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AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF TIBETAN PROVERBS

Abstract: Proverbial sayings and expressions are extremely popular in Tibetan literature. However, in Tibetan scholarship there is no clear definition of the Tibetan proverb. Indigenous genres such as *tampé*, *pechö*, *legshé*, etc. all approximate the genre of proverbs in one way or another, yet at the same time add features that also contradict the genre definition. The essay explores the notion of *tampé* and related genres and highlights the importance of a universal definition in order to not only differentiate between closely related genres but also in order to classify entries in the proposed dictionary of Tibetan popular figurative literature.

Keywords: Tibet, folk literature, proverb, *gtam dpe*, terminology

Like speakers of most languages worldwide, the Tibetans too are immensely fond of expressing themselves proverbially and idiomatically. The traditional vernacular, oral as much as written sayings and idiomatic phrases take up a prominent and substantial share of their literature and diction. Proverbial expressions are one of the most stable components throughout languages, so also in Tibetan, where we find a number of terms for this sort of language. Most readily and generally *tampé* (tib. *gtam dpe*), literally "speech example," a term that signalizes phrases which in one way or another contain a simile or an exemplum, but also additional terms are used by the Tibetans. While generally being translated and understood as proverbial, the genre of *tampé* denotes a much broader and wider spectrum of utterance. It is the objective of the present article to attempt to take a closer look at these indigenous terms and categories in order to understand what the Tibetans actually mean by *tampé*. Surely, the sheer wealth of such language features is staggering, since the allusive and metaphorical genre is easily recognizable, plainly communicative and highly appealing, allowing the listener or reader to

understand a complex issue with the help of a few idioms or words. Yet, such features often are elusive when it comes to defining what exactly is meant with a proverb or a proverbial phrase. It easily resists a proper characterization due to its broad and incommunicable usage. Attempts to define proverbs and the criteria required for classifying proverbs have also been the subject of a sheer endless number of theoretical papers written over the years by numerous paremiologists.

Tibetans nevertheless regularly take recourse to the allusive language and rich imagery inherent in their literary heritage; the capability of using especially skillful and witty language and diction contributes greatly to the esteem of a speaker and strengthens his or her argumentative, oratory or rhetorical faculties. Furthermore, proverbial expressions offer the possibility to indirect a statement and as such are an important means to express ridicule, criticism, and protest while not being held personally responsible but rather delegating responsibility by invoking tradition.

One important element of eloquent and quick-witted speech and diction are phraseologisms such as paremia and sundry idiomatic phrases. This is highlighted in a Tibetan *tampé* or proverb which reads: "Speech (*gtam*) without illustration (*dpe*) is difficult to understand. A vessel without a handle is difficult to hold."[1] The inimitable wonder and great appeal is that the genre is universally appreciated and much cherished both by the illiterate person as well as by a man of letters and learning, irrespective of social setting and background. Consequently, they can be semantically and rhetorically simplistic as much as exceedingly refined and sophisticated both in form and content. Often characterized as an oral folk genre, it frequently appears in literary texts and spoken language, evident from early examples of Tibetan literature and sources up to most recent novels and short stories published in journals.

In this paper we attempt to take a look at the Tibetan notion of *tampé* both in its ethnographical and linguistic definition, touching upon some closely related pithy genres in order to come to a better understanding of the term as a desgnation for short gnomic, often didactic texts of acclaimed folk origin that deploy exempla. We will further explore the genre of *tampé* and analyze exempla along established paremiological concepts and catego-

ries in order to identify and distinguish Tibetan proverbs from proverbial phrases and figurative idioms.

Establishing the Notion of* tampé *in Tibetan Discourse

Before attempting to apply universal definitions of proverbs to the Tibetan genre of *tampé,* an understanding of the genre in form of an ethnographic definition as proposed by Norrick is useful:

> For the purposes of ethnographic definition, however, we must differentiate the proverb from other genres (of folklore) recognizable in the culture under investigation. In particular, we should be careful to distinguish the proverb from the proverbial phrase, the riddle, the curse etc. The parameters of classification should be derived from and must be appropriate to the culture under investigation, but not necessarily to any other culture or universally (Norrick 1985: 59).

With this precaution in mind, the standard Tibetan term for what we may regard as a proverb of sorts is *tampé* or, sometimes, *khapé* (tib. *kha dpe*). Evidently both terms are rather modern or at best pre-modern. *Tampé* are universally accepted by Tibetan indigenous scholarship to constitute their own literary genre often overlapping with related genres such as aphorisms (tib. *legs bshad*), riddles (tib. *lde'u*), songs (*glu*), fables (*dpe chos*)[2] or oaths (*gna' tshig*)[3] etc. The term *tampé* is commonly defined as:

> "*Tampé* are a form of folk literature; [they] are pithy, easy to understand and appealing to the ear. Hence, they are extremely popular in Tibetan folklore" (Rma-rgya, Khro-go, and Rta-ko 1981: Inner Cover)

In addition to this rather imprecise and superficial definition, remarks are frequently added as to their anonymous authorship[4] as well as to the content of proverbs and their ability to describe cultural properties reflecting the specific mentality, idiosyncratic lifestyle and the psychological disposition of the Tibetan people.

> Tibetan *tampé* are the essence of common wisdom and wit created and collected over many generations and

> centuries by the Tibetan people. [They are] broad in content covering every aspect of social life. They are also essential phrases that have been established through their repeated practical application. (Lhag-pa chos-'phel 2006: 99)

Indigenous scholars classify *tampé* thematically as political, economical, ethical and so forth or according to form:

> Judged from their content, Tibetan *tampé* can be differentiated into political, economical, cultural, commonsensual, and class struggle, etc. *tampé*. In terms of form they can be differentiated into *tampé* found in narrations and those which are not. Furthermore, in terms composition *tampé* may be differentiated among others into *tampé* which consist of both a literal and figurative statement, *tampé* directly expressing their meaning (literal), highly compounded *tampé*, as well as *tampé* employing only one illustrations or such employing two. However, there does not exist an unified classification. (Lhag-pa chos-'phel 2006: 99)

The definitions quoted appear to be representative for Tibetan research on *tampé* and represent as a whole what one may call a traditional definition of proverbs following Norrick's detailed critique.[5] He offers a traditional definition in a rather abbreviated and minimal form: "Proverbs are consistently described as self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic content and fixed, poetic form" (Norrick 1985: 31). Similarly, Mieder's slightly more detailed definition:

> A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder 1985: 119).

As Norrick demonstrates, such a traditional definition is rather limited as the single elements (self-containedness, pithiness, didactic nature, etc.) are, despite being very common features, no necessary characteristics of all proverbs.

Origin and History of the Term **tampé**

Early texts from the imperial time (7-9th century, and for those traced in Dunhuang also stemming from the 10th century) demonstrate the fondness of Tibetans for idiomatic and proverbial expressions. Some of the earliest available *tampé* in Tibetan language, though arguably of foreign provenance and translated into Tibetan, are those contained in the anthology *Sum-pa-ma Shags-chen-po*.[6] Albeit, here they are not denoted *tampé* but shag (tib. *shags*), However, most Tibetan scholars generally identify *shag* as *tampé*.[7]

The existence of similar proverbial material is also documented in other early Tibetan texts from Dunhuang, already discussed by Chab-spel Tshe-brtan phun-tshogs (2007) among others. But such early Tibetan examples again were never coined *tampé*. In P.T. 1283, one of the most interesting sources containing proverbial material, for instance, these samples are phrased "old sayings."[8] Chab-spel interprets this phrase and merely paraphrases it as "ways of expression of former times" and reads it as an early incident of what he assumes to constitute what later became *tampé* (Chab-spel Tshe-brtan phun-tshogs 2007: 86). In the same breath, he readily admits, "but of course, [we] cannot decidedly say the term *tampé* appeared in this certain [i.e. early] century" (Chab-spel Tshe-brtan phun-tshogs 2007: 87).

Samples of age-old sayings, reminiscent of what we should regard as tampé, are also attested in the huge Gesar of Gling Epic. The proverbial samples here too are legion and occasionally introduced with the phrase "as a saying of the Tibetan people of yore goes…."[9] Chab-spel takes this, and Tibetan scholarship is generally following him, as an indication that the term may have emerged together with the epic at the end of the imperial period.[10] The dating of the grand epic of Gesar is hugely problematic, since it was steadily expanded over the centuries. Its dating to the 10th or 11th century is probably not much amiss. But frankly speaking, we have no way of making sure when and under what circumstances such "sayings" (tampé) actually were introduced into the Gesar Epic. In other words, it may represent later interpolations and the latter is not a promising source in trying to clarify when this very term was initially coined and used by the Tibetans.

The Structure of the Tibetan tampé

As already mentioned, most Tibetan scholars regard *tampé* as an indigenous oral and literary genre that provides a vast resource for the study of Tibetan folklore and mentality. However, only few have devoted their time to the study of the form and structure of Tibetan *tampé*. Theoretical reflection of the genre has been rare and seems to only recently have started among Tibetan scholars. The discovery and collection of huge amounts of *tampé* followed by the concerted research by the Tibetans themselves into these folk genres have increased dramatically within recent years. In the 1980's, the Chinese launched a nationwide documentation project in order to record and collect and eventually safeguard traditional and vibrant popular literature, covering the three foremost folk genres, in short folk songs, folk stories and popular sayings/proverbs.[11] The precious, largely oral material already collected in Tibet alone is staggering. The local and regional character of these collections allows us to access a large variety of folk literature from all regions of Tibet and assess the regional distribution of *tampé* in the late 20th century.[12]

In analyzing proverbial structure, Tibetan scholars maintain that a proper *tampé* is generally characterized as being condensed (tib. *don bsdus pa*), consisting of only a few syllables (tib. *tshig 'bru nyung*), being arranged in verses (tib. *tshig rkang*) numbering from one to five, so according to Pad-ma dbang-rgyal 2005, or even up to ten and more verses according to Bstan-go 2009.[13] The length of verses may range from three syllables up to fifteen. Even though there are exceptions, most *tampé* are isosyllabic.[14]

Bstan-go 2009 offers an analysis of *tampé* according to verse number and length in syllables (tib. *tshig khyim*). He leaves aside quadrisyllabic units as a different genre of four-syllable *pechö* (tib. *dpe chos 'bru bzhi ma*[15] and states that *tampé* with one verse (tib. *tshig rkang gcig can*) must have at least five syllables and at most no more than ten. He gives examples up to thirteen syllables, explaining that more than thirteen are rare because the ease of language would fade with the length of the verse. For the *tampé* with two verses (tib. *tshig rkang gnyis can*), he starts with pairs of three syllables. The longest *tampé*, he explains, consists of 32 verses. This statement, however, strongly poses the ques-

tion if such a lengthy piece shouldn't be rather called a song (tib. *glu gzhas*) or speech (tib. *bshad pa*)?[16]

Moreover, the vast corpus of *tampé* traced in the Gesar Epic and frequently termed *ling-drung* or *drung-pé* (tib. *gling sgrung, sgrung dpe*) seems to be regarded as a separate type of *tampé* characterized by greater numbers of verses and even stanzas (tib. *tshan pa*) setting them apart from "ordinary *tampé*" as pointed out in an early anthology:

> The *tampé* of the Gesar Epic have a special form. While most of the ordinary *tampé* have no more than one or two verse lines (tib. *tshig rkang*), the *tampé* of the Gesar epic, on the contrary, only rarely consist of one or two verse lines and are [generally] consisting of many stanzas (tib. *tshan pa*) and numerous verse lines. In fact, the longest *tampé* even consist of four stanzas and twenty-five verse lines (Li Wu'u-dbyang and Las Dang-len 1984, 12–13).

The authors go further in describing the intriguing nature of *drung-pé* comparing them to poetry and folk songs:

> Some tampé have gradually evolved from folksongs, therefore, though they resemble songs, they are not songs; though they look like poetry they are not. […] tampé with stanzas and many verses are the most dominant characteristic of drung-pé and also constitute its very essence (Li Wu'u-dbyang and Las Dang-len 1984: 13).

To be sure, these reflections serve merely as general assessments, and the contention that *tampé* may vary to such a degree strongly suggests that the key to a better understanding of this genre is not to be found in the prescriptive structure, but within the area of semantics. The term *tampé* –commonly translated as proverb or saying[17]– denotes a much broader genre and encompasses proverbs as well as longer texts often described as *khata* (tib. *kha ta*) or *labja* (tib. *bslab bya*). While this may be interpreted as gnomic or 'didactic' in content and therefore qualify as proverb, formally many examples show characteristics of related genres such as songs, speeches, etc., and transgress the basic quality of a proverb as a short, syntactically and discursively in-

dependent statement or sentence. Another qualifier in the Tibetan discussion of *tampé* is the reference to the "nameless religion" (tib. *mi chos*)[18] as opposed to the Buddhist doctrine and lore (tib. *lha chos*). Buddhist (Indian or indigenous) literature indeed offers a broad range of related genres such as *pechö* (tib. *dpe chos*), aphorisms (tib. *legs bshad*), or pithy metered advice (tib. *bslab bya*). *Tampé* furthermore are differentiated from other folk genres such as riddles (tib. *khad* or *lde'u*), songs (tib. *glu gzhas*), speeches (tib. *bshad pa*)[19] and traditional folk stories (tib. *dmangs sgrung*).

Related Genres Deploying Exempla

At this point it is necessary to introduce some related genres that in structure and content sometimes resemble, sometimes contain proverbial or idiomatic phrases. Tibetan scholarship so far has been rather lax in defining literary genres. When alluding *tampé,* the definition of the term is usually regarded as common knowledge or self-evident, thereby avoiding the task of defining it. As Dga'-ba pa-sangs argues during a conversation in Lhasa (May 22nd 2012), there are at least two understandings of the term *tampé*; the wider notion includes almost all didactic and mostly oral (*gtam*) genres employing *dpe* or examples, a notion which encompasses proverbs, stories (tib. *sgrung*) or didactic-gnomic fables (tib. *dpe chos*) as well as songs (tib. *glu gzhas*) and speech discourses (tib. *bshad pa*). Only the narrower understanding of *tampé* as a short, didactic statement/sentence would approximate the notion of the term proverb.

Pechö

Pechö (tib. *dpe chos*), composed in a vernacular tongue and ascribed to the Kadampa master Po-to-ba Rin-chen-gsal (1027-1105), are generally regarded as indigenous short narratives that exemplify (tib. *dpe*) some higher Buddhist truth or doctrine (tib. *chos*). *Pechö* are couched in a literary as well as a vernacular diction and are phrased in a fairly understandable language, often with images or narrative allegories and parables gleaned from Buddhist stories, but also using similes from folklore. Even though highly condensed, at the root of a *pechö* is always a small story of sorts.[20] The allusive, often four- or five-syllabic one- or two-liners often remain incomprehensible without the relevant

background story to which it alludes to. While the genre of *pechö* may have Tibetan forerunners and display strong Indian influences and models especially in the narrative plots and frame stories, the genre of *pechö* genre is certainly a Tibetan indigenous product.[21]

The original *pechö* are clearly no proverbs *per se* and should, as indicated, rather be translated as fable.[22] However, given the popularity and wide currency of Po-to-ba's gnomic fables, some of the catch words or "punch lines" have acquired the status and function of proverbs just as Friedman observed for Turk and other languages: "[..] punch lines of well-known anecdotes can have the evaluative and general content of proverbs, and can function as complete contexts in the cultures where they are known." (Friedman 1999: 140)

A new and extended usage of the term *pechö* has been introduced in recent years, either due to the lack of more appropriate terms or due to the function and format that the traditional *pechö* genre enjoys. As we may gather from a large number of published collections and anthologies of *pechö*[23], the term is currently used to translate popular Chinese four-character folk similes (*chengyu*) into Tibetan as A-khyig writes:

> The term *pechö* has recently become widely disseminated. The Chinese *pechö*, the folk simile (chin. *chengyu*) are widely disseminated and have left a very strong impression in Tibetan language. Therefore, this sort of *pechö*, different from the earlier types of Tibetan *tampé* and *khapé,* are in fact translations from Chinese. Since most Chinese *pechö* have four syllables, similarly, the vast majority of Tibetan language *pechö* have four syllables (tib. *tshig khyim bzhi*) as well (A-khyig 1992: 75).

More significantly, it is also used to represent and document any, preferably but not only quadrisyllabic one-liners. Such collections include sample of Po-to-ba's original *pechö*, but also any proverb, idiomatic phrase and apothegm, including even slogans and maxims found in Tibetan literature, for the most part only understood and appreciated upon hearing or knowing the story where the phrase stems from. The compilers of those motley and heterogeneous *pechö* collections have registered any such sayings gleaned from all sorts of literature down through

history. To be sure, most of these brief *pechö* sayings and phrases often appear to be proverbs, characterized by being discursive and syntactically independent as well as allusive.[24] Tibetan quadrisyllabic phraseologisms often show semantic parallelism, or display an antithetic, synonymic, or asyndetic structure, such as "white from outside [but] black inside (tib. *kha dkar gting nag*)", "hitting with the fist on a rock (tib. *kha tshur brag rgyab*)", etc. Given the wide currency and popularity as well as its function in Tibetan texts, *pechö* have to be considered, if not as full proverbs, at least as phraseologisms with proverbial status.

Khapé

Tibetan dictionaries usually do not offer major definitions neither for *tampé* nor for *khapé* (tib. kha dpe). Still, there are some deliberate attempts by some to see a distinction between those terms. So for instance A-khyig makes the following claim:

> The majority of so-called *khapé* among the people are usually said to convey a special meaning constructed by the oral tradition of the populace […] Generally, *khapé* are of folk origin and are used as illustration when conveying a particular [regional] meaning, whereas *tampé* are used to convey a general meaning. In terms of its composition *khapé* have uneven numbers of syllables, whereas *tampé* have an even number (A-khyig 1992: 75f).

In the light of A-khyig's explanation, besides the formal criteria of isosyllabism, the basic difference between *tampé* and *khapé* (tib. *kha dpe*), in his eyes, seems to be found in the semantic denotation. *Khapé* accordingly denotes a concrete instance only regionally current, whereas *tampé* generalize a concrete situation well known throughout the Tibetan language community. However, besides A-khyig's remarks above, we do not have any evidence for this terminological distinction in Tibetan and will treat the terms as synonyms.

Folk songs

The terms *lu* and *shä* (tib. *glu gzhas*), both are generally translated as songs, here refer to folk songs (tib. *dmangs glu / dmangs gzhas*, cf. Sørensen 1990: 11). Traditional Tibetan folk songs usually consist of any number of stanzas, each of four verses, and each verse consisting of six or seven syllables. The main feature of folk songs is the extensive use of metaphors (*dpe*), sometimes allowing for isolated verses as *tampé*. As said earlier, the Tibetan understanding of *tampé* is fairly broad including didactic or gnomic genres employing examples (*dpe*). Hence in many collections of *tampé* songs as well as lengthy gnomic and song-like material from the Ge-sar epic is cited. However, the longer examples with six or more verses or even two or more stanzas show clearly characteristics of *glu*, i.e. a series of different metaphors—one per verse, couplet, or stanza—is applied to or exemplifies a single situation. A-khyig calls such examples "*gtam ma glu*"(A-khyig 1992: 76).[25]

Aphorisms

Aphorisms (tib. *legs bshad, lugs;* skt. *subhāṣita, nīti*) form a literary scholastic genre in Tibet in the first place closely associated with the scholar Sa-skya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) and his celebrated and widely-used compendium *Treasure of Elegant Sayings*. While this collection as well as others certainly have been influenced by and also contain proverbial material, they are generally not regarded as folk literature because they are usually written and the author is generally known. At the same time, the genre of aphorisms borrows greatly from Indian culture and Sanskrit literature and as such constitutes a special case and can only be considered as marginal to the genres concerned here.

As this brief examination of traditional Tibetan genres of folklore has shown the genre definitions as well as the genres themselves are blurry and Tibetans, although engaged in a discussion, have so far failed to produce clear concepts of what makes up *tampé*. While there exists a genre terminology (*tampé, khapé, pechö,* etc.), the classification of texts according to this terminology remains inconsistent. Reflecting the Tibetan notion of *tampé* we may summarize their prototypical characteristics as follows:

- pithiness (*don bsdus pa*)
- consisting of a minimum of four syllables
- ranging from a single verse to 32 verses
- anonymous authorship
- reference to "nameless religion" (i.e. everyday life and lore of people)
- contain worldly advice or commonsensical lore, as well as didactic-edificatory and gnomic content

Our attempt at finding an ethnographic definition shows that the genre of *tampé* shares many similarities with proverbs, nevertheless the emphasis is on the didactic-gnomic nature as well as the use of exempla and comparisons. However, in order to be able to decide whether a given *tampé* actually also qualifies as proverb further investigation remains necessary.

Norrick provides a feature matrix definition enabling us to differentiate between all folk genres including proverbs, proverbial phrases, riddles, songs, jokes etc. along structural and functional lines. Leaving aside the differentiation from non-folk genres such as aphorisms and epigrams for having a source, i.e. an identifiable author, Norrick defines: "The proverb is a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning" (Norrick 1985: 78).

Classification of Tibetan Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases

For our purpose of compiling a dictionary of Tibetan paremia and figurative idioms, the ethnographic definition of *tampé* only partly proves helpful. It enables us to assign a given expression to the appropriate Tibetan genre. However, we still do not know if this expression is a full proverb or a proverbial phrase or even some other phraseologism. Especially in the context of a dictionary, the definitions of entries need to be clear. Consequently we need a definition of the Tibetan proverb which can be distinguished both from proverbial phrases and other short and pithy folk genres. Such a definition needs to go beyond traditional classifications and has to take into account linguistic principles, among others. The Tibetan paremiological phenomenology offers some interesting insights into the plenitude of Tibetan potentially proverbial material both in form and content. Howev-

er, we have seen the ethnographical assessment of *tampé* varies considerably from e.g. Norrick's definition of a proverb. In his definition it is what he calls "free conversational turn" that mainly differentiates the full proverb from a proverbial phrase. Figuration, prosody, and maybe even traditionality are optional properties which, if existing, put emphasis on the proverbiality of the expression. Already in the traditional Tibetan definitions cited above, some general features of proverbiality have been mentioned: Generality of meaning, expression of traditional wisdom and traditionality or currency in the language community[26] are properties which indicate proverbiality basically on the level of semantics. Tibetan definitions of *tampé,* besides the main property of figuration or metaphoricity (*dpe*) as pointed out earlier, clearly assign pre-eminence to prosody over the syntactical feature "free conversational turn". As a result, as already said, the Tibetan category of *tampé* encompasses a wide range of genres such as speeches, songs, fables etc. The syntactical feature "free conversational turn" may therefore be suitable to isolate full proverbs from the wealth of material included in the Tibetan categories. Moreover, it will serve as a criteria to further differentiate full proverbs[27] from proverbial phrases. Accordingly, longer samples which serialize various images for a single situation throughout many verses or even stanzas must be regarded as song (tib. *glu gzhas*) and will not be treated as Tibetan proverbs *per se*.

Browsing through *tampé* anthologies one finds that most *tampé* consist of one or two verses which all are potentially independent and full statements and can be read as proverbs. Some samples for single-lined Tibetan proverbs:

> When the goat is killed, the sheep shivers.[28]
>
> The chief justice is worse than a spy on the mountain pass.[29]
>
> The horn that grew on [your] head pokes [your] eyes[30]
>
> The Lama's butter is eaten by the Lama's dog.[31]

However, most Tibetan *tampé* are two-liners:

> Thinking it might be good, you built a temple
> [and] at worst it is the rest place for pigeons.[32]

You did the hard work
[and] the [other] people enjoy.[33]

Locking the door from outside
[while] the thief is [still] inside.[34]

Still, by far the vast majority of *tampé* employs a simile or comparison as the following example shows:

The depth of one human heart cannot be understood by another;
the core of a stone cannot be plumbed by water.[35]

In order to better understand the differences between expressions such as e.g. "a paper-bag carried by the wind"[36] and "big corpse, small sharp"[37] we need to look at the application of such phrases in their syntactical context in order to decide whether it is a proverb or a proverbial phrase or merely an idiom.

In order to illustrate this, we shall look more closely at the syntactical functions when proverbs or proverbial phrases are involved in context. The following examples are taken from Dga'-bzhi Rdo-ring Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor's elegant memoirs *Music of Outspoken Speech* (*Zol med gtam gyi rol mo*):32F[38]

"[...] since Zhamar Tulku and Dechos Tulku went for private purposes on a pilgrimage tour, without being on [there] on [an official Tibetan] governmental errand, there was no one hindering any of them from returning to their homeland [i.e. Tibet]. Firstly, they went to Nepal on their own without having specifically been dispatched from Tibet; Secondly, the [high incarnate] Tulkus stayed in Nepal (1) overly confident (lit: with an attitude of "buying the bow after knowing the arrow", tib. *mda' shes gzhu nyos*) without the Gorkha King and Ministers and the [two] keepers of the governmental sanctuaries having in mutual [agreement] told them to do so; Finally, in accordance with the saying (2) "the Demon does not recall, but the sick one does"(tib. *'dres ma dran nad pas dran*),[39] they (3) deluded the Nepalese court in many guileful ways (lit. "making paper bags fly in the air", tib. *shog sbug rlung bskyod*), thereby causing different, hith-

erto unseen sorts of annoyance to the keepers of the [governmental] sanctuaries […]"

In this short paragraph Dga'-bzhi employs three figurative phrases in order to criticize the vicious behavior of the Zhamarpa: two quadrisyllabics (1) *mda' shes gzhu nyos* and (3) *shog sbug rlung bskyod*, and the one-liner (2) *'dres ma dran nad pas dran* with the proverbial affix "according to the illustration" (tib. *dpe ltar*). While it is easy, especially through the use of a proverbial affix, to identify (2) as a proverb in accordance with Norrick's definition cited earlier, the quadrisyllabics are more difficult to classify. Example (1) is functionally integrated into the sentence structure as an adverbial phrase indicated by the instrumental particle *kyis*. Phrase (3) functions as qualifier to the phrase *'phrul las* to which it is subordinated by the genitive particle *gi* making possible an interpretation of *shog sbug rlung bskyod* as a phrase representing the adjective "guileful". Hence both quadrisyllabics are syntactical dependent and thus should be described as proverbial phrases.[40]

Proverbs take on their specific and usually semantically ambiguous meaning only when used in a conversational or textual context, and so the phrases in example (1) and (3) suggest, despite their metaphoricity, a clearly lexicalized and unambiguous meaning.

We conclude these preliminary reflections concerning Tibetan phraseologisms, yet we are fully aware of the fact that further research is required in order to bring some light unto the wealth of Tibetan idiomatic language. Still we hope we have been able to clarify the range of meanings associated with the term *tampé* and demonstrate that the term *tampé* as used in text and conversation in no way represents the English "proverb" according to the international standard definition of what a proverb is. However, while exploring the usage of *tampé* in context, we should like to emphasize *in praxi* that Tibetan proverbs do exist and that they can be further differentiated from what we call proverbial phrases. These differentiations and a proper understanding of them will be essential for the compilation of the envisaged *Dictionary of Tibetan Popular Figurative Language*.

A Dictionary of Tibetan Popular Figurative Language

The above considerations are part of the long-term objective of the present authors to present to the readership a dictionary consisting of a systematic lexicographical compilation of Tibetan phraseologisms and especially paremia primarily of popular origin traced in oral and literary discourse. It will focus on such expressions and collocutions that remain beyond the ordinary or strictly contemporary colloquial tongue or vernacular usage (i.e. often entries already covered by other modern-day standard dictionaries). We are tempted but will restrain ourselves from including slogans, maxims, winged words etc. at this point for these usually lack figurative meaning and represent marginal subgenres to the phraseologisms. Also exempted are, at least for the time being,[41] the traditional and conventional stock of lexemes and the vocabulary in use throughout Tibetan religious and literary discourse with its often academically fixed and stylized corpus of Indic-coined expressions culled from the standard lexicons of ornate and euphemistic synonyms (*mngon brjod*) such as those codified in the *Amarakośa* and its Tibetan adaptations.

As we hope to have been able to demonstrate, such phraseologisms pose interesting questions not only regarding semantics but also regarding Tibetan syntax, literary genres, folklore, customs and last not least Tibetan mentality and psychology. Hence the proposed dictionary will be a valuable tool to access Tibetan culture.

The preservation and documentation of Tibetan phraseologisms in form of a dictionary is not only a desideratum in Tibetological research, but also an important means to access the wealth of Tibetan literature, both oral and written. Preservation is especially urgent for numerous reasons, the foremost being the rapid development and change of Tibetan language under the pressuring influence of Chinese and other languages. As a result, a huge amount of expressions, idioms and proverbs are already rendered incomprehensible for a considerable part of Tibetan language speakers.

In order to be easily and widely accessible across nations and borders, with the generous support of David Germano and the University of Virginia, the dictionary will be integrated into the online *Tibetan Historical Dictionary* which is part of the *Ti-*

betan and Himalayan Library (thlib.org). The entered phraseologisms will then not only be translated and explained, but also classified along linguistic categories (proverbial phrase, full proverb, idiom etc.) as well as literary categories (*tampé, khapé, pechö*, etc.) next to other information such as the source, the regional provenance etc. which will be provided with each entry. Finally the phraseologisms will be interlinked through an indexing system which allows to group lexical but also thematic variants of the material presented.[42] Access to the dictionary, naturally, will be open and free and the present authors hereby should like to invite everyone to join us with contributions in order to make the dictionary a success.

Provisional List of Tibetan Proverb Collections

I. Tibetan language Collections

1. *Mthong phyogs skor gyi gtam dpe*. no d. no pl. no publ.
2. *Bod kyi kha dpe'i rin chen gter mdzod*. 2006. 2nd ed. Delhi: Shes-rig par-khang.
3. *Bod kyi gtam dpe mu tig phreng mdzes*. 2007. no pl. no publ.
4. *Bod byang thang gi lde'u*. 2010. Lha-sa: Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrun-khang.
5. *Gtam dpe sum brgya pa bzhugs*. 2010. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
6. *Gtam-dpe sum-brgya-pa*. 2010. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
7. *Mtsho nub bod kyi dmangs khrod rtsom rig rin chen g.yang ti'i phreng ba*. 2011. zi ling: Mtsho-sngon mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
8. Bkra-shis nyi-ma. no d. *Gtam dpe*. no pl. no publ.
9. Blo-bzang don-ldan. 2008. *Sgrung mkhan grags pas gsungs pa'i gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung las: Gtam dpe phyogs bsgrigs*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
10. Bskal-bzang blo-gsal, Mkhar, ed. 2005. *Gtam dpe nor bu'i do shal*. Lan-gru'u: Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
11. Bsod-nams dpal-'bar, Hor-khang, ed. 1982. *Bod kyi gtam dpe phyogs bsgrigs*. Lha-sa: Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrun-khang.
12. Bsod-nams rgyal-mtshan. 2003. *Nag chu'i dmangs khrod gtam dpe*. Lha-sa: Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrun-khang.
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14. Cüppers, Christoph and Per K. Sørensen, eds. 1998. *A Collection of Tibetan Proverbs and Sayings: Gems of Tibetan Wisdom and Wit*. Stuttgart: Steiner.

15. G.yag-dgra khra-sbog and Rdo-rko Ngag-dbang dge-legs, eds. 2009. *Gna' mi bod kyi gtam dpe*. Lan gru'u: Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
16. G.yang-mo. no d. *Bod kyi khed bshad*. no pl. no publ.
17. Gar-gyi nyi-ma, ed. 1992. *Bod kyi kha dpe'i gter mdzod*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
18. Grags-pa dkon-mchog. 1990. *Bod kyi kha dpe'i gter mdzod*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
19. Gzhis-rtse sa-khul dmangs-rtsom-rnam-gsum legs-btus spyi-khyab rtsom-sgrig u-yon-lhan-khang. 2001. *Gtsang khul gyi gtam dpe legs btus*. krung go'i dmangs rtsom rnam gsum legs btus sa gnas pod. Lha-sa: Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrun-khang.
20. Lho-kha zangs-ri-rdzong dmangs-khrod rtsom-rig legs-bsdus cha tshang-gsum rtsom-sgrig u-yon-lhan-khang. no d. *Bod ljongs lho kha sa gnas zangs ri rdzong gi dmangs khrod rtsom rig legs bsdus cha tshang gsum*. no pl. no publ.
21. Li Wu'u-dbyang, and Las Dang-len, eds. 1984. *Gling sgrung gi gtam dpe gces bsdus*. Pe-cin: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
22. Ma'o Tsi-tsu, and Kru'u Kang. 1988. *Bod kyi gtam dpe 'dems bsgrigs: Bod rgya skad gnyis shan sbyar du sbyar ba'i deb*. Lan-gru'u: Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
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25. Mkhas-grub, ed. 1992. *Krung go'i dmang rtsom rnam gsum legs btus sa gnas pod: Lho kha'i gtam dpe legs btus (deb dang po)*.
26. Mtho-skar 'od-gsal, ed. 1992. *Rgyun spyod bod rigs gtam dpe bsags mdzod*. Zi-ling: Mtsho-sngon mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.
27. Na-'ban a-nu thar-ba and Mgon-po tshe-brtan, eds. 2010. *A mdo'i gtam dpe mkhas pa'i mgrin rgyan bzhugs so*. Lan-gru'u: Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang.

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31. Rdo-rje bkra-shis. no d. *Gtam dpe 'phrul gyi lde mig*. no pl. no publ.
32. Rig-'dzin. no d. *Gtam dpe*. no pl. no publ.
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Notes

[1] This proverb comes in many variants; the one cited here was found in Hor-khang Bsod-nams dpal-'bar 2004: 153. Cf. also Cüppers and Sørensen 1998: xxvii.

[2] "When compared to fables (*dpe chos*), *tampé* usually consist of more syllables and come in pairs. Mostly they are used over a long time and they are largely stable in form. Because it has the capability of serving successfully in being appealing as well as rendering elegantly syntax and lexic, they are not only widely applicable both in oral and written form, [but also] they have been handed down in the oral tradition from the moment they were created up to now […]" ('Brug-'bum-rgyal 2007: 82–85). See also Bstan-'dzin don-grub 2010: 21–31.

[3] The term *natsig* (tib. *gna' tshig*) is used as a general term for oaths and swear words. The connection between *natsig* and *tampé* is briefly analyzed in Yul-lha-thar and Sgra-dbyangs lha-mo 2009. While swear words share many features of proverbs they certainly constitute a different genre.

[4] Cf. 'Bri-gung Rnam-rgyal 2008: 61. While this is generally true for proverbs, it is not very helpful to include authorship as a definition feature. Once associated with an author, the proverb often turns into a so-called winged word

or a maxim. An anecdote recounts that the 9th Panchen Lama used to keep a parrot. One day he set the parrot free with the words: "When a man gets old he longs for his home and when a bird gets old he misses the top of the trees." Thus arguably the famous proverb "When people get old, they miss home. When birds get old they miss the forest." came into being. The story nevertheless serves to illustrate how a proverb easily turns into a winged word or *vice versa* (personal communication with Klu-ma-tshal Zla-ba tshe-ring, Lhasa, 2nd May 2012). In truth, the saying is a well-known *tampé* of much older provenience, cited e.g. in Rdo-ring Paṇḍita's celebrated Memoirs *Music of Outspoken Speech*; cf. Cüppers and Sørensen 1998: xx. Modern variants abound e.g. from eastern Tibet (tib. *khams*) in G.yag-dgra khra-sbog and Rdo-rko Ngag-dbang dge-legs 2009: 402, or from north-eastern Tibet (tib. *a mdo*) in Mkhar Bskal-bzang blo-gsal 2005: 299.

[5] Cf. Norrick 1985: 31ff.

[6] The collection was introduced to Western scholarship by F. W. Thomas in 1957. A few samples as cited and translated by Thomas 1957: 107f. from the Sum-pa collection of apothegms demonstrate their commonsensical, popular content and their genuine antithetical, proverbial structure.

[7] Cf. 'Bri-gung Rnam-rgyal 2008: 61. The interesting term *shags* has different, related meanings, and is found in different combinations, like *glu shags, kha shags*, and verbally *shags rgyag / rtsod*, often with the meaning of (giving) an instructive answer, disputative argument, or serving as repartee retorts of sorts.

[8] Tib. *gtam rnying pa*.

[9] Tib. *gna' mi'i bod kyi gtam dpe la*.

[10] Chab-spel writes: "In the songs of the Tibetan epic of *King Gesar of Ling* we often find allover [expressions like] 'as a saying of the Tibetan people of yore goes' when reflecting upon this, it is conceivable that the term *tampé* may well have originated at the beginning of the period of fragmentation of Tibet [i.e. 11th century]" (Chab-spel Tshe-brtan phun-tshogs 2007: 87). See also Chab-'gag Rta-mgrin 2008, Lhag-pa chos-'phel 2006, or 'Ba'-stod Pad-ma dbang-rgyal and Bcud-dza G.yung-mo-skyid 2005.

To be sure, the diction in Chab-spel's sample, however, bespeaks a fairly recent origin. It is difficult to decide whether we here should follow Chab-spel's hypotheses concerning the presence of *tampé* as a term in the Gesar Epic. We withhold any judgment on this point until more evidence is available. Further linguistic corpus analysis will certainly help clarifying the history and the first occurrence of the term.

[11] The "Compilation of the Three Set of Folk/Popular Literature" (*minjian wenxue santao jicheng*, *dmangs khrod rtsom rig phyogs sgrigs khag gsum*) comprises folk-tales and popular stories, folksongs and ballads and popular, folk-based proverbs and idiomatic phrases. See Sørensen 2010.

[12] Cf. Sørensen 2010: 152.

[13] Cf. Bstan-go and Lo-hong 2009: 79.

[14] Cf. 'Ba'-stod Pad-ma dbang-rgyal and Bcud-dza G.yung-mo-skyid 2005: 329–31.

[15] In other words quadrisyllabics or quadrisyllabic *pechö* (tib. *dpe chos*) are either serving as a translation of Chinese folk similes (chin. *chengyu*) or as the shortest traditional Tibetan *pechö,* as discussed below.

[16] See Bstan-go and Lo-hong 2009: 79–86 for songs, and Rva Yum-skyabs 2001 for Tibetan speeches.

[17] So for example Jäschke 1987: 206, who interestingly does not have an entry for *kapé* (tib. *kha dpe*).

[18] The term *mi chos* is of course rather problematic and far from well defined. It seems to denote a huge range of non-Buddhist belief systems and folklore. The translation of the term as "nameless religion", however problematic, was proposed by R.A. Stein 1972. Tibetan scholars frequently use the term when defining *tampé* and thus the currency of the term should be acknowledged.

[19] Examples of such speeches labeled as *tampé*, but arranged according to the occasion of speech making i.e. when meeting a high Lama or authority etc. are found in the recent collection Na-'ban a-nu thar-ba and Mgon-po tshe-brtan 2010. Cf. also to Rva Yum-skyabs 2001 for a brief introduction to different sorts of speeches (tib. *bshad pa*).

[20] This is highlighted by both Bstan-'dzin don-grub 2010 and Dga'-ba pa-sangs 2010. A comprehensive study and German translation of the *pechö* collection compiled by Po-to-ba Rin-chen-gsal is offered by Roesler 2011. The study also discusses the *tshig lab* genre equally ascribed to Po-to-ba. The religious-didactic genre enjoyed great popularity, was widely disseminated and repeatedly commented upon right up to most recent time.

[21] Cf. Dga'-ba pa-sangs 2010. Most of Po-to-ba's *pechö* can be found in the two collections *Dpe chos Rin chen spungs pa* and *Be'u bum sngon po* which are regarded as the first Tibetan collections of its sorts (Bstan-'dzin don-grub 2010: 19).

[22] See Roesler 2011: 163–64f.: "You cannot sew with a needle with two tips. There will be no success for someone without concentration. One dog alone does not catch two musk deers."

[23] Such as contained in the collections *Dpe chos tshig mdzod* (Dpa'-ris Sangs-rgyas 1999) or *Dpe chos rna ba'i bdud rtsi* (Dpa'-ris Sangs-rgyas 1985), to mention but a few.

[24] The above mentioned collections include sayings traced in Dunhuang material, from the Gesar Epic (with plain proverbs like "water good, fish happy"), or from various literary, canonical or authored sources which cherished quadrisyllabics like "evil talk carried [by the] wind" or, "[to] repay beer with water". But also hexasyllabic sayings and idiomatic axioms are cited: 'the walnut dry, the inner rotten'; in fact they include material from earliest sources all the way up to slogans originating with Mao Zedong.

[25] For Dga'-ba pa-sangs most examples from the Gesar epic do not qualify as *tampé* proverbs, because they lack the characteristics of being a single pithy statement (Conversation in Lhasa May 22nd, 2012).

[26] The greatest difficulty in defining proverbs is probably that all but one feature can be "faked" as Arora 1989 demonstrated. She argues that a proverb has to function as such from the very time of its invention and only a functioning proverb may gain currency or, to use Norrick's term, traditionality. However, traditionality is the only property that cannot be "faked". The markers of proverbiality, she concludes, vary from culture to culture. In English language the most important marker would be metaphoricity, while, say, in Spanish it would be prosody.

[27] Here we will include samples from classical as well as contemporary *pechö* if qualifying as proverbs according to the super-cultural definition.

[28] Tib. *ra bsad na lug 'dar;* from Bu-chung, Bde-skyid sgrol-dkar, and Bde-skyid mtsho-mo 1992: 410.

[29] Tib. *la kha'i so pa las / khrims bcos kyi 'go dpon sdug*; Bu-chung, Bde-skyid sgrol-dkar, and Bde-skyid mtsho-mo 1992: 410.

[30] Tib. *mgo la skes pa'i ra co mig la zug*; Bu-chung, Bde-skyid sgrol-dkar, and Bde-skyid mtsho-mo 1992: 411.

[31] Tib. *bla ma'i mar bla ma'i khyis bzas*; Bu-chung, Bde-skyid sgrol-dkar, and Bde-skyid mtsho-mo 1992: 412.

[32] Tib. *e yag bsam nas lha khang bzhengs / ma yag phug ron 'khor sa red*; Tshe-brtan nor-bu, Rdo-phun, and Byams-pa dngos-grub 1989: 190.

[33] Tib. *dka' las rang gis brgyabs / longs spyod mi yis btang*; Tshe-brtan nor-bu, Rdo-phun, and Byams-pa dngos-grub 1989: 195.

[34] Tib. *rkun ma nang la bzhag sgo lcags phyi la brgyab*; Tshe-brtan nor-bu, Rdo-phun, and Byams-pa dngos-grub 1989: 197.

[35] Translated by Padma-tshe-dbang 2012

[36] The phrase "a paper-bag carried by the wind" denoting guilefulness and cunningness. For an explanation, see the discussion of the phrase below.

[37] Tib. *che ba ro / chung ba rno;* "[If it is] big [it is] a corpse [and if it is] small [it is] sharp." Taken from 'Ba'-stod Pad-ma dbang-rgyal and Bcud-dza G.yung-mo-skyid 2005: 331.

[38] These to a large extent political memoirs detail the historical background as well as the various incidents leading to the Tibetan-Gorkha war of 1788-92. This passage deals with the activities of Zhamar Tulku Chos-grub rgya-mtsho, the younger brother of the Panchen Lama Pelden Yeshe (1738-1780). He attempted to mediate in the negotiations between the Nepalese on the one side and the Tibetan and imperial Chinese on the other side. While staying in Kathmandu, the high incarnate was suspected of colluding with the Nepalese side as seen from the perspective of the Tibetan government (Ganden Podrang).

The quoted examples were taken from Rdo-ring Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor 2006: 558.

[39] According to Tibetan belief, demons and spirit are thought to be capable of inflicting sicknesses and maladies upon human beings or intruding into

human endeavors. We can thus identify the demon as agent and the sick person as patient. Ultimately, it indicates that someone causes trouble, suffering, or chaos, etc., yet others must bear the brunt or face the consequences It may be worth noting that spirit of sorts are frequently used metaphorically in Tibetan literature, in songs, prophecies such as those found in Terma-literature(tib. *gter ma*), in order polemically and sardonically criticizing one's opponent.

[40] Recalling what has been said on *pechö,* the two quadrisyllabic examples (1) and (3) are likely to be potentially independent units and hence qualify at the same time for Norrick's definition of a proverb.

[41] It shall be considered that aphorisms (tib. *legs bshad*) are included since they contain material that at one point was proverbial (if only in India) or gained proverbial status later on due to the great popularity and wide currency of the genre.

[42] This brief paper leaves no room to discuss aspects of semantical classification or of a proverb typology, but we hope soon to be able to present our views in a separate publication. The task of developing a typology of phraseologisms and paremia was taken up by Matti Kuusi and G.L. Permjakov independently. Their proposed typologies, while certainly showing limitations and inconsistencies, nevertheless provide a tested foundation to model a typology and index system for Tibetan phraseologisms. For Matti Kuusi's typology, see Lauhakangas 2001 and Lauhakangas 2004; for Permjakov's concepts, see Grzybek 2000.

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