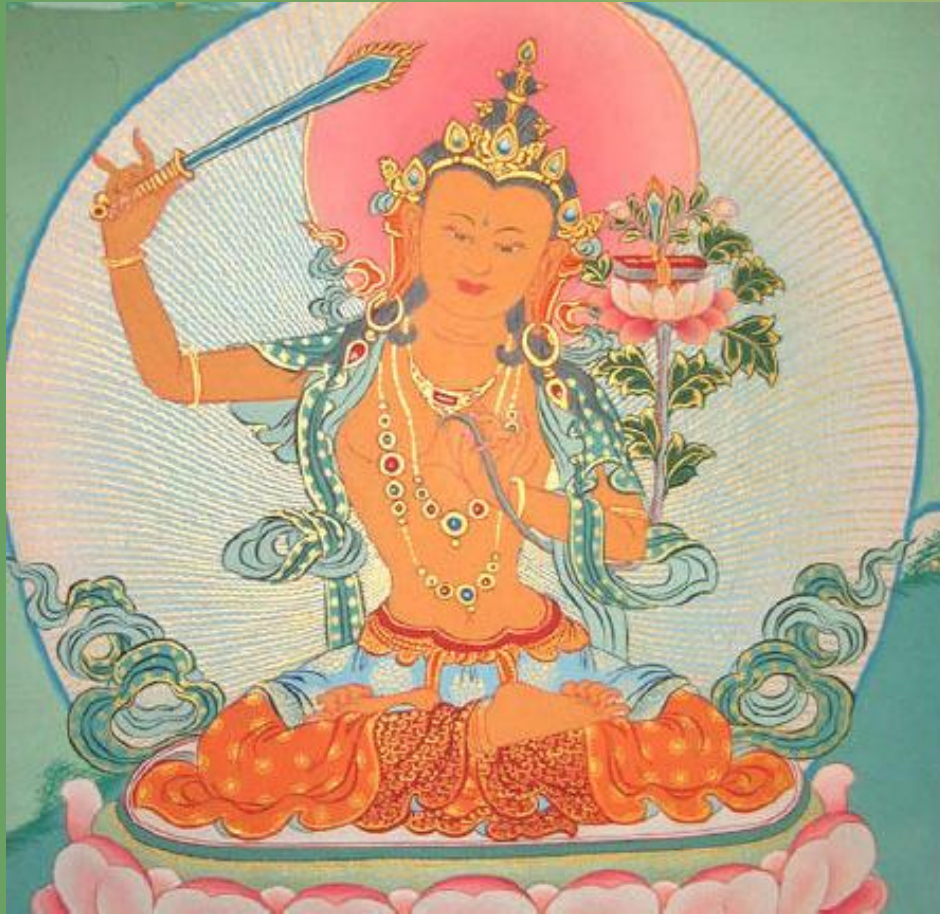


Tibetan Literature

ACCTIL 14A1 – Autumn 2014



**Mon 10:00 AM–
12:30 PM**

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Recap of ACCTIL 14A so far...

Week 1: Introduction to Tibetan Literature and the Tibetan epic tradition

Week 2: Terma (“Treasure”) Literature: Origins and Buddhist Influence

Features of “epic” literature

- *Content*: generally myths, heroic legends, histories, edifying religious tales, animal stories, or philosophical or moral theories
- *Authorship*: Generally collective
- *Form*: often poetic
- *Style*: highly influenced by oral features of the language
- *Length*: considerable!

What are some features of the *Epic of Gesar*?

- Content*: myths, heroic legends, histories, edifying religious tales, animal stories, or philosophical or moral theories?
- Authorship / Editing*?
- Poetic form*?
- Oral elements* ?
- Length* ?
- Other features*?



Terma (“Treasure”)
‘Literature’:
Legitimizing
strategies and
authentication of
“new” literature

Classification of *Terma* Literature

- the term *terma* refers to the place from which the text was drawn; *terma* are 'discovered' by a *Tertön* (gter ston)
- *Terma* texts primarily either discovered buried in the ground (*sater*, *sa gter*) or buried in one's mind (*gongter*, *dgongs gter*).
- Textual *terma* are the material supports that act as a trigger to help the tertön reach the subtle level of mind where the teaching has really been concealed. It is the tertön who writes down the resulting text.
- In the case of texts, occasionally, full-length texts are found, but they are usually fragmentary, sometimes consisting of only a word or two, and may be encoded in symbolic script

Who 'writes' *terma* literature?

- Most Bön termas were hidden during the period of decline under King Trisong Deutsen, and rediscovered around the 11th century. Teachings were hidden by masters such as Lishu Tagring and Drenpa Namkha, often inside Buddhist temples as in Samye and Lhodrak.
- Nyingma termas are attributed to Padmasambhava, discovered/composed by a *Tertön* (primarily 11th century-20th century)

Types of *terma*

Sater

- Earth treasures include not only texts, but also sacred images, ritual instruments, and medicinal substances, and are found in many places: temples, monuments, statues, mountains, rocks, trees, lakes, and even the sky.

Gongter

- A teaching concealed as an intention treasure (*gongter*) appears directly within the mind of the *tertön*

Example of terma

- Seven Line Prayer to Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), discovered by **Guru Chökyi Wangchuk** aka **Guru Chöwang** (1212-1270)

༄། །སྲུ་རྩ་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་ཚིག་བདུན་
གསོལ་འདེབས་བཞུགས་སོ། །

The Seven Line Prayer: The Terma Revelation of Guru Chöwang



རྗེ་ཨོ་རྒྱན་ཡུལ་གྱི་རུབ་བྱང་མཚམས།

hung orgyen yul gyi nubjang tsam

Hūṃ! In the north-west of the land of [Oddiyāna](#),

བརྗེ་གེ་སར་ཚོང་པོ་ལ།

pema gesar dongpo la

In the heart of a lotus flower,

ཡ་མཚན་མཚོག་གི་དངོས་གྲུབ་བརྟེན།

yatsen chok gi ngödrub nyé

Endowed with the most marvellous attainments,

བརྗེ་འབྱུང་གནས་ཞེས་སུ་གྲགས།

pema jungné shyé su drak

You are renowned as the ‘Lotus-born’,

འཁོར་དུ་མཁའ་འགོ་མང་པོས་བསྐོར།

khor du khandro mangpö kor

Surrounded by many hosts of [dākinīs](#).

ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་རྩིས་སུ་བདག་བསྐྱབ་ཀྱི།

khyé kyi jesu dak drub kyi

Following in your footsteps,

ཕྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབ་ཕྱིར་གཤེགས་སུ་གསོལ།

jingyi lab chir shek su sol

I pray to you: Come, inspire me with your blessing!

གྱུ་ཅ་བརྗེ་སོལ་རྗེ།

guru pema siddhi hung

Features of Tibetan Literature

- Like other world literatures, Tibetan literature is marked by the **increasing dominance of written over oral forms**
- Like that of the ancient states of Southeast Asia, Tibetan Literature is marked by an increasing **Indianization**, which went hand-in-hand with the growth of Buddhist influence
- To a degree virtually unparalleled in Asia, Tibetan Literature is marked by a continued **intensification of the influence of religious—especially Buddhist--concerns**

Cabezón, Editor's Introduction in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, 13-15

Tibetan Literature Week 3:

Tibetan Biography, Autobiography, and Hagiography

*What distinguishes biography as a genre?
biography versus “biographical writings”*

*What are some of the features of a biography?
autobiography?*

Development of the biographical genre in the West...

- Often hagiographical accounts dominated biographies (such as those on church figures during the Middle Ages in Europe)
- Originally a subset of historical writing
- Rise of education and cheap printing in 19th century led to increased popularity of biography and autobiography as a literary genre.
- The influence of psychology and sociology turn of the 20th century led to increased production of autobiographies in particular.

In non-Asian countries, autobiography is widely regarded as a product of individualism of modern civilization.

Reading as a practice

- Modern reading is a silent and solitary activity
- By contrast, ancient reading was usually oral, either aloud, in groups, or individually, in a muffled voice.
- In the West, the practice of silent reading developed during the period from late antiquity (10th century) to the 15th century

See Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*

In Tibet and in much of South Asia—both in monasteries/nunneries and in traditional educational institutions, even to the present day, reading is often taught as an oral practice.

How might reading practices influence the production of literature?



Would we expect autobiography to emerge from a collective-reading culture?

What makes the Tibetan case different?

What features might you expect in Tibetan autobiographies that might not emerge in the Western context?

What's in a name?

- *Namthar* (*rnam thar*, “liberation” [story])
- *Rangnam* (*rang gi rnam thar*, “self-liberation [story]”)

Question for thought/discussion:

What do the Tibetan words for biography tell us about the genre?

What are some reasons why *namthar*/*rangnam* would be popular as a genre in Tibet?

Authorship and Audience...

Who authors a namthar? Rangnam?

Who is the intended audience?

How might you expect the intended audience of a namthar/rangnam to influence the genre in Tibet?

Why does *autobiography* as a genre seem incongruous with the tenets of Buddhism?

“For what is autobiography if not a celebration of just the self—oneself—along with that self’s own history, actions, development, virtues, failings?”

“...one of the crucial features which characterizes a text as autobiography proper [in the Western context] is the degree of the sense of individual selfhood that the author displays.”

Gyatso, *Autobiography in Tibetan Religious Literature*, 466, 468.

What are some ways in which these apparent incongruities between non-self and the 'self' in autobiography resolved within the Tibetan tradition?

Some features of *namthar/rangnam*

- The presentation of the subject of a *Rangnam* can range from self-deprecatory to self-aggrandizing
- *Namthar* and *Rangnam* can range from 'biographical' to hagiographical in content.
- Prose, or often mix of verse and prose
- Linguistic register? Often composed in a 'colloquial' literary style; range of honorifics from formal to informal

*What were your reactions to the excerpts from the
Life of Milarepa ?*

Did anything strike you as uniquely 'Tibetan' ?

*Let's look at some other Tibetan biographies
and autobiographies!*

Mind itself,
lacking beginning or end,
is inexpressible.
To appear everywhere,
in both Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa,
is its primordial nature.

If one were to teach
about this endless miracle,
who could ever tell it all?

However much a fool might try,
it doesn't seem to benefit anyone.
It would be best to adopt, for the while,
a discipline of no speaking.

And if there is speaking,
one would hope it would be to tell
the biographies of the venerable ones.
To tell of one's own qualities
is the lowest way to go.¹⁾

Introduction to Tibetan scholar Tāranātha's (16th century) autobiography

(From Gyatso,
“Autobiography”, p. 465)

In your dreams, the great Lama Jamgon
conferred on you in full the four empowerments,
and you changed yourself into the form of Padmasambhava
and brought gods and demons under control.
To you, to whom the mountain goddesses offered songs, I humbly pray....

When you were seventy-eight,
you travelled over the ocean in the appropriate directions
to visit different continents and lands all over the world.
You went to more than thirty five countries.
To you, who travel in the open sky, I humbly pray....

In summary, your mind has merged with the minds
of all the excellent and incomparable lamas.
Your actions fulfill their vision.
You never waver from *bodhicitta*,
nor from development and completion.
To you, holy son of the Victorious One, I humbly pray.³¹⁾

Selection from one of Khalu Rinpoche's autobiographies

(From Gyatso, "Autobiography", p. 472)

autobiographical writings....

“At that time, through the compassionate prayers of my disciples who are here now, there will be a manifested son, who will have as his secret name Gar-dbang 'Jigs-med Gling. He will have a lotus eye on his right hand. He will have great wisdom and little attachment. All of the vehicles (*yānas*) will shine forth in his mind. Dākinīs will come three times to him to encourage him. He should visualize me, Padma [sambhava], on his head. On the tenth day of the Monkey month of the Monkey year, he will meet with my, Padmasambhava's, face....”

Terma prophecy from Jigme Lingpa's *Longchen Nyingthik*

(From Gyatso, “Autobiography”, p. 473)

Recall from last class's readings on *Terma*:

Dancing Moon in the Water
from secret autobiography of Jigme Lingpa

Tibetan Buddhism in Milarepa

- How do we define 'Buddhism' as it is expressed in the *Life of Milarepa*?
- What are Tibetan 'Buddhist' practices? Beliefs?

Orientations of Buddhism in Tibet

- ***Bodhi orientation***: the aspect of Tibetan Buddhism related to personal and/or collective salvation outside of ordinary social life
 - For Theravāda Buddhists: done by virtuosi alone;
 - For Tibetan Buddhists: there is a social/altruistic component, but generally accomplished via tantric performance
- Compare to ***karma orientation***: the relation between action and wealth and leadership, more prevalent in other Buddhist countries.
 - Theravāda Buddhists: merit making, done primarily by laity;
 - For Tibetan Buddhists: this is the primary realm for clerical, but also done extensively by laity.

See Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 5-7, 31-2

Dharma wars: Clerical and Shamanic Buddhism in Tibet

Scholar Geoffrey Samuel distinguishes between 2 modalities of Buddhism: *Shamanic* and *Clerical* Buddhism

- *Shamanic*: “regulation and transformation of human life and human society through use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience.”
- Clerical = monastic
- A Tibetan lama asked to define Vajrayana will typically talk in terms of *Bodhi orientation*--Spiritual empowerment merely a byproduct.

Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 7-9

The 'founders' of the Kagyu tradition:

- Tilopa (988-1089) – Indian tantric practitioner from East Bengal (then India). Transmitted *Four Lineages of Instructions*, a Mahāmudrā (Great seal) practice (**lay**).
- Nāropa (1016–1100) codified the *Four Lineages of Instructions* into what became called the *Six Doctrines* or *Six Yogas of Nāropa* (**lay**).
- Marpa Chökyi Lodrö (1012–1097)– visited India three times to receive transmissions from Nāropa lineage (**lay**).
- Jetsun Milarepa (1040–1123)—studied directly under Marpa Lotsawa (**lay**).
- Gampopa Sonam Rinchen (1079-1153)—studied under Milarepa; combined the stages of the path tradition of the Kadampa order with teaching and practice of the Great Seal and the Six Yogas of *Nāropa* he received from Milarepa synthesizing them into one lineage (**monk!**)

Tsangnyön Heruka (1452-1507)

- biographer and compiler of the "[The Life of Milarepa](#)" and "[The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa](#)"
- '[religious madmen](#)' (nyönpa, [Wylie](#): *smyon pa*)
- He was ordained as a young monk but at the age of twenty one renounced his vows and trained under various [tantric](#) yogis from different schools
- After he left the monastery, he became a wandering yogi for the rest of his life, never staying in one place permanently.

Tsangnyon
Heruka's

*The Life and
Songs of
Milarepa*



Recap: Some features of *namthar/rangnam*

- The presentation of the subject of a *Rangnam* can range from self-deprecatory to self-aggrandizing
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*What features are present in the Life
of Milarepa?*

Similarities between Milarepa's and the Buddha's life stories

- Similar beginning to Buddhist sutta/sutras: “Thus have I heard”
- Similar to the life-stories of the Buddha, the life-story of Milarepa is told to a chief disciple: Rechungpa
- Milarepa's life story organized into thematic chapters similar to that of the Buddha's life-story.
- Milarepa similarly described as being aware of when he is going to die and choosing to consume food that will kill him

Buddhism in Milarepa

- What approach(es) to Buddhist practice are emphasized in the Milarepa story: bodhi orientation? Karma orientation? Shamanic? Clerical? Scholastic? Monastic? Tantric?
- What do you make of the interactions between Milarepa and the Geshe at the end?

Overview of Syllabus

~~Week 1: Introduction to Tibetan Literature and the Tibetan epic tradition~~

~~Week 2: Terma (“Treasure”) Literature: Origins and Buddhist Influence~~

~~Week 3: Tibetan Biography, Autobiography, and Hagiography~~

Week 4: Tibetan Religious Poetry

Week 5: Tibetan Secular poetry

Week 6: Women in Literature of Tibet

Week 7: Tibetan folk Literature

Week 8: Modern Tibetan Literature