



Sinofon

**GULFS AND BRIDGES: INTER-CULTURAL
INFLUENCES AND EMERGENCE
OF MODERN LITERATURE IN TIBET
WORKSHOP ON MODERN
TIBETAN LITERATURE**

**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
OLOMOUC 2019**



Palacký University
Olomouc

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**November 23, 2019
Palacký University in Olomouc**

**Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction
at the Edges**

**reg. no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791
Excellent research**

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Gulfs and Bridges: Inter-cultural Influences and Emergence of Modern Literature in Tibet

Workshop on Modern Tibetan Literature

The workshop “Gulfs and Bridges: Inter-cultural Influences and Emergence of Modern Literature in Tibet” is focusing on modern Tibetan literature approaching it from the stimuli it received from neighboring cultures and literatures. Within a larger framework of the “Sinophone borderlands” project, which scrutinizes the “interaction at the edges” of empires or cultures, we want to bring together scholars with interest in modern Tibetan literature and discuss topics related to intercultural and literary exchange as well as influences and traces of neighboring literatures in Tibetan literature. We want to explore the “bridges and intersections” that brought together various influences and sparked literary innovation in the contact zones where Tibetan and Chinese or Indian literatures met.

The workshop will take place in Olomouc, Czech Republic on November 23, 2019, as a part of Annual Conference on Asian Studies (ACAS) organized by the Department of Asian Studies of Palacky University. The workshop is organized and funded within the current faculty project, supported from European Regional Development Fund, Sinophone Borderlands: Interaction at the Edges, reg. no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

Program

November 23, 2019

- 09:30–10:00** Registration, Tea & coffee
- 10:00–10:30** Welcoming speech, Ondrej Kucera
- 11:15–11:30** Opening remarks – welcome
short intro about the University & Sinophone
František Kratochvíl, Kamila Hladíková,
Franz Xaver Erhard

MORNING SESSION

- 11:30–11:00** **Tibetan Kunstdichtung and Modern Tibetan Literature**
Franz Xaver Erhard
- 11:00–11:30** **Tibetan Identity Embedded in the Poetic Image**
Lama Jabb
- 11:30–12:00** **Whose Modern Literature? A Critical Study of Modern Tibetan Poetry**
Lobsang Yongdan

12:30–13:30 LUNCH BREAK

AFTERNOON SESSION 1

- 13:30–14:00** **Some Observations on Dhondup Gyal's Advice on Writing: Literary Views and Sources of Influence**
Riika Virtanen

- 14:00–14:30** **Döndrup Gyel and the Modern Chinese Literary Tradition**
Christopher Peacock
- 14:30–15:00** **Tibetan Reception of Two Women Writers' Novels**
Françoise Robin

15:30–15:45 **COFFEE BREAK**

AFTERNOON SESSION 2

- 15:45–16:15** **Linguistic Hospitality: Translating Contemporary Tibetan Literature into English**
Michael Monhart
- 16:15–16:45** **The Unhyphenated Postcoloniality of Tibetan English Literature in Exile**
Shelly Bhoil
- 16:45–17:15** **Life in the “New Tibet” and the Double-Edged Sword of Cotemporary Tibetan Sinophone Writing**
Kamila Hladíková
- 17:15–17:45** **FINAL DISCUSSION/REMARKS**
- 18:00–19:00** **OLOMOUC TOUR**
- 19:00** **DINNER**

November 23, 2019

Tibetan Kunstdichtung and Modern Tibetan Literature
Franz Xaver Erhard (Leipzig University)

Tibet is often described as a religious place where people and institutions invested immense efforts in the propagation of the Buddhist doctrine. Consequently, its literature is thus frequently read as predominantly religious and edificatory in content. The introduction of Indic poetics in the 13th century marks a decisive moment in Tibetan literary history and proves still a major source of inspiration for contemporary writers. In my presentation, I will attempt to revisit the history of Tibetan Kunstdichtung (kāvya) tracing elements of emancipation and secularisation in Tibetan literature and education in the 18th century.

Tibetan Identity Embedded in the Poetic Image

Lama Jabb (University of Oxford)

Imagery is an essential element of poetry in general and Tibetan poetry both written and oral, revels in this creative act. Tibetan poetic compositions indeed confirm Wyndham Lewis' famous phrase that the image is the "primary pigment" of poetry. Working in tandem with other artistic devices, sets of subtle as well as elaborate images intensify the experience of poetry and reinforce its meaning, be it emotional, intellectual or a mixture of the two. The visual content of a poem may be formed from a single dominant image or can be woven from a multiplicity of interconnected as well as dissonant images. These images are visual representations of sensual and intellectual experiences that possess a force of sudden revelation. They also distil and impart Tibetan collective identity, which is fluid, flexible and always undergoing transformation. The Tibetan poetic image helps to reveal how Tibet was born of encounters with foreign civilisations and how it continues to survive through such dynamic interactions.

Using oral and literary examples my paper will attempt to demonstrate how metaphors, similes and other forms of figurative utterance are employed not only to enhance the aesthetic effects and affective pull but also to capture Tibetan identity in all its complexities.

Whose modern literature?
A critical study modern Tibetan poetry
Lobsang Yongdan (University of Bonn)

In talking about so-called modern Tibetan poetry, scholars have assumed that it was something new and vernacular as well as that it had a secular nature. Importantly, they argue that it emerged only recently in Tibet and was written in opposition to traditional Tibetan literature. For these scholars, Tibetan traditional literature-as they have named it-was something old and static. As Pema Bhum states, Tibetan traditional poetry was "imprisoned by religious views"; as such it was incapable of expressing modern's views and feelings. In contrast, modern Tibetan literature, is "not bounded by any views"; rather, 'the treasure human nature as it really is" (2008: 231). One Western scholar even calls the 'new poem' a 'cultural revolution' in Tibet-of course, in the positive sense. While talking about how traditional literature was constrained by religious views, and the social and political context in which traditional literature was produced, these scholars appeared to have failed to recognize or to minimize the impact of new political literature, education, and cultural background, which emerged under the new socialist China on the production of this so-called modern Tibetan literature.

In studying recently resurfaced literary works, which were produced between 1959 and 1979s by China's state, this article looks into whether so-called modern Tibetan literary writing was something new-as many scholars have claimed; or, whether it was a part of a cultural scheme that was designed by the new China' state to construct a new conception of "truth" "order" and "reality" in Tibet.

Some Observations on Dhondup Gyal's Advice on Writing: Literary Views and Sources of Influence

Riika J. Virtanen (University of Helsinki)

The sixth volume of his *Collected Works* (dPal don grub rgyal gyi gsung 'bum) includes an unfinished writing by Dhondup Gyal (Don grub rgyal, 1953-1985), which is titled "Slob khrid dang sbyar ba'i rtsom rig gi zin bris" ("Notes for Teaching Literature"). It has two chapters or lessons mainly giving advice on how to write and contains information on his views on literature and both academic and creative writing. Many writings of Dhondup Gyal have already been discussed by scholars (see e.g. Stoddard 1994, Pema Bhum 1995 & 1999, Kapstein 1999 & 2002, Robin 2002, Hartley 2003, Lin 2008, Hladikova 2013, Lama Jabb 2015), but so far as I know there has been less discussion on this particular work. Taking a look at the writers and also political thinkers mentioned or quoted by Dhondup Gyal it is possible to gain some idea on the sources which influenced his literary thinking and views on writing. A large part of the writings of Dhondup Gyal appeared originally in the 1980s and his views have to be seen in the context of cultural atmosphere and views on literature in the People's Republic of China in those days. In my presentation I shall take a look on what kind of advice Dhondup Gyal gives for those interested in writing and also shall examine on which sources he has based his views on literature and writing. This will help to trace influences from literature and writers of both Tibetan origin and from other cultures.

Döndrup Gyel and the Modern Chinese Literary Tradition

Christopher Peacock (Columbia University)

This paper will consider the life and work of modern Tibet's most renowned writer, Döndrup Gyel (1953-1985), from the perspective of his relationship with China's literary and intellectual traditions. Döndrup Gyel spent a significant part of his creative life in China's capital during the major intellectual renaissance that was taking place in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and it was during this period that many of his most famous works – "Waterfall of Youth," among others – were written. Döndrup Gyel first went to Beijing in 1971, where he studied for three years at the Tibetan department of what is now the Central University for Nationalities (Krunḡ dbyang mi rigs slob grwa chen mo, Ch. Zhongyang Minzu Daxue). In 1978, he again left Qinghai for Beijing to take up a place as a research student at CUN. He graduated in 1981, but remained at CUN as a teacher until 1984, when he returned to Qinghai, where he lived until his death in 1985. His time in Beijing coincided with a period of fervent cultural activity spurred by a wave of translations, a time when many of the profound issues surrounding nation, society, and civilization were being discussed in China with a renewed enthusiasm and sense of urgency. I contend that Döndrup Gyel's work reflects not only an engagement with the environment of Beijing at that time, but also with the grand questions of modernity raised by the May Fourth generation. Döndrup Gyel's critique of traditional culture, his emphasis on innovation and progress, interpretations of race and history, and notion of "national pride" carried out a significant dialogue with early modern Chinese literature, and Lu Xun in particular. Döndrup Gyel's work thus represents the first extensive and substantial engagement between Chinese and Tibetan literary modernity. Through this encounter was born a body of literature that envisioned a Tibetan nation that lived as one of many within the territory of the modern Chinese state, but a nation that was beset by its own unique cultural crises and urgent questions about its place in the modern world.

Tibetan Reception of Two Women Writers' Novels

Françoise Robin (INALCO, Paris)

In pre-1950s Tibet, women were notoriously absent from educated, learned and public circles. The contemporary stage of Tibetan-language literature inherited and prolonged that tendency, at least until recently. A quantitative survey made in the mid-2000s on the basis of published journals and collections in Tibetan language in Tibet showed that women writers still accounted for only an average of 5% of all featured authors. Since the mid-1990s, though, women intellectuals, writers and activists themselves have taken upon themselves to play an instrumental role in addressing this imbalance and pulling women out of invisibility in literary circles. These painstaking efforts, led by the university professor Dpal mo (b. 1968), resulted in a steady stream of publications of women-only works, mainly consisting of anthologies of poems, the genre that was and has remained for long the privileged and most common mode of literary expression in lay Tibetan writing. While women have started carving a space on the poetic scene, the world of fictional and prose writing is even more strongly male-dominated. The first collection of short stories by a single male author was published as early as in 1981, coinciding exactly with the beginning of that new literary format and genre, and was followed by tens of them. In contrast, it took more than twenty years for a woman writer to publish her own collection of short stories: Tshe sgron skyid (b. 1975), a Tibetan teacher from Amdo, made a breakthrough when she published *Skyo snang gi zlos gar* [Tragedy] in 2005 at the Gansu Nationalities Press. It was soon followed by the Lhasa-based Tshe ring dbyangs skyid (b. 1962) and her *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar* [White clouds at the mountain top] published in 2007 by the Tibet People's Press. Even rarer than short stories by women writers are novels: the translator and writer Mkha' mo rgyal (b. 1974) acted as a pioneer when she published *Phyur ba* [Cheese] in 2014 (Gansu Nationalities Press). After two years, Tshe ring dbyangs skyid drew attention with her *Me tog dang rmi lam* [Metok and Dreams] published in Lhasa by the Tibet People's Press. Both novels have in common to put women characters at center stage, in opposition with male fiction.

This paper will look into a selection of Tibetan reviews of these two

women's novels and will analyse how literary critics, men or women, evaluate women's literary works, and to what extent gender of the writer, the critic and the characters is a relevant category for literary criticism in Tibet today, in the overall context of an emerging feminist discourse in Tibet today.

Linguistic Hospitality: Translating contemporary Tibetan literature into English

Michael Monhart (NYC, US)

In this presentation I consider the influence we, as translators, feel from our own languages and literature traditions and how it can shape, sometimes quite subtly and without conscious reflection, the presentation of our translations. In other words, I look at the translator as a bridge with two-way traffic between two cultural worlds. I have drawn on the work of Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney in my consideration of this topic, specifically from their idea of translation as 'linguistic hospitality,' that is, inviting the other into one's linguistic world while at the same time resisting, from an ethical and moral standpoint, the temptation to impose one's own familiar cultural values and ideas on the other, the author. Ricoeur references psychoanalysis as a kind of translation and, as a psychoanalyst, I find his notion that we only discover ourselves through the other, both inner and outer to be compelling. In that way, there is both a 'linguistic bridge' between languages and what Ricoeur calls an 'ontological' bridge between one human self and another, author and translator. For indeed, we engage not only our words but also our selves in the interpretative process of translation. In my own work translating short stories of Pema Tsenden, I had to struggle not to impose values from my own English literature tradition upon his style with its frequent use of repetition, ambiguity, and a beguiling simplicity. In this presentation I expand the frame of reference to discuss not only Pema Tsenden, but also his contemporaries, Stag 'bum rgyal and Bu tshe ring rgan pa.

The Unhyphenated Postcolonialism of Tibetan English Literature in Exile

Shelly Bhoil (India/Sao Paolo, Brazil)

The title of the Dalai Lama's autobiography *Freedom in Exile* metaphorically suggests that exile is a state of freedom, which is denied to those in Tibet. From this exile freedom, Tibetan activists and intellectuals put up resistance to the illegitimate occupation of Tibet by China. The anti-colonial resistance of Tibetans, while being primarily driven by the particular predicament of their home country, is also influenced by the post-colonial discourse of their host country India. However, it is not the same as Indian postcolonialism because Tibet, unlike the erstwhile British colonies, is an 'ongoing colony' of China. What then is the implication of 'freedom in exile' for Tibetans? The exploration of this question leads to my paper's hypothesis that the postcolonialism of Tibetan exile is unhyphenated; it is postcolonial in terms of geographical space but not chronological time. I problematize the discourse of Tibet's colonization and the exile Tibetans' unique postcolonial predicament through the study of a cursory but growing body of Tibetan English literature. The material conditions of the production of Tibetan English Literature, which involves the two processes of Tibetan exiles 'cultural fermentation' and 'shangrilization' through their interaction with their host countries, is where I locate the particularities of the unhyphenated postcolonialism of Tibetans.

Life in the “New Tibet” and the Double-Edged Sword of Cotemporary Tibetan Sinophone Writing

Kamila Hladíková (Palacký University Olomouc)

The question what is “Tibetan literature” is indeed not just a literary, but also a political one, and if we want to answer it, we need to consider many factors. We can try to be apolitical and avoid both overt propaganda and nationalism, but then we necessarily have to leave some gaps or blank spaces that we cannot or are not willing to touch upon. In my presentation I am going to examine a part of the “official” Tibetan literature, which is being published in the TAR and mainland China. Such works can be easily ignored as pure propaganda, but - in their specific way – they reflect the current situation in Tibet, where the official narrative is promoted with inescapable intensity, permeating everyday lives of Tibetan people. More than a decade ago a few Sinophone “official Tibetan writers” and their “Tibetan magical realism” reached certain degree of interest in the West in the form of translations and scholarly research, the most prominent two being Tashi Dawa and Alai. Both reached top positions in the official Chinese literary system and recently even important political functions, Tashi Dawa as the member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (since January 2018) and Alai as the Sichuan representative of the National People’s Congress. The question arises, how to evaluate the literature produced within the frame of the official PRC literary system by people with this level of active participation in the system. Does this literature represent Tibet in any way? I will try to provide possible insights by looking at a short story collection by a recently promoted “official Tibetan writer” of the succeeding generation, Tsering Norbu.

WORKSHOP VENUE

**Palacký University Olomouc
Faculty of Arts
Křižkovského 12 – room 2.15
779 00 Olomouc
Czech Republic**

WORKSHOP COORDINATOR

Nela Chudová +420 734 182 042, nela.chudova@upol.cz



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Excellent research