women once lamented the dearth of available sources, now this is no longer the case with the proliferation of recent publications of women's writing in Tibet including several collections of contemporary women's poetry and prose as well as the largest-ever anthology of writings by and about Buddhist women compiled by nuns from Larung Gar called the *Khandro Chö dzö Chenmo* (མཁའ་འགྲོའི་ཆོས་མཛོད་ཆེན་མོ། *Dākinī s' Great Dharma Treasury*), totaling 53 volumes (Padma 'tsho and Jacoby 2020, 2021). These are rich resources for academic research—several dissertations are currently being written on aspects of this material—as well as rich resources for translation projects. At the Lotsawa Workshop “Celebrating Buddhist Women's Voices in the Tibetan Tradition” that I co-hosted at Northwestern University with Holly Gayley, Padma 'tsho, and Dominique Townsend in October 2022,

we initiated a conversation about a large-scale collaborative translation project centered on (parts of) the *Dākinīs' Great Dharma Treasury*.¹



Khando Chödzo Chenmo (མཁའ་འབྲེལ་ཆོས་མཛོད་ཆེན་མོ། *Dākinīs' Great Dharma Treasury*). Photo by Sarah Jacoby.

These days there are many more organized and funded Tibetan-English translation projects than previously existed, namely those under the auspices of non-profit organizations like [84,000](#), the [Tsadra Foundation](#), and the [Khyentse Foundation](#). Additionally, pioneering English-Tibetan translation projects are underway, such as [108 Translations](#) associated with The Latse project, which is dedicated to promoting Tibetan language literacy and giving Tibetan readers greater access to world literature. This project has already produced Tibetan-language translations of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Kerouac's *On the Road*, and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, among others. Hopefully translators can draw from this increased professionalization of the field of Tibetan translation to develop new visions of best practices for the future.

Finally, the best *methodology* for creating accurate and beautiful translations that center Tibetan language and Tibetan epistemologies is not solitary armchair reflection but collaboration and co-creation, especially between contributors with native fluency in source and target languages, respectively. This is hardly a novel insight, given the rich imperial Tibetan history of royally patronized translation committees composed of Tibetan and foreign

1 Audio recordings of this event are available here: <https://conference.tsadra.org/2022/11/08/the-2022-lotsawa-workshop-audios/>

Buddhist experts who, together, translated Buddhist texts into Tibetan. Nowadays, however, it must be emphasized that such source-and-target language collaborations require ethical attribution practices in which the native speaker of an internationally hegemonic language is not always first and/or sole author. Inasmuch as we non-Tibetan scholars speak for, instead of with Tibetan authors and knowledge holders, our translations fall into colonial paradigms. There is no excuse for perpetuating the exploitative practices of earlier generations of Tibetologists. There is also no way not to be already implicated in unequal power relations when translating from a language increasingly exiled from its homeland into a globally dominant language—paying close attention to these dynamics and finding ways to disrupt the well-worn treads of orientalist knowledge extraction is critical.

In addition to clearly attributing credit to all those who collaborate on translation work, there are other ways to address the unequal power relations between Tibetan and English. One is to insist on parallel text publications, with a Tibetan source on the left page next to its English translation on the right.² This reinforces the primacy of Tibetan at the same time as it provides the assistance of English translation, although it tends to be unpopular with publishers because it doubles the page length. Another smaller-scale, less resource-intensive practice is to insist on Tibetan script instead of Wylie transliteration of Tibetan words in Tibetan studies publications. If academic journals worldwide can publish Chinese characters, they should also be able to publish Tibetan letters. Since Wylie is difficult to read for many people and the Tibetan language has its own beautiful script, our publications should feature Tibetan script whenever possible. Alongside this, phonetic transcription of Tibetan written in roman letters has value as well to make our work accessible to a wider readership.

Collaboration is not just important because of the pitfalls it helps us avoid. The process of translation is enriched many times over through the critique, corrections, connections, encouragement, and comradeship that emerges through

2 Two prominent examples of such parallel text publication series are the Clay Sanskrit Library and the Loeb Classical Library.

the act of reading and translating in partnership with others. Translation is at its heart an intersubjective endeavor, one in which we absorb the words written or spoken by another and transform them into a new form that emerges from us as translators but does not belong to us. For this alchemy to work at its best requires not only linguistic skill but also aesthetic sensibility, ingenuity as well as good judgment about when to step back, concerted effort as well as fortuitous coincidences. To say this in another way, the best translation is vitalized by the *tendrel* (རྟོན་འབྲེལ། auspicious connections, favorable conditions, good omens, interdependent relations) that bring the translator and her source text together, supported by authors, teachers, classmates, co-translators, editors, funders, and friends. When I think about the very long list of people, mostly Tibetans, who have helped me read and translate Sera Khandro over the past twenty-plus years, I realize that I have forged some of the most meaningful friendships of my life, in Tibetan and in English, pouring over Sera Khandro's writing and puzzling through how to render her words in mine. My work translating Sera Khandro would not have been possible without this collaboration, especially with Gyalrong Khenpo Sangyé, Lama Tsondu Sangpo, Tulku Thondup, Lama Jabb, Khenpo Ju Tenkyong, Sogan Pema Lodoe Rinpoche, Somtsobum, and many others. I am overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation for the learning and love that has been and continues to be at the core of my own translation process.

Cultivating this *attitude, intention, and methodology* runs counter to the values of individual authorship and assumptions of mastery that academia promotes and financially rewards. Centering the richness of the Tibetan language therefore necessitates promoting the importance of learning foreign languages other than languages valued for corporate profit or “national security.” It also necessitates a re-evaluation of translation not as a trade skill that can be done just as well by a machine, but as a creative and aesthetic endeavor of parallel and often longer-lasting significance than other forms of scholarship.

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ལོ་རྒྱུ་དང་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བྱེད་ཐུབ་མེད་བའི་ཆ།

Translation and Untranslatability

What Forms the Basis for Translation? Thinking with Tibetan Material Culture

Cameron Warner

Abstract: *Ten*: basis, foundation. *Ku*: an honorific body. *Ku + ten*= statue??? Before 1951, Tibet had an estimated 6,000 religious institutions plus thousands of private homes, housing millions of objects that are termed in English statues, sometimes under the rubric “Buddhist images.” They have played an essential role in Tibetan life for centuries. Unsurprisingly, the Tibetan language contains a plethora of terms, at least twenty-six that could be translated as “statue,” for these objects. And the breadth of the terminology only hints at the complexity of Tibetan theories of materiality at play, some inherited from Indian Buddhism, others entirely indigenous. Scholars of Buddhist studies have attempted to adopt a variety of theoretical frames, from Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Piercean semiotics, and Marxism to name a few, to translate the terms and ideas of Tibetan materiality. However, each of these frames explains away as much as they reveal to their intended audiences. I use the example of the Jowo Śākyamuni of the Rasa Trulnang Tsuklakhang to think with Tibetan materiality about the relationship between not just Tibetan and English, but the cultural contexts and purposes of the act of comparison and translation.

Keywords: *kuten*, Jowo, materiality, *zowo*, statue

Introduction

Ten (ཏེན): basis, foundation. *Ku* (སྐུ): an honorific body. *Ku + ten*=stat-ue??? Before 1951, Tibet had an estimated 6,000 religious institutions and thousands of private homes housing millions of objects that are termed in English statues, sometimes under the rubric “Buddhist images.” They have played an essential role in Tibetan life for centuries. Unsurprisingly, the Tibetan language contains a plethora of terms, at least twenty-six that could be translated as “statue,” for these objects. And the breadth of the terminology only hints at the complexity of Tibetan theories of materiality at play, some inherited from Indian Buddhism, others entirely indigenous. Scholars of Buddhist studies have attempted to adopt a variety of theoretical frames to translate Tibetan materiality (and the terms used). However, each of these frames explains away as much as they reveal to their intended audiences. In this essay, I will use the example of the Jowo Śākyamuni (རྩོ་བོ་ཤུག་ལྷ་ནེ) of the Rasa Trulnang Tsuklakhang (ར་ས་འབྲུལ་སྒྲུང་གཙུག་ལྷ་ཁང) to think with Tibetan materiality about the relationship between not just Tibetan and English, but the cultural contexts and purposes of the act of translation.

Thinking with the Jowo

When I began collecting passages from Tibetan texts for my dissertation on the Jowo Śākyamuni, I was struck by how many different terms were used to refer to him—at least twelve. Some are imprecise without a wider context such as Jowo Yizhin Norbu (Lord Wish-fulfilling Gem) (རྩོ་བོ་ཡིན་བཞིན་ནོར་བུ), or incomprehensible absent knowledge of his etiology, such as Sergyilha [Śākyamuni] (Golden God) (གསེར་གྱི་ལྷ་ཤུག་ལྷ་ནེ), Kutsab (Proxy) (སྐུ་ཚབ), Tulku (Emanation-Body) (སྐུ་ལྷ་སྐུ), Chomdendé (The Blessed One) (འཇམ་དབྱངས་པཎ་ཌཱ་རྒྱལ་པོ) (བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས), Gunglo chunypé kutsé (Honored Body Aged Twelve in Size) (དགྲུང་ལོ་བཅུ་གཉིས་པའི་སྐུ་ཚད), or Sangyé Zhalkyin (Substitute Buddha) (སངས་རྒྱལ་ཞལ་སྐུན).



The Jowo Śākyamuni without clothes or ornaments (except for the crown) following the regilding ceremony during Losar in 2004. Photo by Sarah Schorr.

In hindsight, this is perhaps unsurprising as Tibetans have been writing about the Jowo for nearly a thousand years and in almost every single genre from historical writing, biographies, ritual texts, pilgrimage guides, popular songs, novels, etc. This led me to pay attention more to the source context—who was the author, what was the genre, what was the time period—before deciding on when and how to translate a particular passage of text. But it also got me thinking about what I wanted the target context to be. Who was my audience?

At the time, in the early to mid 2000s, religious studies and anthropology had both rediscovered material culture, and art history had developed a keen interest in ritual studies. Some of my colleagues who studied Buddhist statues, the history and practices surrounding them, translated their findings into the language of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity due to their rich corpus of religious paraphernalia and hermeneutics, others chose to return to Sanskrit terminology, and some colleagues performed translation and analysis simultaneously through the use of European and North American

social scientific theory, especially Piercean semiotics or Marxist thought. In the present however, none of these choices is terribly satisfying. Each obscures as much or more than it reveals. None of them help us to understand fundamental questions Tibetans asked themselves about their material culture such as:

Who or what is the Jowo Śākyamuni?

Is he *the* Buddha Śākyamuni? Some texts answer yes.

Is he *a* Buddha, but not *the* Buddha Śākyamuni? Some texts answer yes.

Is he his own thing, possessing a history and qualities unique to him? Some texts answer yes.

Is he a statue or a person? In other words, what is his ontological status? Some texts use humor to state that the answer to this question is beyond our knowledge as humans.

Therefore, an example like the Jowo can tell us something about Tibetan material culture generally. He can be used to illustrate a whole range of theories about material culture for an advanced undergraduate student or research colleague. But if we do not first attend to the questions Buddhist Tibetans asked themselves prior to imposing non-Tibetan frames of comparison, interpretation, or analysis, then the quality of any translation will suffer. We will assume too quickly that we already know what a given text says. We will ignore or hyper-correct passages that do not conform to our preconceived notions.

For example, let's start some place simpler: What does the Jowo Śākyamuni even look like? And what did he look like in earlier time periods? One textual passage described his appearance in a way that did not make any sense to me. In one redaction of the *Vase Pillar Testament* (བཀའ་ཆེན་པ་ཀློང་པ་), the Jowo is limned as having a wrathful deity named Dutsi Kyilwa (བདུད་རྩི་ཀྱིལ་བ་) on the nape of his neck (Jo bo ati sha and Smon lam rgya mtsho 1989: 17-44). An excellent scholar of Tibetan history, Per Sørensen, communicated to me privately his opinion that the text was corrupted, as the prologue says that Monlam Gyatso combined two manuscripts to create this redaction of the text, neither of which is independently available. But when I conducted fieldwork in 2005, I interviewed one of the last two great Tibetan *zowo* (བོ་མོ་), Chenmola Shilok (ཆེན་མོ་ལགས་ཀྱི་ལོགས་). Descended from a long line of famous *zowo*, Shilok worked for the

Ganden Phodrang Government in Lhasa before 1959 and constructed the Jowo Śākyamuni at Tsechen Shedup Ling Sakya Tharig Monastery (ཁྲ་རིག་བཞེ་ཆེན་བཤད་གྲུབ་གླིང་) in Boudha, Nepal (Warner 2023). Few Tibetans of his generation could boast they were more knowledgeable about the Jowo Śākyamuni than Chenmola Shilok. I asked him about this strange passage, and we read it together. According to Shilok, this edition of the *Vase Pillar Testament* is uncorrupted. The text describes the Jowo in his true form, the way he appears to the enlightened beings whose minds are cleared of obscurations. Though Shilok had never made a statue with another deity popping out of the neck, he emphatically stated that some would see this feature, even though I could not.

My point in this example is to say that translation is obviously not just about moving from source to target language. Whether we are translating or analyzing someone else's work, we need to account for not only what we see in the text, but also for what the community that existed around the text saw in it. And when we read texts that have already been translated, we must also account for the identity of the translator and consider the intended audience of the translation. An academic translation of a tantric visualization might differ in important ways from a translation intended for a community who would engage in that practice. Tibetan language is not a fixed entity to be learned or preserved, but is multifaceted, dynamic, and evolving; it is a means of communication that is inseparable from the people who embody it.

For example, in the earliest Tibetan historical texts, such as the *Testament of Ba* (དབང་བཞེད) the Jowo isn't even called "Jowo" (Wangdu et al. 2000). He was the Lha, Sergyilha or even Gyanakilha (ཁྲ་གཤམ་གླིང་)— the god, golden god, or Chinese god. Only later he was a *kutsab* (proxy) but never a *kuten* (Warner 2008). These terms reveal the Jowo's function, his role in relation to particular people— but not a fixed ontology; rather an interpersonal one. Lama Jabb refers to translation as a movement through the bardo where something is left behind and something is gained (Lama Jabb 2018). But translation is also related to *tendrel* (རྟེན་འབྲེལ)— a kind of connection where two different things meet, come in contact in a moment and leave changed by each other, and yet from then on are always, subtly connected.

Kuten

If we look into Tibetan Buddhist material culture more generally, we encounter a series of problems. Reliquary shrines are *chörten* (*mchod rten*) (མཚོད་རྟེན) and statues are *kuten*. And yet so much is lost in these translations. A dictionary would tell us *ten* is a basis or foundation. *Chö* is an act of worship or veneration. *Ku* is the honorific word for body, suitable for any person one shows respect. To translate *chörten* as the basis for veneration is not incorrect, but it is far from sufficient either. To even translate it as a reliquary shrine or sepulchral monument would not convey any sense of the variation or significance of *chörten*. Is it handheld, human-size or monumental? Is it generic or does it house the relics of a specific *tulku*? *Chörten* are not even useful for making offerings. And it is too far afield to begin addressing the question of *chörten* being a representation of the Buddha's mind.

Our options for translating *kuten* are likewise unsatisfactory. In English, statue conveys something supremely still, solid, dead, like a rock, the very opposite of *kuten*. Think of a person frozen in place, like after looking into the eyes of the Greek goddess Medusa, whose gaze could turn humans into stone. Whereas *kuten* are occasionally carved from wood, rarely from stone, *Kuten* are more often cast hollow from metallic alloys, whose interior cavities are filled with sacred substances, rolled prayers, and a life-giving spine (སྟོན་ལྗེ་རྩེད་). Their eyes are covered during consecration ceremonies because of the dangerous power of that first gaze that comes from eyes that can truly see... and yet not see. Against the abundance of miraculous stories meant to convince audiences that *kuten* are truly alive, animate, speaking embodiments of the Buddha or other deities, Tibetan Buddhist exegetes, such as Desi Sangyé Gyatso (1635-1705) also wrote treatises tempering this stance with a view towards the doctrines of emptiness (སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་) (*stong pa nyid*) and skillful means (ཐབས་ཀྱིས་). These voices asked, “Why construct a *kuten* as the embodiment of the Buddha's miraculous [physical] manifestation (སྟུང་པ་སྟུང་) when the Buddha's enlightenment body (ཆོས་སྟུང་) already pervades all space?” From this point of view *kuten* and consecration rituals are only performed to encourage the faith of the unenlightened (Bentor 1996) but are ultimately unnecessary. We must conclude that *kuten* does not have an English equivalent. Perhaps like

the novelist Tsering Yangzom Lama, we're better leaving the term untranslated (Lama 2022).

Conclusion

And yet when we must translate, how? Do we invent new words, like Tibetan translators of Sanskrit once did? Do we choose among available words, and if so, ones that are relatively common or uncommon? Is the act of translation about accuracy and precision, or inspiration and affect? The answer lies again in our perceived audience, the function of the translation. For me personally, I use theory or comparisons to other religions to lower the cognitive burden of my audience. Tibetan names, words, and ideas, when presented too fast or thick can alienate a reader. On the other hand, my interest in the source material is because of the uniqueness of Tibetan thought on materiality. Therefore, I keep returning to the Jowo as an opportunity to entice readers to understand there are other ways of seeing and communicating beyond the canon they think they know.

The most important part of translation then is to make our choices clear to our readers so they can understand that the act of translation is a series of choices. It is not automatic, like Google translate; and it doesn't always exist on a scale of better or worse.

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Living in the བསྐྱུས་གླེང་བར་དོ་: Translation as the Preservation of Liminality

Jed Forman

Abstract: The phraseology of Collected Topics (བསྐྱུས་གླེང་) is relatively simple. Works in this genre express the essence of Buddhist epistemology and logic using the strict syntax of Tibetan debate, a language first formulated by Chapa Chökyi Sengé (ཇུ་པ་ཚལ་གྱི་སངས་ཤེ་) in the twelfth century. Nevertheless, they are incredibly difficult to translate. This is because these debates hinge on subtle ambiguities in Tibetan that are easily lost in English. This paper explores one such subtlety, what I dub the “chi-drotak (ཁྱི་སྒྲོ་བདག་ས་) maxim” found in Gelug (དགེ་ལུགས་) Collected Topics. Indeed, Gelug authors consider it *the* “difficult point” of Collected Topics. But without nuanced attention, its English translation can render it either absurd or facile. Its apt translation must therefore preserve the liminality inherent in the maxim’s meaning, which hovers between absurdity and simplicity. Borrowing from Lama Jabb, I extend his metaphor of translation’s being an “Act of Bardo” to discuss the necessity of preserving ambiguity, liminality, and intentional imprecision in translation, with specific attention to its ramifications for translating the chi-drotak maxim.

Keywords: Collected Topics, Buddhist Philosophy, Gelug, logic, epistemology, translation

Lama Jabb has elegantly dubbed translation an “Act of Bardo.” In Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the Bardo (བར་དོ་) is the stage between death and reincarnation, a dreamlike plane where the mind contends with nightmarish apparitions

before it finds its way to the next birth. Using the Bardo as a metaphor, Lama Jabb contends that “translation operates in a liminal Bardo-like zone between two languages,” culminating in a rebirth within the target language (2018). As we all know, however, not all rebirths turn out well.

The *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* (བར་དོ་ཐོས་གྲོལ་)—popular-ly known as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*—argues that a successful rebirth depends on how one negotiates the Bardo. The trick is to see its apparitions as liminal, neither inherently harmful nor helpful. Only then will seeming demons morph into liberating Tantric deities (e.g., Karma Lingpa 2016, 118-19; also see Bryan J. Cuevas 2003, 192). Similarly, success within the translator’s Bardo demands we embrace liminality. If we eschew ambiguity too quickly, our texts will turn into demons, dragging us to those lowest hells reserved only for bad translators.¹



The cover of Purchok Jampa Gyatso’s (ཕུ་ཤོག་ཇམ་པ་གཡུ་མཚོ་, 1825-1901) famous Collected Topics text used in Sera Jey Monastic College (མེ་རེ་ཇེ་མཆོག་གི་སྡེ་ཁོ་རྒྱུ་མཚན་). It is better known as Collected Topics of the Master (ཡོངས་འཛིན་བསྐྱེད་པ་).

1 Here I follow Rasheed S. Al-Jarrah, Ahmad M. Abu-Dalu, and Hisham Obiedat’s model of applying Relevance Theory to translation, especially their remarks that “the translator should not try to explicate the implicatures of the original text, in particular, if the scenario deploys strategic ambiguity” (2018, sec. 2.4). Indeed, Collected Topics could be seen as a sustained exercise in strategic ambiguity.

One poignant example of such a liminality hails from Collected Topics (བསྐྱུ་བློ་བྱ་བ་), a genre of Tibetan scholastic writing focused on epistemology and logic. I center my analysis on a trope repeated throughout Collected Topics that is exemplified in the following maxim, “ཉི་མོ་བདག་པོ་ཡིན། ཉི་མོ་ནི་ཉི་མོ་བདག་པོ་ཡིན་པས་མ་གྲུབ།” I dub this the “chi-drotak maxim.” We can roughly translate “ཉི་མོ་” as “universal” or “property.” “ཉི་མོ་བདག་པོ་” is a “superimposition” or “abstraction.” Preliminarily, then, the maxim states that properties—“red,” “big,” “long,” etc.—are abstractions. They are not real. Nevertheless, those things that “are” those properties are not necessarily unreal—i.e., those things that are red, big, long, etc. The Gelug tradition famously claims that this maxim is *the* “difficult point” (དཀའ་གནད་) of Collected Topics (Tillemans 1999, 209-46).

Before deconstructing the semantics of this phrase, let’s examine its syntax, with *x* substituted for “ཉི་མོ་” and *y* for “ཉི་མོ་བདག་པོ་,”—that is, “*x y* ཡིན། *x* ཡིན་ན་ *y* ཡིན་པས་མ་གྲུབ།” This formulation is littered throughout Collected Topics. Geshe Chime Tsering² of Sera Jey offers one cheeky modern example: “ཇོ་བོ་དན་མིང་འདྲིན་ཡིན། ཇོ་བོ་དན་ཡིན་ན་མིང་འདྲིན་ཡིན་པས་མ་གྲུབ།” (personal communication, June 3, 2022). That is, “Joe Biden is the President. But if someone is Joe Biden, they are not necessarily the President.”

Already, this presents challenges. If we read “ཡིན་” indexically as a copulative (or linking verb), it amounts to nonsense: “*x* is *y*, but if something is *x*, it is not necessarily *y*,” apparently breaking transitivity. In other words, if *x* is *y* categorically, it would be absurd to deny that *everything* that is *x* is not also *y*. This peculiarity has led some translators to contend that Collected Topics is paraconsistent, i.e., that it accommodates contradictions. Margaret Goldberg thus calls its formulations “antinomies” (1985a; 1985b) while Tom Tillemans opts for the more colloquial “quirky” (1999, 224-25). He even argues that this maxim “would probably never be entertained in English” (1999, 219). In effect, Tillemans dooms the chi-drotak maxim to the Bardo, arguing that it can never take rebirth into English cogently.

2 Sadly, Geshe Chime Tsering passed shortly before the publication of this article in July of 2023. I dedicate this article to him.

Goldberg and Tillemans are giants of translation. Nevertheless, I think they too quickly denounce this maxim as a demon from the hell of logical inconsistency. Jay Garfield thus proposes instead to read “ཡིན་” as denoting a definite description rather than a universal quantifier (personal communication, Feb. 13, 2020).³ On this reading, “སྤྱོད་བཏགས་ཡིན་” does not give a universal description of all those things about which a སྤྱི་ can be predicated. Rather, it describes སྤྱི་ *per se*. We can use the example of color again to make this point. It is fair to say that red is a certain frequency of electromagnetic radiation. This describes red *itself*. But it is not true that anything that *is* red is a frequency of electromagnetic radiation—e.g., a red ball. So, although the predicate “to be a frequency of electromagnetic radiation” is a definite description of “red,” it is not a property that is universal to all red things.

As I demonstrate in a forthcoming paper, Garfield’s solution essentially bifurcates “སྤྱི་” into two different meanings. As a definite description, “སྤྱོད་བཏགས་ཡིན་” predicates a property *of properties*—a second-order property. And so, this translates as, “A property *per se* is an abstraction.” However, the ante-cedent in the second clause, “སྤྱི་ཡིན་ན་,” denotes something that instantiates that property. And so, “སྤྱི་ཡིན་ན་སྤྱོད་བཏགས་ཡིན་པས་མ་ཁྱབ།” translates as, “Instantiations of those properties are not necessarily abstractions” (Forman 2021).⁴ This avoids the problem of lost transitivity, since the subject of the first clause is “properties” while that of the second, conditional clause is “instantiations.” The first is abstract while the other is concrete.

3 For example, consider “Cats are felines” versus “The cat is a tabby.” The first describes a property universal to all cats. And so, the copulative “are” acts as a universal quantifier. In the second, “is” is also a copulative, but describes a quality of one particular cat, for not all cats are tabbies. And so, it gives a definite description of one cat. In Tibetan, both functions are governed by “ཡིན་.”

4 Put another way still, the first clause is a predicate about a predicate, while the second is a predicate about an instantiation. Let A be the predicate “སྤྱོད་བཏགས་ཡིན་” or “to be an abstraction,” while Φx is “སྤྱི་ཡིན་” or “to be some property.” We could express the chi-drotak maxim as $\forall \Phi (A\Phi \wedge \neg \forall x (\Phi x \rightarrow Ax))$. That is: all properties are abstractions, but it is not the case that everything that instantiates a property is also an abstraction.

This gives a viable solution to the problem. However, this translation comes at a price, since it forecloses the very ambiguity that makes the *chi-drotak* maxim an important focus of Collected Topics. As Tillemans identifies, this maxim is supposed to be “difficult, just as Goldberg says they are “puzzles” (1985a, *passim*; 1985b, *passim*). If we translate the maxim in the language of properties and instantiations, we have effectively solved the puzzle in the same breath that we give it. An apt translation must preserve the “quirkiness” (la Tillemans) that makes it a puzzle in the first place. Otherwise, its discussion would seem facile, not difficult.

We might think that this premature resolution is a product of importing property-instantiation talk into our interpretation of Collected Topics. If this distinction is foreign to Collected Topics, then relying on its implied framework would be a poor hermeneutical strategy. But this is not the case. English notions of properties and instantiations come incredibly close to Collected Topics’ differentiation between general characteristics (ཐྱི་མཚན་) and specific characteristics (རང་མཚན་), or rather *those things* specifically characterized. Like properties, general characteristics pervade over multiple instances. And like instantiations, specific characteristics belong to phenomena that are unique and particular. The first is abstract, while the latter is concrete.

But notice this mutual conceptual affinity does not help us out of the problem. Even if we replace property and instantiation talk with that of general characteristic and specific characteristic, describing their relationship is not straightforward. If we translate literally, we get, “A general characteristic is an abstraction, but those things that *are* that general characteristic are not,” and we are back to nonsense. Yet if we give a translation based on an assessment of the philosophical meaning, we get, “A general characteristic is an abstraction, but those specifically characterized phenomena that share general characteristics with other phenomena are not,” and we have elided the puzzle. In English we seemed forced either to claim absurdly one thing (ཐྱི་) holds two contradictory predicates (it both is and is not a རྩོད་བྱུང་), or trivially claim that two things—a general characteristic (ཐྱི་) and specifically characterized phenomena that possess it (ཐྱི་ཡིན་པ་)—have different qualities.

Furthermore, the distinction between properties and instantiations cannot account for every iteration of the chi-drotak schema. Take again Geshe Chime Tsering’s Joe Biden example. According to Geshe Chime Tsering, this instance of the puzzle concerns temporality, not properties and instantiations (personal communication, March 9, 2023). So, we could translate as, “Just because Joe Biden *is* the President does not mean Joe Biden has *always* been the President.”⁵ But again, this translation solves the puzzle in the same breath it states it, sounding facile. Moreover, this translation loses any parallel to the chi-drotak maxim, while in Tibetan, the connection is clear. Indeed, Geshe Chime Tsering presented the Joe Biden example as another species of the conundrum to which the chi-drotak maxim belongs.

In other words, the essence of the maxim (as well as its translation difficulty) is not found specifically in its indices, “ཉིད་” or “སྟོབས་པའི་པུ་མུ་མུ་” Rather, it concerns how the syntax of the maxim construes their relationship as defined by the copulative. How should we understand this relationship so defined?

In English, the copulative usually denotes two types of relationships, either identity or predication: either “the flu is a virus,” where two substantives are equated, or “the flu is dangerous,” where the flu has the property of being dangerous. Notice the importance of keeping these functions disambiguated. If the second were to mean the flu *is* the property of being dangerous, it would be a strange claim.

Translating “is” for “ཡིན་” gives way to either the absurd or facile reading depending on whether it is understood as identity or predication. The absurd reading appears when we read it consistently as denoting identity. The facile reading appears when we equivocate, reading it as identity in “ཉིད་སྟོབས་པའི་པུ་མུ་མུ་ཡིན་,” as a predicate in “ཉིད་ཡིན་ན་,” and as identity again in “སྟོབས་པའི་པུ་མུ་མུ་ཡིན་པའི་པུ་མུ་མུ་” Both readings are *possible* translations of “ཡིན་” in the maxim. This is because “སྟོབས་པའི་པུ་མུ་མུ་” could be read either as a substantive, “an abstraction,” in which case

5 Or, in Arthur Prior’s Tense Logic, let b = Joe Biden and Φx : “to be the President,” $P\Phi b \rightarrow \neg H\Phi b$.

“ཡིན” denotes identity, or as a predicate adjective, where “ཡིན” denotes the predication of a property.⁶ (A predicate adjective is an adjective that is joined to the noun it modifies by a linking verb.) Neither choice, however, gives the desired meaning, since the maxim is neither absurd nor facile.

However, although “ཡིན” can mean identity or predication, it seems to have greater semantic range. In the chi-drotak maxim, “ཡིན” denotes a relation that is *neither* one of identity nor of predication. Indeed, such relations are a general feature of Collected Topics: one of the most important goals of its study is to equip students with a conceptual toolkit replete with “slippery” relations such as this one.⁷ In the chi-drotak maxim specifically, the expressed relation is such that although general characteristics hold it with abstractions, and specificall characterized phenomena hold it with general characteristics, these specific phenomena do not share it with abstractions. Most generally, this could be described as a transitive relation, or a two-place predicate.⁸

We could think of love as an example. Arden loves Bellamy. But just because Callaway loves Arden, that does not necessitate that Callaway loves Bellamy. What this type of relation means in the context of specifically and generally characterized phenomena remains puzzling. Still, it is not absurd. And it is a puzzle that English struggles to render, since *its* copulative does not have the sufficient semantic range.

6 Indeed, the first ebate introduced to Collect Topics students hinges on this ambiguity. This concerns a white horse. Is a white horse white (ལྷ་དཀར་པོ་ཚོས་ཅན་དཀར་པོ་ཡིན་པར་ཐལ།)? This would seem obviously true interpreting “ཡིན” as a predicate and “དཀར་པོ་” as a predicate adjective. But the debate ends with the conclusion that a white horse is not white. This is based on interpreting “ཡིན” as identity and “དཀར་པོ་” as a substantive. And because a white horse is obviously not *the property* white, the conclusion is a white horse is not white.

7 I am thankful to Drupchen Dorje, who first ointed this out to me (personal communication, December 14, 2018).

8 Put more technically, identity is rendered as an equality, $x = y$, and simple predication by Px , where x predicates the property P . The type of relation in the maxim that avoids both absurdity and being facile would be rendered as the two-place predicate Pxy . In other words, if $a = ལྷ།$ and $b = ལྷ་བཏགས།$, then the maxim could be translated at as $Pab \wedge \neg \forall x (Pxa \rightarrow Pxb)$.

Consider the following case from Ngawang Tendar’s (b. 1759) work on Mind Only (མིམས་ཙམ་པ་) as an example. He explains that, according to this school, what we perceive to be an external phenomenon, like the color blue, is actually a manifestation of our own mental karma. And so, that karmic seed “becomes blue” (བག་ཆགས་ཐོན་པོར་གྱུར་པ་) (2008, 150).⁹ An English speaker would most naturally understand the “blue” as a predicate adjective and “becomes” as predication. But this is not what the phrase means. It is not as if the karmic seed itself *is* blue—that is, it does not take on some pigment.

We could foreclose the adjectival reading of “blue” through nominalization and specify “blueness.” But this does not get at the point either. The karmic seed does not turn into the abstract property *blueness*—it becomes the concrete patch of blue that the perceiver sees. So, “གྱུར་” cannot mean identity either. Thus, again, we see English equivocate between property predication—the karmic seed *becomes* blue—and substantial identity—the karmic seed *becomes* blueness—where Tibetan expresses a non-identity relation between substantives—in this case, the relation of *transformation* from a karmic seed into a blue appearance.

Importantly, then, the pedagogic goal of the chi-drotak maxim is not just to elucidate the nature of སྤྱི་, but to equip the student with a broad schema for relations, one that includes but is not limited to identity and predication. That is, it must explain how *x* can “ཡིན་” *y* even though everything that “ཡིན་” *x* does not also “ཡིན་” *y*. If our translation does provide an equally broad rendering of this relation, we lose the syntax that Collected Topics is trying to impart, one repeated *ad nauseam* therein.

To return to Lama Jabb’s metaphor, the difficulty in translating Collected Topics is to avoid a premature rebirth. Collected Topics itself seems to live always-already in the Bardo, inherently liminal, teetering on the edge between ambiguous paradox and unassailable certainty, much like those apparitions that can either be punitive demons or amicable deities with

⁹ བག་ཆགས་དེ་ཉིད་ཆ་ཉིས་སུ་གྱུར་ཏེ་ཆ་ཅིག་ཐོན་པོར་དང་ཆ་གཅིག་ཐོན་པོར་མཇེན་མིག་ཤེས་སུ་གྱུར་པ་ཡིན་པས་……

a slight change of perspective. If the translator rebirths the Bardo-esque genre of Collected Topics prematurely, foreclosing one for the other, they have missed the Bardo's lesson and are dragged down to the lowest hell, or—even at the hands of angels—taken up to a false heaven. Indeed, rather than translate Collected Topics' maxims into hellish, nonsensical aporia or pleasant but obvious banalities, we must both preserve their “quirkiness” and resist their rendition as trivial.

How, then, can we find a successful rebirth from this བསྐྱེད་ཀྱི་འཇུག་—the Bardo of Collected Topics? This requires a longer analysis.¹⁰ But to conclude, I offer a few parameters of what a sound translation must accomplish. Again, as the *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* instructs, the liminality inherent in the Bardo is not just a feature of transition, *but of rebirth as well*. All phenomena, it argues, are liminal—transformable with a slight change of perspective. One only need remember the story of Asaṅga, who beheld Maitreya, the future Buddha, where everyone else saw a maggot-infested dog. The question then is how to translate (or transmigrate) the liminality inherent in the Bardo felicitously and not succumb to its erasure. Again, this appears especially difficult when translating Collected Topics from Tibetan to English, since the latter often demands foreclosure in places where Collected Topics plays with ambiguities. But it is not impossible. Indeed, we, as translators, gain much by seeing ambiguity, liminality, and open-endedness not as something to *resolve*, but as substantive, as much part of the text as its definitive meaning, clarity, and precision. Only with such an attitude can our texts be well-birthing into the target language, such that—like a realized Rinpoche—it holds the memories of its past life in the Tibetan original.

10 Please look out for my work in progress on this topic (Forman 2021).

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ལོ་རྒྱུ་སྤྱི་ཆེད་བྱེད་དམ།

Translating for whom?

Translating Academic Research Methods and Writing into Tibetan

དབུ་ཤུལ་ཆེ་དཔག་སྐྱབས། *Tsehuahab Washul*

Abstract: Western formal academic research guides in Tibetan are scarce for Tibetan academics. Tibetan scholars who went through graduate programs in *minzu* (minority nationality) universities in the PRC generally agree that research practices and writing in Tibetan language could be enriched by learning from Western academic research standards. Today, there is a new cohort of Tibetan graduate students and scholars who have been trained in Western institutions in various disciplines. These scholars can work with both English and Tibetan, and thus collaborate in translation work with non-native Tibetan speaking scholars. Tibet has a very rich and long tradition of translating from other languages; there are myriad precedents that we can learn from. Although translation is not a straightforward task, and it is challenging to reach agreement among scholars, at least we can start with standardizing basic lexicons of terminologies, such as common concepts, names of people and places, and eventually create a research guide in Tibetan language. Technologies such as Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) tools can make collaboration across time and space seemingly effortless. Translated work can be disseminated through conferences in the Tibetan Studies field. Finally, this article shares some initial reflection on translating ethnographic research methods into Tibetan as an example.

Keywords: Tibetan language, Translation, Academic writing, Research methods.

In this essay, in the same vein as the Kenyan author, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who urges his fellow writers to write in African languages to enrich their own

languages and build confidence in their own cultures and forms of expression, I call for Tibetan translations of academic research methods from European languages (primarily English) into Tibetan in order to add vitality to Tibetan language scholarship. Today, there is a new cohort of a Tibetan graduate students and scholars who have been trained in Western institutions in various disciplines. In 2021, a small group of these Tibetan PhD students and scholars studying in North America and Europe started an informal discussion group called Bumtsok. The organization, facilitated by The Latse Project, arranges talk series, offers new book introductions, and has plans to eventually produce a handbook for research methodologies in Tibetan language.¹

Speaking on research ethics at a Bumtsok talk series, Gen Lama Jabb asserted that Tibet has its own rigorous research traditions, from which we can utilize many research tools. He stated that, as researchers, we should strive to use indigenous Tibetan academic terms when possible. Thus, translating research methods also involves an important task of recognizing and identifying Tibetan forms of intellectual traditions and using the existing terms whenever possible. This demands deep knowledge of both source and target languages.

In general, academic research published in Tibetan is considered to be inferior in terms of scholarly quality to those in other, dominant languages such as English and Chinese. Tibetan journals, for example, are mostly considered to be of a lower grade in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Western formal academic research guides in Tibetan are not widely available for Tibetan graduate students (to my knowledge, one book was published recently).² Tibetan scholars who went through graduate programs in *minzu* universities in the PRC generally agree that Tibetan language academic publications could benefit from Western academic research standards. Therefore, there is a need for translating academic research methods and writings from English into Tibetan.

1 The name “bumtsok” (བུམ་སྐྱོད་པ་) is the abbreviation of “a gathering of PhDs” in Tibetan (འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་པའི་ཚོགས་པ་). The group aims to explore ways they can share their experiences of studying abroad in Tibetan-studies-related fields with counterparts and other interested persons back home in Tibet.

2 ལུན་གྲུབ་དོན་མེད། 2020 རིག་གཞན་དཔྱད་ཚོམ་འཛིན་ཚུལ་གྱི་རྩམ་གཞག་མེད་བརྒྱུད་པའི་དོལ་གཏན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྟར་ཁང་།

Tibet has a very long tradition of translating from other languages. The ninth century *drajor bampo nyipa* (སྒྲུབ་བཟ་པོ་གཉིས་པ།) is known as one of the first national translation guides that standardized terms and practices. The twelfth century luminary Sakya Pandita's *Gateway to Learning* (མཁས་པ་རྒྱམས་འབྱུག་པའི་སྒྲོ།) discussed principles of translations. There were countless translators known as *lotsawas* (ལོ་རྩ་བ།) who translated different fields of knowledge from Indic and other languages throughout Tibet's intellectual history. As monastic training is heavily oral based, there are not many Tibetan language guides available on writing. However, Ngawang Tendar's guide, *The Sunlight of Eloquent Explanation: A Presentation of Exposition, Debate, and Composition* (འཆད་ཚིང་ཚོམ་གསུམ་གྱི་རྒྱམ་གཞག་ལེགས་བཤད་ཉིན་བྱེད་སྒྲུང་བ།), written in the 18th century discusses the process of composing treatises, is such an example of a precedent that we can learn from.

Contemporary lexicons of Western terminologies were introduced in Tibetan en masse since the 1950s mostly from Chinese translations, which are themselves mostly rooted in Japanese translations from Western languages. Many of the currently established academic terms in Tibetan are translated by non-experts who often did literal translations of these academic fields based on the Chinese terms (such as through textbooks). For instance, the term *mi ser pel yül ring luk* (མི་མེད་སྤེལ་ཡུལ་རིང་ལུགས།) for “colonialism” mimics the Chinese term *zhiminzhuyi* (殖民主义), which was itself derived from Japanese. Some people use the term *mi gyü rik pa* (མི་རྒྱུད་རིག་པ།) for “anthropology,” which is the direct translation of the Chinese term *zhongzuxue* (种族学 the literal transition is “the study of race”), which was used prior to the 1980s. Due to a lack of timely translation, there is also a tendency for Tibetan scholars to use outdated theories and many Tibetan scholars do not trust new terms that official bodies standardize and disseminate. The relatively scarce and lower quality of Tibetan translations of academic research methods is another factor that reinforces the perception that Tibetan language is a language of the past and not useful for dealing with contemporary knowledge.

Nowadays, a new cohort of Tibetan graduate students and scholars trained in Western institutions can work with both English and Tibetan, and thus collaborate in translation work with non-native Tibetan speaking scholars. This affords opportunities for scholars to translate research methods from their

respective fields or disciplines into Tibetan. Such translation projects would involve long-term, collaborative work.

As part of Bumtsok's inaugural online event in 2021, we discussed starting with a specific discipline and an end goal of producing a basic glossary of research method terminologies in Tibetan. A few of us began to translate basic citation practices into Tibetan. As an experiment, I attempted translating some aspects of ethnography into Tibetan and gave a small online workshop with a group of college students in Tibetan. My experience is very limited, but I want to share a couple of reflections from this case.

I realized that translation work helps one dig into the deeper history behind academic fields through a careful consideration of the etymology of the words. For example, take the very basis of the anthropological method, the term *ethno* in ethnography: Some render it in Tibetan as *mi rik nam shé* (མི་རིགས་ནམ་བཤད།) or *mi rik lo gyü* (མི་རིགས་ལོ་རྒྱུ།). As many are well aware, *mi rik* (མི་རིགས་), equivalent to “ethnicity/nationality” (Ch. *minzu*), has a specific political and social meaning in Tibetan in the PRC context, where the state officially recognizes fifty-six *mi rik*, that might be more misleading.

Furthermore, translation work is also an opportunity to imagine a new possibility for such words instead of direct translations of original concepts of the words. In this case, I settled with *rik né jö pa* (རིག་གནས་བརྗོད་པ།) (roughly translated as “narration of culture”) for ethnography just for the purpose of the workshop, deliberately choosing a vague combination of words to illustrate my point of possible new directions. Furthermore, I am inspired to search for ethnographic descriptions in traditional Tibetan scholarship as a comparison. A more recent example is Gendun Chopel's South Asia travelogue, *Grains of Gold: Tales of a Cosmopolitan Traveler* (རྒྱལ་ཁབ་མཁས་རིག་པས་བསྐོར་བའི་གཏམ་རྒྱུད་གསེར་གྱི་ཐང་མ།). Lastly, this work challenges us to consider what aspects of research methods should be prioritized when being used primarily by native scholars, in this case, Tibetan researchers researching their own cultures.

Although translation is not a straightforward task, and it is challenging to reach agreement among scholars, at least we can start with standardizing

basic lexicons of terminologies, such as names of different disciplines and key terms, and even basic things like terms for the structure of an academic article, citation practices, common concepts, and of course, names of important people and places. This will enable academic circles to use Tibetan language to talk about how to undertake research and academic writing more efficiently. Next steps might include tackling research methods, and eventually we might be able to produce a comprehensive Western style guide to research and academic writing in written Tibetan language. Such resources will greatly enrich the Tibetan language in the current context and empower Tibetan speaking scholars to produce higher quality academic writings in Tibetan. This endeavor might be something academics can contribute to support the vitality and perseverance of Tibetan language, as well as to enhance scholarship in general.

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Extractive Greed versus Reciprocal Relations: Reflections on Teaching Tibetan Language in the West

དཔལ་ཅེ་ཁྱེ། *Huatse Gyal*

Abstract: This thought-piece aims to highlight the fact that there is a systematic way to study the written Tibetan language by calling into question the common practice of non-Tibetan scholars reading, translating, and analyzing some of the most sophisticated Tibetan Buddhist texts after they have learned Tibetan just for a few years. It also argues that poetry has served as an effective teaching methodology in Tibetan language and grammar for many centuries.

Keywords: Tibetan language, teaching, reciprocity, reflection.

Exploring a larger issue through a story

Sometimes we need a story to get to the bottom of issues, because larger issues always affect the lives of individuals in invisible ways. Hopefully we can turn stories into awareness, and then awareness into more tangible actions. Consider, for example, this story. Ganla was a respected Tibetan scholar, and he had taught Tibetan history at a Tibetan college in India. In 2015, he was invited to teach Tibetan language at a university in the United States. Ganla was

excited at the prospect of pursuing a new career in the States. However, he said that it was truly painful to leave his two young kids and his wife behind, with the hope that they would join him soon. With a heavy heart, Ganla embarked on a new journey with both excitement and uncertainty.

One day in the US, two to three months into his new job, Ganla and I had lunch together. I asked him about his teaching experiences. Ganla said that it was going ok, and then I asked, “How are your students?”

“Students here are very greedy (རྒྱ་ས་ཆ་བོ་འདྲག),” Ganla jokingly replied, and then he continued, “Some of my American students have studied Tibetan language for only one to two years, but they want to read and analyze some of the most difficult texts in Tibetan Buddhism. But this is like a toddler wishing to compete in the Olympics. There is a systematic way to study the Tibetan language.”

Ganla had planned to teach Tibetan gradually and systematically, but whenever a student approached him and asked him to explain the meaning of a specific Tibetan text, he had to translate almost everything into English for them. Ganla said, “*They hired me as a Tibetan teacher, but they expected me to translate everything.*” More puzzling for Ganla was that even the beginners wanted to read highly sophisticated Buddhist texts.

Ganla felt that he was not being treated as a teacher of Tibetan language, instead, he felt that he had come all the way from India, leaving his family behind, only to translate for the American students and assist with their research projects. Ganla also didn’t sense students’ love for the Tibetan language, as a lover of Tibetan language would enjoy the sound and feel of carefully crafted turns of phrase or musically arranged Tibetan words on their tongues. Although Ganla said, “Students here are very greedy” somewhat jokingly, what disappointed Ganla the most was his discovery that the students were studying Tibetan as a way to extract something from the Buddhist texts as fast as they could.

As time went by, Ganla refused to translate and honestly told them that there was no way that they could understand these texts without seriously studying Tibetan language first. Students were not happy to hear this truth. Many then dropped his class and complained that Ganla's English was not good enough. By the end of the year, Ganla was told by his department that his position wouldn't be renewed due to low enrollment. Within a year, Ganla had to leave the teaching position.¹

“There is a systematic way to study the Tibetan Language.”

I would like to invite you to explore some of the issues in Ganla's story in regard to how the written “classical” Tibetan language is being taught, how Tibetan studies scholars are being trained, and how Tibetan teachers are being treated in western academic institutions. What is “classical Tibetan”? Why is classical Tibetan not taught in Tibetan schools and monasteries but so valorized in Western academic institutions? Why are most western academic institutions not following the Tibetan language teaching methodologies used by Tibetan schools and students? Yet it is common sense for Tibetan scholars of Tibetan language that there is a systematic and effective way to study the written Tibetan language. *It does not start with reading sophisticated Tibetan Buddhist texts, and the idea that one can read such texts upon learning Tibetan language for one to two, or even three years is inconceivable.*

So, what did Ganla mean when he said that there is a systematic way to study the written Tibetan language? As a Tibetan who studied written Tibetan from an early age, I learned that traditional Tibetan scholars developed sophisticated teaching methodologies. For example, Tibetan grammarians long ago established a tradition of summarizing key principles of Tibetan grammar in poetic verses. Once one has memorized the key principles of Tibetan grammar,

1 I would like to clarify and acknowledge that there are other cases where teachers from Tibet or India have created robust programs for teaching Tibetan language in western academic institutions. However, they are also often expected to assist the research projects of their students and professors by helping with major translations with very little credit.

one can apply them to write proper sentences in Tibetan. Yet in the West, writing in Tibetan is not a major concern for Tibetan studies scholars and students because they can just write in English about Tibetan texts and issues in order to become an expert in Tibetan studies. I wonder if any English Departments in the West would hire someone who could just read old English texts such as those by Shakespeare or Chaucer but who could not converse and write in contemporary English.

One may also argue that foreigners who learn Tibetan only start when they are older than eighteen or twenty so they can't memorize the basic Tibetan grammatical principles in poetic verses. I disagree with this point because when Tibetan students start learning English in high school, they don't attempt to read, let alone analyze some of the most sophisticated texts in the English language upon learning English just for one or two years. They are better off first following the most effective ways to study the English language, and then learning to read simple stories in order to lay a solid foundation.

In English, it is commonly understood that studying the forty-two letter sounds, or what is known as phonics, is the most effective way to crack the alphabetical code of English reading. Many schools in the West are increasingly teaching phonics to their students (both native and nonnative English speakers) from day one. Even high school students struggle with reading if they don't have a good grasp of letter sounds in English. As Ganla pointed out, there is also a systematic and scientific way to effectively study the written Tibetan language. It starts with learning the Tibetan writing system, followed by the vowels, and then memorizing མགོ་ཅན་གསུམ། ར་མགོ་ལ་མགོ། ས་མགོ། and འདྲོགས་ཅན་གསུམ། ཡ་བཏགས། ར་བཏགས། ལ་བཏགས། and finally it gradually moves to studying eight different Tibetan རྩ་དབྱེ། (cases or 'declensions.')

One great example of a textbook that teaches Tibetan grammar in poetic verses is *Words of Thonmi*² (ཐོན་མིའི་ཞལ་ལུང་།) authored by Tse tan zhabs drung ཆོ་རྒྱ་ཞབས་བློང་། (1910-1985), and I highly recommend that both Tibetan and non-Tibetan language learners thoroughly study *Words of Thonmi*. One will enjoy

2 Some audio teachings on *Words of Thonmi* are available at <https://ti.tibet3.com/edu/online-course/2018-04-27/27652.html> (accessed in January 2024).

learning both Tibetan grammar and poetry through *Words of Thonmi*, and it will lay a solid foundation for one's future endeavors to read and analyze sophisticated Tibetan Buddhist texts. For English language resources on Tibetan grammar, Tony Duff's *The Great Living Tree; Tibetan Grammars: Beginner's Level Tibetan Grammar Texts by Yangchen Drhpay Dorjie*; and *Tibetan Grammar: Sit's Words: A Medim to Advanced Level Grammar Text* are highly recommended.

Another ignored aspect of Tibetan language in western academic institutions is poetry, which has served as an effective teaching methodology in Tibetan language and grammar for centuries. Both Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, postcolonial scholar of African languages and literatures, and Lama Jabb, Tibetan scholar of Tibetan literature, have pointed out that poetics, the musicality, or stylistic form of any language in practice, is as important as the meanings it codes. If so, how will only training to read and understand the meaning of Tibetan texts allow us to attend to the musicality of Tibetan language and all that entails? Far from just a form of artistic expression, poetic forms have been central to Tibetan language teaching methodologies. For example, Tibetan grammarians long ago established a tradition of summarizing key principles of Tibetan grammar in poetic verses, in the same way that Tibetan Buddhist scholars such as Tsongkapa (1357-1419) or Sapan (1150-1203) summarized their key philosophical findings in poetic verses.

I would also like to point out that the written Tibetan language from as early as the fourteenth century is not very different from today's written Tibetan language. However, in English, the language of Shakespeare and Chaucer is vastly different from contemporary written English. Perhaps the valorization of so-called classical Tibetan in Tibetan Studies in the West is partly an imposition of an understanding of the history of English language.

A Tibetan teacher once jokingly told me that scholars of Tibetan Buddhist Studies in the West know the meaning of terms such as རྩམ་འབྱོར། (hermit) but many don't know the meaning of དང་ལ་འབྱོར། (economy). This joke does say something about the Western scholars' deep interests in Buddhist texts and traditions versus their relative lack of concern about the lives of contemporary Tibetan societies and people, e.g., the economy or the wellbeing of Tibetans.

As Sara Jacoby pointed out in this volume, “It is not enough to translate written Tibetan without also learning how to speak it; without this fluency we cannot ask questions of the greatest Tibetan language experts. But this is not the only gain that learning to speak Tibetan for those of us who grow up speaking other languages brings; building relationships with others in and through the Tibetan language reshapes one’s sense of self, time, humor, hospitality, and much more.” It is worth quoting this long passage because Tibetologists or scholars of Tibetan Buddhist studies should recognize their debt to the cultural treasures that they study and should acknowledge an obligation to reciprocate in appropriate ways. Gift and hospitality have to be reciprocated, otherwise, relationships are doomed to collapse.

Heartfelt words are not always sweet

Tibetan scholars and students in Tibet often have a very generous reading of the works of Western scholars on Tibetan Studies, claiming, “Although their Tibetan language skills are limited, they have very good research methodologies.” This is partly true because modern academic criteria expect the scholar to start with solving a specific research problem by focusing on a very specific topic, which has to go beyond just accumulating and reporting facts. Most Western scholars are well trained in this type of academic methodology. However, such academic training is somewhat different from the expectations placed on a great Tibetan scholar (མཁས་དབང་), someone who is well-versed in the Five Major Sciences (inner science, logic, language, medicine, and arts and crafts), and the Five Minor Sciences (synonyms, mathematics and astrology, performance and drama, poetry, and composition).

By focusing on Ganla’s story, I would like to raise more difficult questions with the aim of turning the questions into awareness, and then awareness into more tangible actions. As the Tibetan saying goes, heartfelt words are not always sweet (ཤར་བའི་ཆོག་ལ་སྒྲན་མོ་མེད།). Is it academically ethical to expect Tibetan teachers to provide translation services for both rising and established western scholars of Tibet? Can we instead give dual author attribution to any

individual who played a major role in the work of translating Tibetan texts and other materials? Why are scholars of Tibetan studies so passionate about translating Tibetan texts into English but not the other way around? Do they also have a responsibility to contribute to the vitality of the Tibetan language by translating their own works into Tibetan?

In this volume, Tsehuajab Washul raised the importance of translating non-Tibetan academic research methods and writing into Tibetan by inviting both Tibetan and non-Tibetan scholars to create more knowledge in the Tibetan language. I would like to amplify his sentiment by inviting both Tibetan and non-Tibetan scholars to add more vitality to the Tibetan language in this way.

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ལོ་རྒྱུ་དང་ས་གནས་བརྟེན་པའི་འཛིག་རྟེན།

Translation and
Land-based Lifeworld(s)

Centering the Histories of Tibetan Place Names¹

Eveline Washul

Abstract: This essay documents the richness of meanings encapsulated by Tibetan place names through a study of the name Golok and how it can reflect, embody, and guide historical memory, social relations, and relational ties to more-than-human beings.

Keywords: Geographical names, Indigenous knowledge, local histories, Golok.

Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has observed that language is not simply a means of communication but a “collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” and is entwined with how we perceive ourselves and our place in the world (1986, 15-16). Lama Jabb (2015) further posits that language not only records experiences but also shapes how individuals and societies are able to think, feel, and communicate. I follow these approaches to viewing language as neither strictly functional for communication nor deterministic of perceptions and worldviews but as articulations that can guide, shape, and

¹ I thank Huatse Gyal and Charlene Makley for conceptualizing and organizing this roundtable at the 16th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in Prague, and especially to Charlene for bringing our discussions to a broader audience through this special issue of *Yeshe*. I also thank Tashi Dekyid Monet for her insightful comments on this essay.

enrich experiences and understandings of the world around us, sometimes in ways that resist easy translation. In this essay, I explore these approaches by taking the example of Tibetan place names. Tibetan place names are increasingly rendered into or replaced by the administrative units of the Chinese state, or even forgotten as Tibetans spend less time in their home places.² What knowledge systems and perceptual worlds might be obscured or written over in the process?

As researchers, we also often take place names for granted as naturalized backdrops to our research. But as I hope to show, Tibetan place names themselves, far from being labels of place easily translatable between languages, act as a “collective memory bank” capable of shaping experiences and relationships in the world. Specifically, Tibetan place names can reflect, embody, and guide ecological knowledge, historical memory, social relations, and relational ties to more-than-human beings. While it is beyond the scope of this short essay to discuss each of these aspects in detail, here I demonstrate a few aspects of this process through the example of the name Golok (མགོ་ལོག་).

To the unfamiliar eye, many Tibetan landscapes, full of rolling grasslands and endless mountain passes, may appear to be empty spaces—uninhabited and pristine. Yet these places are highly legible, often in fine spatial detail, to those who dwell there or frequent them through the use of place names. While many of us may associate place names with built structures like houses and streets,³ we must also understand that relationships between people and places are not always embodied in structurally built forms. Such relationships between people, land, and more-than-human beings can also shape the physical environment and

2 These are of course part of broader state processes of replacing Indigenous categories, knowledge, and practices with those legible to and governable by the state. For a discussion on this, see Huatse Gyal 2021.

3 For instance, both Bachelard 1994[1958] and Heidegger 1971 argue that the activities of building and dwelling are fundamental to bringing about a material manifestation of both the human imagination and an innate disposition of the physical landscape, such as a house. For them, coming from a Western philosophical context, the act of building produces meaningful locations, but they fail to take into account other forms of meaningful place making.

can manifest in rich traditions of oral histories that both reflect and maintain such relationships⁴.

There are various oral and written histories regarding the meaning and origin of the name Golok and I will draw on local historiography through interviews and the 1991 *Golok Genealogy* (མགོ་ལོག་རྒྱལ་མཛད་དེ།) compiled by Gyilung Tashi Gyamtso (ཁྱི་ལུང་བཟ་ཤེས་བླ་མཚོ།) and Gyilung Tukchok Dorje (ཁྱི་ལུང་བཟུགས་མཚོ་གློ་མཚོ།). Invariably, the name Golok is bound up with its origin stories and refers not just to the place but also to the people and their specific history moving through various Tibetan lands and how their relations with this particular place transformed both people and place to become “Golok.” The Golok origin stories share similar themes with those of some other eastern Tibetan communities, stories that stretch back to a beginning point in collective memories set in the Tibetan Imperial period (7th-9th c.) and located in central or western Tibet.

According to a local Golok scholar, whom I shall call Jikmé, Golok people originally came from Ladakh sometime during the Tibetan Empire, sought better pastures in Damzhung (དཔ་མུང་གཞུང་།), then moved on to reside in a place called Gukok Valley (གུ་ཁོག་གྲོང་ཁུངས་།) in the realm of the King of Ling (ལིང་།), in present day Pelyül County in Kardzé (དཀར་མཛོེས་དབལ་ཡུལ་མཛོེས་།)⁵. In one variation of the origin story, the lineage of one of the sons of Nyenpo Yütsé (གཞན་པོ་ཡུའུ་ཙེ།), a powerful mountain deity in the southeastern part of Golok, had many households whose women were of human lineage. Five young women from such households went on pilgrimage to several sacred mountains in southeastern Tibet⁶.

4 Indigenous Studies scholars have documented the reciprocal and relational nature of Indigenous relationships with places. See for instance: Alfred and Corntassel (2005); Corntassel (2013); Simpson (2013); Weaver (2001). Keith Basso in his seminal 1996 study, *Wisdom Sits in Places* demonstrates the rich social functions of place names for the Western Apache (now in Arizona, United States) that are often attached to unbuilt landscapes.

5 Interview with Jikmé, 2015.

6 In the oral version, this pilgrimage was to Khawakarpo (ཁ་མ་དཀར་པོ།). Interview with Jikmé, 2015. In the *Golok Genealogy*, this pilgrimage included Katok Dorjeden (ཀ་ཐོག་རྩོལ་གདན་།) in Kardzé and Khawakarpo and the Chicken-footed Mountain (རི་ཚོ་བྱ་རྒྱུད་།) in current-day Yunnan (p. 27).

On the way back, they passed through Gukok Valley and met a chieftain by the name of Dri Lhagyel (འབྲི་ལྷ་གྲུལ།). One of the young women, Nyenza (གཉན་བཟའ། literally, “the consort from Nyen”), became his wife while the others returned home. From Dri Lhagyel and Nyenza came the lineage of leaders of what later became known as the Golok *tsowa* (ཚོ་བ།) (*Golok Genealogy* 1991, 27-28)⁷. The leading lineages of the Golok people are literally the human de-scendants of the mountain deity, Nyenpo Yütsé.



View over Zalmogang Range with Nyenpo Yütsé and his gatekeepers (ཟའ་མོ་སྒང་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་གཉན་པོ་གཡུ་ཅེ་དང་དེའི་སྒོ་སྤང་།). Photo by the author.

Relations soured with the King of Ling, and one night, the powerful mountain deity, Amnye Machen (the maternal uncle of Nyenpo Yütsé), appeared in the dream of Nyenza, prophesying that she would return to her ancestral land. So Nyenza and Dri Lhagyel took four hundred households and went to

7 A very similar version was also recounted by Jikmé in an interview (2015).

Markok (མར་ཁོག) in present day Pema County, Golok (མགོ་ལོག་བད་མཛོང་།). There, they ended up fighting the original inhabitants of these lands, the Nyen, Khar, and Ba *dewa* (གཉན་མཁར་བ་ཐེ་བ་གསུམ།), who were defeated and fled to surrounding areas. This victory in Markok is considered to be the original site from which the people and place became Golok (*Golok Genealogy* 27-28).⁸

As illustrated in these stories, familial and genealogical relations extend to important protector deities inhabiting the land. In this way, Golok people are also brought into the genealogical relations tying together sacred mountains and lakes in Tibet: The father of Nyenpo Yütsé in Golok is Mount Kailash (གངས་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།) and the mother is Lake Mapham (མ་པམ་གཡུ་མཚོ།), both in Western Tibet; the maternal uncle is Amnye Machen in central Golok (མ་ཁུལ་སྒོ་མ་ར།); the nephew is Nyenchen Thangla in Central Tibet (གཉན་ཆེན་ཐང་ལྷ།); and the grand-father is Zhagdra Lhatse in Minyak (བཞག་བྲ་ལྷ་ཆེ།); not to mention the immediate family and court of Nyenpo Yütsé himself, who populate the local landscapes in southeastern Golok⁹.

The meaning of the name Golok itself has various explanations. According to some, the Golok people were originally known as Gulok (གུ་ལོག) after the name Gukok Valley in Ling where they had earlier settled. In this version, Golok is simply a variation, or error, in spelling the original name, Gulok.¹⁰ But the implication is that the people of Gukok Valley brought their previous place name with them to their new homeland. In another version, the name Golok is taken literally to mean “overturning the heads” of the Nyen, Khar, and Ba, i.e., the victorious events that produced the land and people of Golok (*Golok Genealogy*, 30-31).

8 A very similar version was also recounted by Jikmé in an interview (2015).

9 Interview with Jikmé, 2015.

10 As several local Golok scholars, including Jikmé, pointed out, the place name “Gulok” appears in Dunhuang documents. Indeed, Gulok appears in P.T. 1287 as a site where Chinese armies suffered devastating defeat and is renamed “Gulok, the Chinese burial ground” as a result: ལྷོ་ཁྱེད་མག་པོ་ན་ཉི་ཤི་སངས་དང་། འགྲུལ་ལོག་སྒང་དུ་གཡུལ་སྒང་ནས། ལྷོ་ཁྱེད་པོ་བཅུ་དང་སྒྲི། འགྲུལ་ལོག་ལྷོ་ཁྱེད་པོ་བཅུ་དང་སྒྲི།

The precise location of Gulok is not identifiable in this particular textual context, but it is notable that the name appears in this early document.

Bound up in the name Golok མགོ་ལོག་ is a history where the Tibetan Imperial period is an important starting point, linking Golok peoples with the common history of Tibetan peoples broadly construed. But the name Golok also contains within it a significant series of events that tie a people to a particular place. In the case of the Golok people, what binds land and people together is a genealogical relationship to a sacred mountain deity, as well as a shared history of migration and hardships. Furthermore, this genealogical tie to a local mountain deity locates the place and people of Golok within a map of genealogical relations to a broader region of sacred mountain deities that extends across much of the Tibetan Plateau.

In other words, packed into these two morphemes are the rich histories and meanings that tie a people and place together in history to the present¹¹. Within many Tibetan place names are histories and meanings that often exceed simple translation and can shape the relationships people have with the places they inhabit in the present. Foregrounding the richness of Tibetan place names in our research, translations, and everyday conversations can illuminate the myriad ways in which uniquely Tibetan senses of the world are constituted by and in the places they are part of.

11 To be sure, my focus on the larger place name Golok in this essay does diminish the roles of other, more localized, place names that also have a role in constituting the overall meanings of Golok. There are numerous stories centered on local sites in Golok that can activate shared memories and weave together the history of the region and people of Golok. For instance, the Nyenpo Yütsé Environmental Conservation Group (2018) has compiled an incredibly detailed encyclopedia of the Nyenpo Yütsé region that includes its flora and fauna, geological and hydrological features, sacred sites, local histories, origin stories, stories tied to specific local sites, monasteries, ruins, and much more.

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Translating Tibetan Lifeworld(s): An Ontological Bridge or Erasure

མོ་དེ་བཟ་ཤིས་བདེ་སྒྱེད། *Tashi Dekyid Monet*¹

Abstract: In this essay, I briefly discuss the possibilities, challenges, and implications of researching, writing, and translating Tibetan place-based relations and traditions in the space of academic research and in languages other than Tibetan. Indigeneity, defined as intergenerational systems of place-based relationships and responsibilities (Whyte, 2016), centrally concerns ethical relationships and moral responsibilities among people and places, and their communities of plants, animals, and spiritual entities in co-constituting distinct lifeworlds. I have argued that there is an ontological stake in how we research, translate, and write about place-based traditions and lifeways. Indigenous methodologies and research offer great examples of critical and ethical research practices that recenter the role of place and more-than-human relatives in our ways of knowing and being.

Keywords: Indigeneity, place-based relationship, lifeworld, research ethics, songs, translation

¹ I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to Charlene Makley and དཔལ་ལྷན་པ་ Huatse Gyal for organizing this panel at IATS 2022 and now publishing the contributions in this special issue; Eveline Washul for her thoughtful comments, and Lama Jabb for providing the full lyrics of Dhube's song that I write with in this essay. Thank you all, fellow panelists, for our intentions and actions to center the richness of Tibetan language in Tibetan Studies

In this essay, I briefly discuss the possibilities, challenges, and implications of researching, writing, and translating Tibetan place-based relations and traditions in the space of academic research and in languages other than Tibetan. These are methodological concerns (that I engage with in my dissertation project) about how Tibetan cosmologies and place-based traditions, relationships, and practices *inform* and *require* a distinct approach to education and research in Tibet and for Tibetans. A key focus of interest in my dissertation and in this essay is the centrality of place, Land or lifeworld in Tibetan educational thought. “Lifeworld” is a term commonly used in Indigenous Studies to describe the world in both physical and metaphysical forms. Aaron Mills (2016), an Anishinaabe scholar in Indigenous constitutionalism and philosophy, defines it as referring to “the ontological, epistemological, and cosmological framework through which the world appears to a people” (850). Other Indigenous scholars have argued that Land, places within it, and especially Indigenous homelands, are sentient, intellectual, and agential beings who can relate to us, and reciprocate when we relate to them (Tuck, McKenzie, McCoy 2014; Whyte 2017).

This idea that a people and their homelands are in mutually responsible and reciprocal relationships, *and* that these relationships are the foundations of how we know what we know, is a key aspect of Indigenous methodologies or theories of knowledge compared to non-indigenous traditions of knowledge. Language is both the medium and manifestation of this ontological, epistemological, and cosmological framework through which the world appears and relates to a people, and how a people communicate and relate to Land and place-based relations (Lama Jabb, 2015). Languages and their respective knowledge systems are thus the results of complex systems of intergenerational, cosmological, and genealogical relationships between a people and their homelands (Whyte 2016). Centering the richness of Tibetan language in (western) academic research should entail foregrounding Tibetan ways of knowing, including ways of knowing-in-relation-to-places.

I will now use a section of a song titled *Tshedi Rewa Jolsa* (མཚོ་འདི་འི་རེ་བ་བཞེས་སྟེ། “The Place Where I Entrust My Hopes of This Life”) written, composed, and sung by Dubhe, date unknown, as an example to discuss the intricacies of translating and writing with and about the Tibetan lifeworld and place-based

relationships. Dubhe (བདུད་རྩེ) is one of the most influential Tibetan singers of Amdo. He began his singing career in the 1980s and passed away in 2016.² Robin Wall Kimmerer (2022), a Potawatomi scientist, teacher, and writer, says that it is primarily songs of plants and places (not via merely western scientific naming, classification, and description) through which one can learn their relationships and beauty, and our own ways of “entering into reciprocity with the living world” (Kimmerer 2022). Similarly, Lama Jabb (2015) has shown the centrality of songs as a space for and expressions of Tibetan thoughts and emotions. Dubhe sings,

ངའི་རྩེས་ལྷ་མ་ཆེན་རི་བོ།
ཁྱའི་རི་ཆེ་དགུང་ལ་ཟུག་ཡོད།
བསང་རྒྱུང་ཉི་མཆོད་པ་འབུལ་ཞིང་།
སེམས་རེ་བས་ཀྱི་གསུམ་བཏབ་དུས།
བོད་ཁ་བའི་བསམ་དོན་ཁྱོད་མཁྱེན།

To you, my natal deity, the great mountain Machen,
Your mountain peak reaching into the sky,
I offer juniper *sang* smoke and *lungta* prayer papers³,
And thrice call ‘Ki’ with hope in my heart,
Please remember the aspirations of snowy Tibet.

Dubhe calls to his *kye lha* (རྩེས་ལྷ)—that is the central place-based or territorial more-than-human being who rules and protects the place where one is born and raised—the great snow mountain, Amnye Machen. *Kye lha* is also known as *zhidak* (གཞི་བདག) or the territorial sovereign and *yu lha* (ཡུལ་ལྷ) or local deity. He points out the grand scale of Amnye Machen (ཨ་མྱེས་མཆོད་ཞེན།) and the deity’s connection to the sky via his mountain peak reaching into the sky. He then offers juniper *sang* smoke and *lungta* or wind horse prayer papers to the mountain and requests his reciprocal attention to, and protection of, the Tibetan

2 Please see Lama Jabb’s (2020) article on Dhube for more information.

3 *Lungta* (རྒྱུང་རྟ།), literally, “wind horse”, are small square papers printed with prayers that are often offered to mountain deities and on mountain passes that Tibetans are traveling across.

Land. This song is a dialogue between the singer (and listeners of the song) and Amnye Machen, though we can't quite hear Amnye Machen's response in the written words on this page.

I can sense Amnye Machen's presence and a mutual connection and communication between the singer, the mountain in Dubhe's voice, and my own body as I listen to his singing. Perhaps such experience of connecting and communicating with places can only be articulated, felt, and shared in metaphors, just as Dubhe's songs abound with place-based metaphors. Perhaps when white clouds encircling the peak of Amnye Machen, a ray of morning sunlight, eagles or lucent white vultures (Thangkar Göpo), and the juniper smoke that we offer gather in the embrace of our grandfather mountain, Amnye Machen, words can hardly describe the resultant senses of beauty, power (and powerlessness), and joy other than to shout *ki hi hi* and feel them in our bodies and whole being (and becoming with the universe).

Nothing could replace such power and depth of connection with the mountain one can experience when visiting and paying homage to mountains in person. But the performance of this song in the beautiful voice, melody, and words of Dubhe can also activate the connection and renewal of Tibetan place-based relationships. Yet it seems that one must access a certain shared cultural sense of being and knowing in order to truly understand and feel the connection through metaphors, images, songs, and as well as a deep knowledge of the musicality of Tibetan language. I am afraid that I fail terribly at articulating this felt sense of knowing to foreign readers in the English language here.

This then brings me to ask, what goals and motivations do we as academic researchers engage when we research, translate, and write about (and hopefully *with* and *for*) Tibet, Tibetan culture, and lifeways? How might we engage similar goals and aspirations of contributing to the regeneration and strengthening of Tibetan place-based relationships as Dubhe demonstrates in creating and singing this song? Conversely, how can our scholarly works undermine such ways of knowing and being when we write about Tibetan culture, lifeways, and places

in non-Tibetan languages, with, for example, assumptions that such ways of being are merely “cultural” and “symbolic?”

When we discuss such Tibetan ways of relating to mountains and rivers as merely cultural, religious, and interpretive practices, I wonder what are the unstated assumptions with which we are working. Are we suggesting that the cultural and the physical realities of these mountains and rivers are radically different kinds of things (such as a *zhidak* mountain is a radically different reality from the physical mountain that is a *zhidak* in a Tibetan lifeworld)? Are we suggesting such place-based relationships and lifeways are created, interpreted, and sustained by human beings upon the surfaces of land, which is then rendered as inanimate objects strictly separated from cultural worlds of human communities?

Here is a simple example of the ontological reframing of a Tibetan *zhidak* mountain that may occur in a hypothetical academic writing: let’s say a Tibetan villager introduces a female *Zhidak* mountain to a researcher whose native language is English, saying “མ་འབྱར་ལུའི་རྒྱལ་མོ་ནི་ང་ཚོ་ས་ཆའི་གཞི་བདག་ཞིག་རེད། (Majar Luyi Gyalmo is a *zhidak* of our place)⁴”. The researcher then writes that the villager *regards* Mount Majar Luyi Gyelmo as the territorial deity of the region or the mountain is *regarded* as the territorial deity of the region. I say that such a translation and/or interpretation undermines the ontological nature of the mountain as a *zhidak* because it suggests that reality of a *zhidak* mountain is merely an abstract symbol to the Tibetan villager, while implying or even stating explicitly that in reality the mountain is just an inanimate object, such as a resource for development.

Yet, the Tibetan utterance above (and generally Tibetan articulations about *zhidak* and other place-based relations) strongly affirms the nature of the mountain as a *zhidak* and leaves no space to suggest otherwise. Therefore,

4 Majar Luyi Gyalmo is a female *zhidak* mountain in my hometown, though I am unsure about the correct Tibetan spelling of the mountain’s name, as I have not seen her name in written forms.

even interpretive and humanistic research approaches to Tibetan culture and society, which may do well in including Tibetan cultures and perspectives, can alter Tibetan place-based relations on ontological and material levels when they resort to anthropocentric epistemic theories of social construction and symbolic meaning (especially when humanity is conceptualized as a separate and superior entity from Land). Additionally, western academic systems and practices of categorizing and historicizing such lifeways as “religious,” “folklore,” “traditional,” or “pre-modern” decouple Tibetan ways of knowing-being from places, lifeworlds, notions of the interconnectedness of land and life as well as thinking and being, and present-future times. To what kind of futures are such unquestioned academic conventions committed? Or to what kind of futurities⁵ are our academic practices contributing? Do our scholarly works contribute to the erasure and “disappearance” of such Tibetan ways of relationships by imposing our unquestioned assumptions of progressive linear histories and rational/secular thinking?

It matters greatly how we write, research, and translate Tibetan lifeways, given the power and privilege of western academic research, which has long been established as more valid and truer than other forms of knowledge. Indigenous scholars in the US have long noted the incommensurable differences between the cultures and worlds of European settlers and the Indigenous communities in Turtle Island (North America), as well as how such differences were unsettled through European cultural and linguistic imperialism. For example, Robin Kimmerer in her 2017 speech at Yale University, says, “a single word that seems to me the most pernicious act of disrespect coupled to linguistic imperialism is the little word, it.” Kimmerer continues “In English, you are either human or you are an it, it imprisons us in this idea of objectification of nature.” Kimmerer contends that such objectification puts these beings outside of our moral responsibilities.

5 “Futurity” is different from “future”. It refers to how the future is rendered knowable through specific practices and how the anticipatory logics of those futures intervene in the present. Futurities can overdetermine certain futures over others, such as the dominant settler future over Indigenous futures. See more in Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández’s work (2013).

Advocating for justice for plants and places, Kimmerer has called for changing English pronouns that are used for non-human beings and entities in order to recognize their legal rights and responsibilities. Kimmerer suggests using the terms “ki” and “kin” for pronouns of more-than-human relations; ki derives from aki, which refers to land in the Anishinaabe language, and kin refers to kinship and thus as a plural pronoun. Therefore, I think translating and researching lifeworld(s) is not only a matter of representation but is fundamentally an ontological practice that could change the world in literal and material senses. Research and translation could be a bridge to realities and worlds other than the privileged dominant world if it is done well and justly. Indigenous research, literature, and education from Turtle Island (North America) and Aotearoa (New Zealand), for example, offer great promise for more ethical research and cross-cultural/linguistic translation when research, writing, and translation practices are rooted in, informed by, and done to support the flourishing of Indigenous ways of being and knowing⁶.

Therefore, we must consider the real impact of our translation and research projects on the communities—human and more-than-human—with whom the projects are concerned. Traditions and lifeways of a community have their own logics and purposes of expression and performance, which may not be up for “transfer” or “displacement” to a different culture, language, and place, especially the power dynamic of dominant and non-dominant languages is considered. We must thus also discern and respect the original purposes and uses of knowledge and traditions imagined by the knowledge creators and keepers of the community.

In conclusion, I return to the power of Dubhe’s song in renewing and deepening Tibetan relationships in everyday mundane and cosmic life, knowing, being, and becoming all at the same time. In this song, Dubhe speaks directly to his ancestral mountain, Amnye Machen, and articulates the relational and reciprocal encounter of the singer (and listeners) with the mountain-relative.

6 Please see the works by McCoy, Tuck, & McKenzie 2017; Kimmerer, 2013; Vanessa, 2013; Hunt 2014; Silko 2006.

The mountain's action of reaching into the sky, the singer's action of offering a *sang*, juniper smoke, and shouting *ki hi hi* are states of being and doing, connected to relational remembering and thinking with Tibetan Land, to which the mountain himself and the singer are inseparable parts, and for interconnected becoming and possibilities.



Layered landscapes of Minyak Rabgang, the snowy peaks of Zhakdra Lhatse (བཞག་བླ་མེ) in the upper layer, the shaded rocky mountain or Drari, Zursum Nyingpo of a territorial deity in the middle layer, and the meadows of Goruma village in the lower layer. Photo by the author.

In similar spirit, I also conclude this essay with an invocation of my ancestral mountain, Zhakdra Lhatse of Minyak Rabgang (the great plateau of Minyak, Eastern Tibet; མི་ཉག་བཞག་བླ་མེ), who is also the son of Amnye Machen in Golok. I was inspired to write these concluding words by Dubhe's song, as well as by a special phenomenon of rainbow lights that appeared near Minyak Zhakdra Lhatse on the fourth day of the Lunar New Year (January 25, 2023). I address these words primarily to my natal Mountain (also to Tibetan-speaking/reading audiences) and thus it is left untranslated.

ངའི་སྒྲིམ་ལྟ་མི་ཉག་བཞག་བ་ལྟ་ཅེ།
ཁྱའི་རི་ཅེར་སྒྲིན་འཇའི་དར་ཐག་འཐེན་དུས།
ཡུལ་རི་ཆུར་འཕེང་བའི་བྲན་གདུང་ཕྱི་བུང་།
དྲིན་ས་ཡུལ་སྒྲིད་པའི་ཉེན་འབྲེལ་ཡག་མོང་།
ཆོག་འབྲུ་འགའ་ས་སར་དམར་བཞིན་བྲིས་ནས།
སྒྲིན་ཡར་སྐྱོད་ཞིག་ལ་རེ་བས་སྐྱར་དུས།
བོད་ཁ་བའི་སྐྱོད་བཅུད་བཟན་པར་སྤྱང་ཞིང་།
མོ་ང་ལ་ལམ་སྐྱོན་སྤོང་གྲོགས་མཛད་རོགས།

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Afterword: The Lotus Garden of Literary Translation

མཐུག་གཏམ་ཚཱ་སྐྱར་པ་སྒྲའི་དགའ་ཚལ།

ལ་མ་སྐྱབས། *Lama Jabb*

ཆོག་གི་དག་ཆས་དོན་གྱི་གནད་འབྱིན་ཞིང་།
དོན་གྱི་གོ་བས་ཆོག་གི་དག་ཐོན་པ།
སྐྱེས་སྐྱེས་རིག་ཆལ་ལྟ་ཡི་ལུང་འདྲ་བས།
ཚཱ་སྐྱར་པ་སྒྲའི་དགའ་ཚལ་འཁེལ་གྱུར་ཅིག།

ཇེ་བཙུན་ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།¹

Huatse Gyal and Charlene Makley organized a unique roundtable on translation *Centering the Richness of Tibetan Language in Tibetan Studies* at the 16th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in Prague in 2022. The panellists were encouraged to reflect upon the challenges, rewards, and politics of translation as well as their own experience as translators while they engage with Ngüŋi wa Thiong’o’s and my work on language and translation.

¹ ཇེ་བཙུན་ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ། (Jetsun Sherab Gyatso) 1980: 456. For an English translation of this verse please read through the essay.

It was an unbelievable honour and inexpressibly humbling to have my name mentioned, let alone my work discussed, alongside such a peerless and impactful global intellectual giant. My own chastening experience and stings of imposter syndrome aside, the packed-out roundtable was one of the most dynamic, engaging and constructive events of the entire conference. The insightful and critical presentations and the animated and thoughtful responses made it abundantly apparent that all the scholars at the gathering were preoccupied with the successful translation of Tibetan language materials into other tongues.

As can be seen in the published versions of their talks here, the overwhelming concern of the panellists is to do justice to the richness and musicality of the Tibetan language, especially when attempting literary translation. The accomplishment of such a lofty objective – if ever possible – entails prioritising Tibetan ways of thinking and vocabularies of conceptualization, which requires not only a deep cultural immersion but also the cultivation of a critical socio-political and historical awareness about Tibet. Without reiterating the convincing arguments laid out in this special issue, here I will briefly touch upon some of the aspects that foreground Tibetan lived experience and epistemology.

Language of Self-expression

The Chinese Communist invasion of Tibet in the 1950s was a long-drawn-out bloody process, although the oppressive endurance of the subsequent colonial occupation makes one neglect this fact. The Tibetan survivors and their immediate descendants had put into words this traumatic event to make sense of it and record it for posterity. In a way they had to translate an unprecedented tragedy into new utterances that bear witness to history. Yet it is no exaggeration to point out that in contemporary scholarship on modern Tibet, few scholars give precedence to the actual vocabulary Tibetans themselves came up with to communicate their colonialisised reality. The Tibetan language of self-expression is either totally ignored or glossed over with purportedly neutral terms. Even worse, it is replaced with the very language invented by the colonial power for the sole purpose of erasing Tibetan history, denying colonial oppression, and indoctrinating everyone who studies Tibet.

Such intellectual malpractice is prevalent, but it will suffice to cite just one glaring instance here—the descriptions of the violent encounter between the Dalai Lama’s Tibet and Mao’s China. With slight variances in wording, uncoerced Tibetans described and still describe this encounter simply as “invasion” (བཅན་འཛུལ།). For example, it is recounted as “the Red Chinese invasion of Tibet” (རྒྱ་དམར་གྱིས་བོད་ལ་བཅན་འཛུལ།), “the Chinese military invasion of Tibet” (རྒྱ་དམག་གིས་བོད་ལ་བཅན་འཛུལ།), “the Chinese invasion of Tibet” (བོད་ལ་རྒྱ་མིས་བཅན་འཛུལ།) and “China’s invasion of Tibet” (རྒྱ་ནག་གིས་བོད་ལ་བཅན་འཛུལ།). However, this self-representing Tibetan voice is lost when the defining historical moment is translated or reformulated as the “arrival” of the Chinese Communists in Tibet or the “incorporation” of Tibet into the People’s Republic of China. Worse still, it is completely disregarded when the same historical event is explained through the regurgitation of CCP-speak as “the peaceful liberation of Tibet (བོད་ཞི་བའི་བཅེངས་གྲོལ།).”

With characteristic perception Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o’s states: “The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.”² When the language of the Chinese colonial power (both Mandarin Chinese and CCP-speak) is elevated over that of Tibetans in works on Tibet, one cannot help but think that such works assist in perfecting the mental control of the colonised and those beyond. Therefore, a crucial task of the translator of Tibetan materials, literary or otherwise, must be to eschew such complicity in colonialism. This calls for, among other necessities, an acute consciousness of lived Tibetan experience and the uncurbed Tibetan ways of uttering it, a heightened critical awareness of the Tibetan colonial condition, and the rigorous avoidance of the language of the perpetrator when chronicling the victimised.

Travails of Translation

The scrupulous cultivation of a deeply critical and empathetic awareness is part and parcel of the arduous dimension of translation that demands time,

2 Thiong’o 1986: 16.

patience, struggle, vigilance, and endless studying. Elsewhere, I have compared translation to an act of *bardo* because it operates in a liminal realm between at least two languages and enables communication among different worlds that engender as well as embed these languages.³ Particularly in the translation of poetry both concerned languages are compelled to experience something like slow death and rebirth. They are both deconstructed into the minutest units before the original substance and beauty are reborn in the now meticulously reassembled target language. One of the significances of the *bardo* metaphor is to heighten our attention to this long laborious process and its indispensability.

In *Angry in Piraeus*, an illuminating personal reflection on translation, Maureen Freely states: “Translating is for me the slowest, deepest, and most intimate form of reading: closer than close reading. I sometimes think of it as immersed reading.”⁴ The *bardo* metaphor also carries a similar sentiment that successful translation rebirths can only come about as a result of slow, patient, and frequent close reading accompanied by cultural immersion. Without a mental disposition to rigorously engage and struggle with specifically the source language over an immensely long time, good translation would be almost impossible. With this being the case, it would be quite foolhardy and disrespectful to attempt the translation of any literary text, let alone great Tibetan classics, after only a brief stint of studying Tibetan language and culture.

Eternal Translation for a Plural World

The great irony of translation is that even after the investment of a huge amount of time, hard work, learning, and constant struggle for accuracy, some dimensions of meaning and style of the source texts are inevitably left out or betrayed. The act of translation is never-ending and remains forever unsatisfactory. Hence, we have the unrivalled status of the original text, which is itself not an unchanging and fixed entity. No matter how talented and studious

3 Lama Jabb 2024: 32-51.

4 Freely 2014: 32.

translators are, the simple fact is that there are too many things to be translated. Moreover, what is translated is incomplete and open to contestation and retranslation. Herein lies an overlooked quality of translation that helps address the serious elements of erasure, betrayal, and violence it entails. Jacques Derrida underscores this when in the Tower of Babel story, he sees God's interruption of "the colonial violence or the linguistic imperialism."⁵ The denial of a universal language condemns humans to perennial confusion but neutralises the tyranny of a single language. This in turn permits the continuance of linguistic diversity that cries out for eternal translation. I believe it is vital to embrace such a critical consciousness when it comes to the translation of Tibetan literary texts. No language should be universally dominant, and no translation can be definitive or final. Translation of Tibetan literature should serve to generate cross-cultural dialogue and creativity while countering any form of linguistic imperialism that might snuff out the Tibetan language.

In his atmospheric and contemplative poem "Snow," Louis MacNeice observes that the world is "incorrigibly plural" and celebrates "the drunkenness of things being various."⁶ The goal of translation is to enable communication between distinct languages while neither undermining nor erasing equally priceless systems of communication. By fostering conversations across cultures, translation upholds and enhances the ecstasy of plurality in the world. All the articles in this special issue are written in English. All of them, except for Tsehuajab Washul's contribution, treat translation from Tibetan into other major languages. This grave imbalance of scholarship, which mostly benefits the readers of powerful colonial languages, was discussed with passion, insight, and ethical commitment at the roundtable. I fervently wish that similarly galvanising critical and creative attention will be turned on translation from other languages into Tibetan along with discussions of translation theory and practice in Tibetan. This will help make Tibetans themselves beneficiaries by rectifying some of the inequalities in knowledge production in Tibetan studies, bolstering Tibetan intellectual advancement, and enriching Tibetan cultural diversity.

5 Derrida 1992: 226.

6 MacNeice 1999: 611.

Translation as Treasure Substitute

In the Tibetan treasure tradition, it is customary for treasure revealers to leave what are known as གཏེར་ཚལ། “treasure substitutes” in exchange for the extracted texts and objects at the exact sacred spot. This custom is for the appeasement of the treasure guardians, territorial deities, and other local spirits as well as for the protection and renourishment of the natural environment.⁷ Translations of great literary works from English and other languages into Tibetan will undoubtedly be a nourishing repayment for the fine literary treasures mined out of Tibet through translation over the decades. Such intellectual pursuits will also be an apt and novel implementation of the Tibetan notion of treasure substitute in the realm of contemporary knowledge production. Translations from and into Tibetan are also indeed an invaluable cultural exchange that will ensure the world will continue to be “incorrigibly plural” and thus pleasurable.

Towards these noble ends, let us aspire with the great Tibetan Buddhist master, poet, scholar, and translator Jetsun Sherab Gyatso (1884-1968) that our endeavours here and elsewhere may contribute to the thriving of the garden of literary translation in Tibet and elsewhere:

The accuracy of words draws out the essence of meaning
And the sense of meaning brings out the accuracy of words.
May divine authority-like intellectual power of talent and learning
Make the lotus pleasure garden of literary translation flourish

⁷ For an insightful and ecologically conscious discussion of this practice see Terrone 2014: 460-482.

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Artist Statement II

ཀུ་ལ་ཡག Kulha

(Collected and translated by མོ་དེ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་བདེ་རྒྱུད། Tashi Dekyid Monet)



KULHA, རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ Vitality (2023)
Acrylic paints and canvas, 30x40 cm

Courtesy of the artist

རི་མོ་འདི་མཚོན་དོན་གཙོ་བོ་ནི་བོད་ཀྱི་སྐད་ཡིག་གི་རླང་རྟ་འདི་འཛམ་གླིང་གྱི་ལ་བྱ་བ་པའི་སྒོན་འདུན་སྟེ།
 སའི་གོ་ལའི་ཡར་ལ་ཀ་ཁ་ག་ང་ཡི་རླང་རྟ་མཚོན་བཞིན་པ་བྱིས་ཡོད། སྤྱིར་བཏང་རླང་རྟ་ཡིན་ན་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་བཤད་རྒྱ་
 ཡོད་པ་སྟེ། ཁ་ལས་དབང་ཐང་སོགས་གང་གི་རྩྭ་གས་ཡིན་ན་ཡར་རྒྱས་སུ་འགྲོ་བཞིན་པའི་ནང་དོན་ཡོད་རེད། དབྱངས་
 གསལ་ཡི་གེ་ནི་རྩ་བའི་ཚོན་མདོག་ལ། གསུམ་དང་དྲུག་ཟེར་བ་སོགས་ཡོད་པ་ནས་མ་གཞིའི་ཚོན་མདོག་དྲུག་པོས་བྱིས་
 ཡོད། དེས་རྩ་བ་དང་འབྱུང་ཁུངས་ཡིན་པར་བསྟན་པ་སྟེ། རྩ་བའི་ཚོན་མདོག་དྲུག་པོ་མེད་ན་ཚོན་མདོག་གཞན་པ་ལས་
 ཐུབ་ནི་མ་རེད། ཨ་མ་ཞིག་གིས་བྱིས་པ་ཞིག་ཁྲིད་ཡོད་པ་ནི་མ་འོངས་པའི་སེམས་གཏད་དམ་རེ་བ་བཅོལ་སའམ་རེ་བ་
 འབྱུང་ས་ཡོད་པའི་ནང་དོན་དུ་བྱིས་ཡོད། དེ་ནས་ཨ་མའི་གོན་པ་དམར་སྐྱེ་ཡིན་པ་ནི་བྱམས་བརྗེ་དང་རེ་བའི་མཚོན་
 བྱེད་དུ་བྱིས་ཡོད།

This painting (here and on the cover) primarily portrays the hope that the *Lungta* (literally, wind horse) of Tibetan language—its vitality and power—will spread across the world. This is shown by a mother and her child offering *Lungta* prayer papers, marked with the letters of the Tibetan alphabet, upward to the planet Earth. Generally, *Lungta* are explained as *tendrel*, namely auspicious connections and fortunate conditions, in their signification of [and hope for] flourishing in various areas, such as prosperity and power. The Tibetan alphabet is painted in the six primary colors, from among the various ways of considering the root colors as fivefold, threefold, sixfold, and so forth. This shows how they are foundational and generative, since without the six root colors, it is impossible to create other colors. The scene of a mother bringing a child with her to offer the prayer papers signifies the existence of a place to which one can embrace faith and hope for the future. I have painted the mother's clothes in the light red color, symbolizing love and hope.

Contributors' bionotes

Cameron David Warner is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Aarhus University. His work has focused on Buddhism among Tibetans and Nepalis, and the development of Nepal. His current projects include an investigation of gender and family dynamics in Tibetan migration to France, and the impact the pending retirement and succession of the 14th Dalai Lama on Buddhist communities in the Himalayas.

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Lama Jabb (ལྷ་མ་རྒྱལ་བ།) was born and brought up in the Dhatsen tribe, a nomadic community in Northeastern Tibet. He studied in Tibet, India and the UK and received his D.Phil at the University of Oxford. He is currently a Supernumerary Fellow in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies and the Head of the Tibetan and Himalayan Studies Centre at Wolfson College. He teaches Tibetan language and literature at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford. Lama Jabb's research and writing centres on the interplay between the Tibetan literary text and oral traditions, literary criticism, translation theory and practice, and contemporary Tibet. He is the author of the book *Oral and Literary Continuities in Modern Tibetan Literature: The Inescapable Nation* (2015) and many scholarly articles

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Tsehuajab Washul (ཏེ་མུ་ཇམ་བཤུ་ལེ་འུ་ཤུ་བཤུ་) is a Ph.D. student in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia. He was born and raised in a pastoralist community in eastern Tibet. Prior to beginning his doctoral studies, he worked for many years in cultural documentation projects on the Tibetan Plateau. He also co-founded a coworking and cultural space in Chengdu that supports emerging young Tibetan entrepreneurs. His research interests include situated learning, sociocultural aspects of learning, and informal learning such as everyday practice in home and community settings.

Jed Forman received his undergrad in philosophy from Tufts University with a special certificate for additional studies in Ethics, Law, and Society. After college, he had a successful seven-year career as a computer programmer and street dancer, performing and teaching in New York, LA, and internationally. Jed received his M.S. with distinction in Kinesiology and Dance from California State University Northridge in 2014. He thereafter returned to his interest in Buddhist philosophy, entering the doctoral program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. After completing his research in India under Fulbright and American Institute of Indian Studies grants, he graduated in 2021. He is co-author of *Knowing Illusion with the Yakherds on the Epistemology of Taktsang Lotsāwa*. Jed also recently completed his monograph on yogic perception, exploring its intellectual development from India up into Tibet and its connections to Western philosophy. It is currently under review. His research interests include Buddhist epistemology, the cognitive science approach to religion, and phenomenology.