

SALC 25200 Intro to Tibetan Literature

Week 5:

Poetry in Tibet

“Poetry” in Tibet

- *glu* (*lu*) – songs
- *mgur* (*gur*) – songs of realization/poetical songs
- *snyan ngag* (*nyän ngak*) – ornate poetry

Glu “songs”

- Most secular of the poetic genres
- Most musically oriented of the genres
 - generally performed (rather than read)
 - often accompanied by dance
- Two major subcategories
 - Royal songs (*rgyal po'i glu*)
 - Popular songs (*'bangs kyi glu*): love and marriage, planting and harvest, advice, riddle songs

*je nye ni je nye na
yar pa ni dgung dang nye
dgung skar ni si li li*

Nearer, ah, nearer yet
Yarpa, ah, near the sky
Sky-stars, ah, *si-li-li*.

*Je nye [ni] je nye na
gla skar ni brag dang nye
brag skar ni si li li*

Nearer, ah, nearer yet
Lakar, ah, near the stone
Stone-stars, ah, *si-li-li*.

*sdur ba ni chab dang nye
Gyur sram ni pyo la la'*

Durwa, ah, near the stream
Otter, ah, *pyo-la-la*.

*nyen kar ni dog dang nye
'bras drug ni si li li*

Nyenkar, ah, near the earth
Al fruits, ah, *si-li-li*.

*mal tro ni [klum] dang nye
syi bser ni spu ru ru*

Maltro, ah, near to Lum
Cold winds, ah, *pu-ru-ru!*

Mgur and *Nyams gyur* “songs of realization”

- *Mgur* came to denote a more Buddhistic type of song
- Buddhist in content
- sung poetry forms characteristic of the tantric movement
- Sometimes spontaneously composed verses by Tibetan lamas, such as Milarepa...

Mgur from The Life of Milarepa

Feeling great faith and devotion toward the lama, I knelt down and joined my palms in prayer. With tears streaming from my eyes, as a prelude to presenting my experience and realization, I first offered this sevenfold service to the lama in song:

I bow to your various emanation bodies
Displayed before impure disciples,
And to your venerable enjoyment body
Revealed to your circle of pure disciples.

I bow to your speech, at once audible and empty,
Which enunciates the eighty-four
thousand true dharmas
With the sixty qualities of Brahma's voice
To each person in his own language.

I bow to your mind, changeless reality body,
Which embraces all objects of knowledge
While remaining unobscured by conceptual marks
In the space of the luminosity reality body.

I bow down at the feet of great lady Dakme,
Birth mother of the buddhas of the three
times,
Unchanging selfless (*dakme*) illusory body
Dwelling in the pure palace of reality's
expanse.

I prostrate with unfeigned devotion
To the spiritual sons you have gathered,
The assembly of disciples who practice as
taught,
Together with all of their followers.

In your presence I offer my body
And whatever material offerings exist

Throughout all realms of the universe.
I confess each of my negative deeds.
I rejoice in all forms of merit.
I pray that you turn the great wheel of dharma.
I pray that the glorious lama remain
Until life's round is emptied.
I dedicate my accumulated virtue to the benefit
of sentient beings;

"Having first offered the sevenfold service in this way," I continued, "to my sovereign master, I present the meager understanding I have gained through the utterly pure enlightened activity of the lama-inseparable from Vajradhara-his consort and children, through the power of the blessings of his immeasurable compassion, and through his unbounded kindness. I pray listen to my words of little eloquence with your mind in the state of unchanging reality.

Spiritual Songs of Kelden Gyatso

To you, who are unerring refuges no
matter where you cast your attention,
To lineage masters, personal gods, the
Three Jewels,
To muses, defenders of the faith,
protectors,
I pay heartfelt homage. Guide me with
the iron hook of compassion.
Lozang Tenpé Gyeltsen Pelzangpo,
The Lord of Religion who understands
what's important,
Who strives for attainment, who works
for the good of humanity and the
teachings,
Left for the distant retreat at Kaprom.

The sunlight of happiness did not rise
over Trikha,
The gloom of suffering hung over
Repgong.
Even the holy hermitage of Trashikhyil
Was left like a corpse devoid of life.
At the seminary of Rongwo monastery,
Right and proper activities
Were on the verge of becoming like a
lamp without oil.
Every place I can think of is a source of
despair.
When I look at renunciants in other
lands, I think,
Even were the masses of Repgong monks
To foster a bit of inspired faith,
These poor examples won't know how to
amount to anything.

Kelden Gyatso example #2

In the sky of the universal Dharma body,
Vast cloudbanks of love and kindness
gather,
And the gentle rain of eloquent teachings
falls—a learned one,
Father Tendzin Lozang, I bow at your feet.

I put my homeland behind and left for the
mountain.
From the carefree mountain, the peak of
delight,
I recited some prayers, and then,
Visions of contentment such as these came
forth.

The pleasant chirruping voices
Of cuckoo, grouse, nightingale,
Sparrow, jashang , and partridge
Set my mind helplessly at ease.

Black bees with six legs gathering
On flowers of beautiful colors,
Singing songs, sounding buzz buzz ,
Set my mind helplessly at ease.

Groves of trees swaying,
Each bowing its head in turn,
whispering,
Remaining with half-opened eyes,
Set my mind helplessly at ease.

Animals upon the golden meadows,
Wandering carefree along their paths,
Racing each other, going ever higher,
Set my mind helplessly at ease.

Waters, not too high, not too low,
Sounding just enough, not soft, not loud,
Falling just the right distance,
Set my mind helplessly at ease.

Rocks shaped like castles on the
mountain,
So solid when it rains or snows,
So cooling when the summer sun burns,
Set my mind helplessly at ease.

Bark of aromatic juniper,
Fashioned into seats, pillows, and such,
Protects from danger of cold and damp,
and
Sets my mind helplessly at ease.

Nothing frenetic, no hither and thither;
The mountain is high, the valley deep.
This leisure with no hustle and bustle
Sets my mind helplessly at ease.

Not needing money, a dzo , a cow, a
servant
For that big production, bright white
milk,
As long as I have salt and butter for tea,
Sets my mind helplessly at ease.

Not needing to depend on others,
Doing what I want, whenever I want,
Eating and drinking as I like,
Sets my mind helplessly at ease.

What is *snyan ngag* (*nyän ngak*)?

- Ornate poetry composed in imitation of Sanskrit poetry (*kāvya*)
- Follows the guidelines of Tibetan commentaries on Sanskrit poetician Dandin's *Mirror of Poetry*
- Content can be 'Buddhist' or 'secular'

Nyän ngak Melong

(snyan ngag me long, Mirror of Poetry)

- First translated into Tibetan in part by Sakya Paṇḍita (late 12th century) as part of his Gateway to Scholarship. Translated in full one century later (13th century)
- Divided into three chapters:
 - **First Chapter:** 'Faults' of Poetry
 - **Second Chapter:** *don rgyan* (*arthālaṃkāra*) ornaments of sense/meaning, which includes various types of simile, metaphor, and numerous other devices including poetic 'mood'
 - **Third Chapter:** *sgra rgyan* (*śabdālaṃkāra*) - ornaments of sound The category of *sgra rgyan* refers to any poetical ornament or device that uses sound or words to create pleasure such as onomatopoeia, alliteration, repetition of vowel sounds, etc

Zhapkar- *On Contentment and Patrons*

When the lion is on the white glacier—content.

When the vulture is above the red rock—content.

When the deer is on the gentle plain—content.

When the fish is under water—content.

When the tigress is in the forest deep—content.

When I the yogin am on the lonely mount—content.

Above, a sturdy cave—content.

Below, a bluegrass seat—content.

Between, the illusory body of the yogin—content.

Song sings from voice, so I am content.

Experience and realization dawn in mind, so I am content.

Is the patron with his circle content?

This was sung playfully to some faithful patrons of Arik.

Zhapkar – *On the Beauty of a Mountain Hermitage*

E ma ! In this lonely mountain hermitage,
During summer and during autumn,
Multicolored meadow flowers
Give sweet support for swarms of bees.

Trees with budding branches grow beautiful,
Small birds give voice, flapping their wings.
Fountain pools, cool and fragrant,
Quench pangs of thirst for those who drink.

In the lakes and in the ponds
Float lovely, sweet-voiced geese.
In the vast elysian ! elds,
Deer roam about at ease.

In this supreme and lonely place,
So lovely, in! nitely wondrous,
On a gentle bluegrass seat,
At times I lie down to sleep

Zhapk- *On the Dislike of the Village Life, Extolling the Beauty of Solitary Life*

When the azure dragon
Falls to earth, it's terrible.
Staying among the water carriers,
Sounding song, it's beautiful.

When the young white lioness
Falls to the valley floor, it's terrible.
Perched at the summit of the white
glacier,
Sounding a roar, it's beautiful.

When Jatang the yogin
Wanders into town, it's terrible.
Taking in solitary meditative experience,
Singing songs, it's beautiful.

Zhapkar- *On the Mind and Bliss*

This was spoken by Tsokdruk Rangdröl once while going for alms, out of fondness for the mountains:

Oh, oh! Child, yearning for the pleasures of rank,
Lo, when you shrink from the parents, the ten virtues,
Hey, tell a wondrous tale, a song!
Hah hah! The mind is bliss and splendor, get it?

Oh, oh! Guest, a long way from spiritual certainty,
Lo, when you run to the city of three studies,
Hey, sing a song, a song of the road!
Hah hah! The mind is bliss and splendor, get it?

Oh, oh! Shepherd of enlightened mind,
Lo, when you tend the herd of six perfections,
Hey, sing a song, a small song!
Hah hah! The mind is bliss and splendor, get it?

Oh, oh! Young lad of quiescence,
Lo, when you consort with the insight girl,
Hey, tell a salacious tale, a song!
Hah hah! The mind is bliss and splendor, get it?

Oh, oh! Young peacock of generation,
Lo, when you dance toward perfection,
Hey, sound a song, a warbled cry!
Hah hah! The mind is bliss and splendor, get it?

Oh, oh! Gorgeous Chinese woman of breakthrough,
Lo, when you weave the silken garments of
transcendence,
Hey, sing a song, a joyous song.
Hah hah! The mind is bliss and splendor, get it?

Oh, oh! Jatang, blue cuckoo,
Lo, when you fly to the tree-nest hermitage,
Hey, sound a sweet song!
Hah hah! The mind is bliss and splendor, get it?

This was written in jest by Tsokdruk Rangdröl.

A Weaving Song

Homage to the master, the personal deities, and the muses.
May you look with compassion upon us women without religion.

Listen here, you girls my age.
Listen with your ears to Nangsa the revenant.

This girl's weaving tools will serve as examples,
As I sing a song to turn your thoughts to Dharma.

If this four-footed structure dragged on the ground
Were a thatched hut for one—what a joy it would be.

If this four-corned seat spread out below,
Were a small meditation pillow—what a joy it would be.

If I, the revenant Nangsa Öbum,
Were a contemplative—what a joy it would be.

If you, happy servant women gathered here,
Were bringing provisions for a retreat—what a joy it would be.

...

...

If this bag full of discarded ends
Were samsara discarded—what a joy it would be.

If these matching joints now joined
Were bliss and emptiness united—how happy I would be.

.....

If the take-up reel that rolls the finished cloth
Were the two accumulations of wisdom and merit complete—how
happy I would be.

...

If working the loom fiber back and forth
Were exchanging self for others—what a joy it would be.

If 84,000 strands of fiber
Were the good Dharma of the sutras and tantras—how happy I
would be.

If this white cloth, supple and long,
Were this girl's good motivation—what a joy it would be.

What are some of the features you noticed from the excerpts from Kelden Gyatso's and Zhabkar's poems?

How would you differentiate these from the mgur (songs of realization) of Milarepa?

What, if anything, strikes you as Indic in origin about these poems?

**SALC 25200 Intro to Tibetan
Literature
Week 5:**

Snyan ngag and Tibetan love poetry

A poem composed by Nordang Ogyan (20th century)

*yang dag lam rab gsal mdzad pa/
bla ma 'jam dpal dbyangs can lha/
yang yang dad pas bsam gang la/
snyan ngag smra la zla bral 'tshal/
(bya dka' ba dbyangs a la nges pa)*

*'di ni srid zhi ji bzhin gzigs/
phul byung gzhung lugs kun 'byung khungs/
bde gshegs ye shes skyed byed rkyen/
dkon mchog mchod bstod yongs rdzogs sgo/
(bya dka' ba dbyangs bzhir nges pa)*

*snyan ngag lam bzang dpag bsam sgeg mo yis/
bla med byang chub dgos rgu bde ba'i dpyid/
ci 'dod ster na 'jig rten chos lugs kyi
snang tshul ji bzhin smra ma dka' ba ci
(gzugs rgyan 'phar ma)*

*mang mang snyan ngag bstan bcos dga' tshal du/
brjid brjid tshig gi 'dab stong 'dzum pa'i sbubs/
mdzes mdzes nyams 'gyur sbrang rtsi'i dpal 'dzin pa /
yang yang bsngags 'os pad dkar 'di kho na/
(ma chod pa'i zung ldan bzhi ka'i thog mar yod pa)*

*rab dkar lhag bsam bzang pos dbyangs can ma/
rab mang dka' bas bsgrub la lhag pa'i lha'i/
rab gsal 'dzum pa'i zhal las mchog thob pa/
rab 'byangs snyan ngag smra ba nag mo'i khol/
(chod pa'i zung ldan bzhi ka'i thog mar yod pa)*

*nyams 'gyur dpal 'bar sprin gyi pho nya zhes
lhag bsam dpal gyis yur ba la brten nas/
gangs can dpal gyis phyug pa'i zhing sa cher/
'dren mkhas dpal ldan skad gnyis smra rnam rgyal/
(chod pa'i zung ldan bzhi ka'i dbus su gnas pa)*

*sngon dang da lta'i mkhas pas gzhung 'di'i don/
ji bzhin dgrol ba'i ngal ba ma brten par/
'du shes gsum pa bdag la 'di lta'i khur/
'gel ba mkhas rnam btang snyoms ches sam snyam/
(sems ldan rab rtog)*

*mang thos shes bya'i gnag snum mgo skyes dang/
bral ba'i rnam dpyod spyi ther can nyid kyang/
dam pa'i drin las thor bu'i sma ra tsam/
mchu yi rgyan du thob la byul 'di mtshar/
(dpa' ba'i nyams/)*

See Nor-brang O-rgyan. *Sprin gyi pho ña'i 'grel pa ño mtshar dga' ston (Marvelous and Festive commentary on the Cloud Messenger)*. Beijing: kruñ go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khañ, 2004.

(Selected Translation)

The supreme path is illuminated;
[By] Lama Manjushri and Sarasvati;
Whatever I reflect upon repeatedly, through faith,
I search for the matchless utterance of poetry.
(Display of the Vowel 'a')

This [poem], is perceived like samsara and nirvana;
Atisha is the source of the textual traditions;
The Buddha is the condition which produces wisdom;
The perfected gate is the [three] Jewels, offerings, and praises;
(Display of the four vowels)

...

In a forest of countless poetry and commentaries
A thousand-petalled lotus of brilliant words is the birthplace for a smile;
beautiful expressions Attains the glory of the nectar
This white lotus alone is worthy of praise again and again.
(First of the full four pairs of uncut)

..

Regarding the accomplishing of glittering white purity of intentions there is Sarasvati;
Regarding accomplishing from the many difficulties there is one's personal yidam;
Excellence is attained through a face with a dazzling white smile;
The speech of poetry is completely purified [by] Kalidasa.
(Top of the full four cut pairs)

Poetic ‘moods’ *nyams ldan gyi gyan (rasa-alamkara)*

- In Sanskrit context, originally applied to drama/plays only (*naya*)
- Later developments applied to poetry as well
- Among the poetic ornaments highlighted in Sakya Paitya's *mkhas pa'i 'jug pa'i sgo*.
- The number of *rasa-s* has varied throughout history, but eight are presented in the *me long*.
- A mood is created by the intensification of its corresponding stable emotion.

The 8 Poetic Moods

Erotic rasa (<i>śṛṅgāra</i>)	<i>sgeg/ sgeg pa</i>
comic rasa (<i>hāsyā</i>)	<i>dgod / bzhad gang</i>
Sorrowful rasa (<i>karuṇa-rasa</i>)	<i>snying rje / brtse</i>
Furious rasa (<i>raudrasya</i>)	<i>drag po</i>
heroic rasa (<i>vīra</i>)	<i>dpa' ba</i>
Fearsome rasa (<i>bhāyanaka</i>)	<i>'jigs byed/ 'jigs</i>
Disgusting rasa (<i>bībhatsa</i>)	<i>mi sdug</i>
Amazing rasa (<i>ādbhuta rasa</i>)	<i>rmad byung ngam ngam</i>

Stable emotions - *sthāyibhāvas* (*gnas can*)

Desire (<i>rati</i>):	<i>dga'</i>
Humor (<i>hāsa</i>):	<i>dgod bro</i>
Grief (<i>śoka</i>):	<i>mya ngan</i>
Anger (<i>krodha</i>)	<i>khro</i>
Energy (<i>utsāha</i>)	<i>spro ba</i>
Fear (<i>bhaya</i>):	<i>'jigs/ 'jigs pa</i>
Revulsion (<i>jugupsā</i>):	<i>skyug bro ba</i>
Wonder (<i>vismaya</i>):	<i>ngo mtshar</i>

What struck you about the Songs of the 6th Dalai Lama?

What poetic moods might be invoked here?

Is there anything that reminds you of other Tibetan genres?

What, if anything, strikes you as being Indic about this poem?

What tensions within the Tibetan monastic community might arise from this kind of poem?

In what ways do Polhane's and the 6th Dalai Lama's poem differ? What features do they share?

In your opinion, which poem is more subversive?

How would you respond to the question posed by Kapstein, et al:

How do love, romantic sentiment, and erotic writing relate to Tibetan social structures?

A Drinking Song

When the Victor's Son, the Master [Longchenpa] himself, was staying at Lhündrup Ling, several fortunate ones asked, "Everyone drinks beer on the sly, and in particular great meditators drink it exclusively. Yet monks who adhere to Kadampa precepts claim that only great adepts drink. Please explain the good qualities of beer and the reasons everyone drinks in a song." In response to this request, [Longchenpa] recited a Diamond Song entitled "Sweet Nectar Describing the Origins and Qualities of Beer."

....

Homage to the Master. In praise of the good qualities of beer.
Homage to Vajravarahi.

Ancestor of beer, Vajradhara, and
The masters, deities, and muses—homage to you.
I relate the good qualities of beer,
Nectar supreme, drunk by the fortunate. Listen...

From the city of beautiful heavenly gods,
A single supreme nectar drop falls,
From the merit of every being in the world,
Nutritious barley becomes the grist for beer.

With taste and color like honey, and
Perfect fragrance like the nectar of the gods,
Just the sight of it raises the spirits; one cannot be without it.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Drinking it is bliss, tasting it is delicious.
When it goes down, body and mind are totally blissed out.
Appearances are blissful, loose, as for one who understands
what's real.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

...

Rule-following Kadampa so proud of
their cleverness,
Philosophers and monks alike,
Drink it on the sly, so who is more
covetous?
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

Men use beer for anything at all.
Women use it to master wool.
Distinguished people use it in place of
work.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

Bönpo sorcerers take it as payment for
drum and tambourine.
Monks take it in place of monastic items.
Adepts use it to master the sun.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It is a powerful substance for profound
secret spells,
It is used at the beginning of initiations
and blessings,
It is necessary in creation and perfection
meditations.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect

....

All people rely on it for joy,
Demons too are taken by its sweetness,
Gods as well frolic with delight.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It increases vitality, so body and mind
are happy.
It produces pleasing warmth, so
concentration increases.
It makes insight more intense, thus
realization dawns.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

After drinking, in carefree repose,
In an unconscious state, one falls asleep
easily,
Like one who has mastered stabilization,
luminosity, and concentration.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

No sooner drunk than happy tales and
Lovely melodious songs come aplenty.
Courage and fearlessness toward others
know no depths.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

...
Drinking it, one quickly becomes healthy
and beautiful,
The ocean of voice bursts forth, speech is
perfect.
Appearances sooth the senses, and mind
finds joy.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

...
When you meet it, all activity becomes
relaxed.
When you drink, mental anguish ceases.
Days and nights pass by quickly without
notice.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It is necessary for all activities,
Great and small, all completely enjoy it.
Near and far, one cannot do without it.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

It achieves one's ends, it is the source of
conversation,
When friends and family meet, they need
it to foster flattery.
In family meetings it is needed as a
distraction.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply
perfect.

Such are its inconceivable qualities.
Inexpressible, like the nectar of the gods.
The supreme taste to be found in this human realm:
May you and everyone else delight and play.

Exhibiting this manner, the carefree yogin
Achieves an uninhibited state of mind.
With this bliss may I and all living beings
Rest all day and night in bliss and happiness.