

**A MONASTIC SCHOLAR UNDER CHINA'S OCCUPATION OF TIBET: MUGE  
SAMTEN'S (1913-1993) AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND HIS ROLE AS A VERNACULAR  
INTELLECTUAL**

by

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B.A., Methodist University, 2013

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Asian Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

January 2019

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A monastic scholar under China's occupation of Tibet: Muge Samten's (1913-1993) autobiography and his role as a vernacular intellectual

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submitted by Dhondup Tashi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

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## Abstract

This thesis explores Muge Samten's (*dmu dge bsam gtan*, 1913-1993) life and scholarly works in the context of China's colonization of Tibet. He was a leading Tibetan intellectual, considered one of the three great scholars (*mkhas pa mi gsum*) of twentieth century Tibet. He was a vernacular monastic intellectual during this crucial period of transition and, while serving as an official within the civil bureaucracy of the People's Republic of China in Eastern Tibet, Muge Samten was able to employ his monastic knowledge and official position. The fact that he had both monastic and official influence allowed him to play a major role dealing with the historical fate of Tibetan language and religion under colonial China. These two roles, traditional and official, were respectively "normative" and "situational" in the manner that Yogendra Malik (1981, 1-17) proposes for vernacular intellectuals in context of colonial India. Using Malik's terminology, Muge Samten exercised his "normative" authority through traditional knowledge and "situational" authority as an official in response to the hostile political circumstances of the communist takeover of Tibet. His life thus was an illustration of a Tibetan response to China's occupation.

His unique position meant that he introduced communist ideas and ideology to Tibet. He engaged in the production of dictionaries, editing official periodicals, translation of government documents in the early 1950's, and later advocated protecting Tibetan grammar from the language reform proposed by the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing in 1969. During the 1980's, he revived Buddhist teachings and sustained Geluk ordination practices at monastic institutions that had been decimated during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), serving as preceptor for many monks throughout monasteries in eastern Tibet. Muge Samten's activities in Tibet could be characterized as situational, adapting to the political climate of an occupied Tibet. His role in reviving Geluk ordination lineages could be considered normative, relying on traditional monastic tradition and religious status. And finally, the sustainability of Tibetan language and resuscitation of Tibetan identity can also be examined in his autobiography through the lens of "vernacular intellectual," highlighting the unequal power between him and the political authority within Communist China.

## Lay Summary

Muge Samten was a dynamic Tibetan intellectual during the Chinese Occupation of Tibet. His autobiography, entitled *The Author's Reflections on His Own History* (*rtsom pa po rang gi byung ba brjod pa rang gsal a dar sha zhes by aba bzhungs so*), comprises eight chapters that proceed through his life chronologically. The autobiography is a rich resource for analyzing Muge Samten's monastic authority and official political roles as he responded to the decline of Tibetan culture within the complex sociopolitical transformations of Communist China. In this thesis, I explore four major themes discussed in his autobiography: dictionary projects, language reform, resistance, and revival. Muge Samten exercised his monastic knowledge and official authority within an unequal relationship between tradition and colonial bureaucracy. His interaction with the new political power reveals elements of resistance and flexibility that allowed him to advance Tibetan language, Tibetan culture, and Tibetan Buddhism under China.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Dhondup Tashi.

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## Glossary

- blo sbyong* “mind training”: In Tibetan, *Lojong* (*blo sbyong*) means mind training, for *lo* means mind and *jong* means training or practice. In Tibetan Buddhism, “mind training” is associated especially with the Kadam (*bka gdams*) sect that provides pithy instructions on the cultivation of compassion. This training is based primarily on the technique of exchanging of self and other.
- byed sdud* “differentiation and inclusion particles”: In Tibetan grammar, they are *gam*, *ngam*, *dma*, *nam*, *ram*, *lam*, *sam*, and *tam*. They are a group of non-case particles with the function of differentiation and inclusion.
- chol kha gsum* “three regions”: In Tibetan, *chol kha gsum* refers to the three traditional regions of Tibet, namely *Utsang*, *Kham*, and *Amdo*.
- dgar sdud* “separation and inclusion particles”: In Tibetan grammar, they are *nas* and *las*.
- Hong Weibing* “Red Guards”: In China, *Hong Weibing* (红卫兵) were a student-led mass paramilitary social movement mobilized by Mao Zedong in 1966 and 1967, during the Cultural Revolution.
- khor ba* “cycle of existence”; The Tibetan, *khor ba*, derives from the Sanskrit *samsāra* and refers to the Buddhist idea of the condition of suffering and endless rounds of rebirth.
- lam rim* “stages of the path”: In Tibetan, *Lam Ram* (*lam rim*) means the stages of the path to enlightenment, which are major components of Buddhist monastic training, particularly in the Geluk sect. It is also a common abbreviation for *jangchup lamkyi rimpa* (*byang chub lam gyi rim pa*) meaning “stages of the path to enlightenment,” a broad methodological framework for the study and practice of the complete Buddhist path to awakening.
- lhag bcas* “continuative particles”: In Tibetan grammar, they are *te*, *de*, and *sta* and indicate that something more is coming in a sentence.
- rang rnam* “self-liberation”: In Tibetan, it is translated as autobiography; a type of life writing in Tibetan literature belonging to the “complete liberation” genre in which the story of how the protagonist achieved liberation from suffering through religious practices.



*Renmin Huabao* “People’s Pictorial”: In English it is also translated as *China Pictorial* or known as *Renmin Huabao* (人民画报).

*rdzogs tsig* “completing particles”: In Tibetan grammar, they function like a completing word and their synonyms are *slar bsdu* and *zla sdud*.

*rgyan sdud* “ornament-conjunction particles”: In Tibetan grammar, they have three particles including *kyang*, *yang*, and *ang*. They have two functions: emphasizing and including.

*rnam thar* “complete liberation”: In Tibetan, it is translated as biography, an umbrella term that contains several sub-types of liberation story; a genre of life writing in Tibetan literature in which the protagonist achieves “complete liberation” or enlightenment. In the Tibetan context, *rnam thar* refers to a widespread literary genre of sacred biography or autobiography. The term usually indicates an emphasis on the stereotypically Buddhist aspects of the subject’s life, including his or her religious training, practice of meditation, and eventual liberation.

*rtogs brjod* “legendary story”: In Tibetan, *rtogs brjod* refers to stories that are moral legends and convey the realizations of a Buddhist adept. These are the translations of the Sanskrit *avadāna*, “tales” or “narratives” applied generically to stories of former lives of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and other notable figures. The Tibetan *rtogs brjod* is applied to men and can refer to stories of political leaders or stories from epic literature as well.

*sang rnam* “secret liberation”: In Tibetan, it is translated as secret biography; a type of life writing in Tibetan literature belonging to the “complete liberation” genre that refers to stories, oral or textual, that only specially authorized persons had access to.

*skyes rabs* “birth story”: From the Sanskrit *jātaka*, defined groups of stories about the prior rebirths of a buddha or other important Buddhist figures.

*slar bsdu* “terminative particles”: In Tibetan grammar, there are eleven terminative particles including *go*, *ngo*, *do*, *no*, *bo*, *mo*, *ro*, *lo*, *so*, and *to*. They are used as terminators of a sentence and have two functions; they either simply indicate that the verb that they are suffixed with is the final verb of a sentence or they can both act as the verb to be and a terminate sentence simultaneously.

## Note on Translation, Conventions, and Abbreviations

My translations are based upon Muge Samten's autobiography entitled *The Author's Reflections on His Own History*. I used Wylie transliteration for the names of people, books, places, and things in Tibetan language; Wylie transliteration is a method for transliterating Tibetan script using only the letters available on a typical English keyboard. Also, every foreign language is italicized. For instance, I have italicized Sanskrit names such as *avadāna* and *jātaka*.

For Tibetan names, I used English phonetic names first, followed by the Wylie name in the parenthesis, such as Muge Samten (*dmu dge bsam gtan*) in the initial sentence and then only use the English phonetical name in the following conversations. However, if it is a Tibetan grammar case, instead of using the English phonetic name, I just find the equivalent meaning of the case in English and used the Wylie name of it in the parenthesis such as terminative particle (*slar bsdu*) and differentiation and inclusion particle (*byed sdud*) and then provide the details of each cases in the footnote for further comprehension. If it is a Chinese name, I use Pinyin name first and then put the simplified Chinese name in the parenthesis.

Furthermore, every point that I cite from Muge Samten's autobiography is translated into English, indented, and made available in Appendix. I put my every effort to stay close with the original meaning of the text. If the author is using a pronoun in a conversation the original text and if I assumed that he is referring that to the name mentioned in the previous lines, then I put the assumed name in bracket. For instance, in Chapter 3, Resistance, there is a conversation in which the author talks about his experience of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. He used the name, Red Guards, in the first line, then used "they" in subsequent lines, assuming "they" refers to the aforementioned Red Guards.

I have made no attempt to reproduce the original syntax nor have I always left lines intact. I have endeavored to stay as close to the original as possible. I have made every effort to represent the tone, voice, and phrasing of the original. It is of course not always appropriate to translate a given word the same way in every context, but I have tried to do so wherever possible.

If you have doubts or are not able to understand the translations fully, please always go back to the original text as an ultimate source or the authority for the meanings. However, I am to blame for any inaccuracies and mistranslations that may be found although I have tried to avoid them.

## **Acknowledgements**

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Jessica Main. She has been an unparalleled resource for my academic growth, intellectually pushing the complex boundaries of my ideas, tirelessly disciplining my writing into clarity. I gratefully acknowledge Prof. Tsering Shakya and Prof. Michael Griffin for their thoughtful feedback, careful guidance and meticulous reading of the draft.

I am also extremely indebted to Tibet Action Institute, the Dalai Lama Trust, and Ottawa Friends of Tibet for providing financial assistance in the form of scholarship. This journey would not have been possible without their kindness.

It would be remiss of me not to express my gratitude to my supportive friends of many years: Rigdol, Tendor, Chungpo, Dickie, Tenzin Tsetan, Choeden, Sonam Wangdue, Choeyang, Jurme la, and others. I am thankful for their continued friendship. In particular, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for Katie for her excellent editing skills, genuine support and great friendship.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my intelligent wife, Kunsang for her unconditional love and for always believing in me and encouraging me to follow my dreams. Thank you for being my best friend.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate my MA thesis to my family inside Tibet, who I haven't seen in person for almost two decades. For them, my enrolling in Western academia is not just for my career or intellectual passion but carries a deeper meaning and value for my community and country at large. I also dedicate this work to my childhood friend Namkha Tserang, the Bird Chaser (his nickname), who sadly passed away in Amdo Rebgong, Tibet, in 2014.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction: Muge Samten As a Vernacular Intellectual**

Muge Samten can be seen as a vernacular intellectual, for he exercised his traditional knowledge and held official position in the discourses of two linguistic domains: Tibetan society, its culture and religion, and Chinese political authority, in the context of its colonial bureaucracy. He used both his traditional knowledge and official position, in a nuanced manner, to sustain Tibetan language and religion during Chinese proposals for Tibetan language reform (late 1960s) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). As a vernacular intellectual, the religious, political, and social roles that he employed under the rule of Communist China are a fascinating illustration of how he responded to the dominant political power of Communist China. For these reasons, his autobiography is a great resource for us to analyze major socio-political themes. He describes his work on dictionary projects, language reform, resistance, and revival.

This chapter outlines theoretical approaches to the role of intellectuals, including vernacular intellectuals, as well as provides a review of scholarship on Muge Samten and his scholarly works. I present the structure of Muge Samten's autobiography, and provide background historical information about his birthplace and monastic studies. His early years and monastic studies provide a window for us to see the training informed his later activities. The traditional knowledge and authority that he accumulated and earned through his monastic studies became, in later years, the basis for his efforts to ensure that Tibetan language, religion, and culture were preserved within the Chinese political system.

### **1.1 Theoretical Approaches to the Role of Intellectuals**

In the study of "intellectuals," there has been a tendency among liberal scholars to define intellectuals as educated or knowledgeable persons who oppose or criticize authority. The oppositional sense of the term intellectual itself was present at its beginnings: the term originated from a "Russian word referring to writers and scholars who opposed the authoritarian regime of the tsars" (Burke 2016, 21). There are scholars today who still see intellectuals as defenders of justice, confronting various powers with courage and integrity (Chomsky 2016, 5-21). Public intellectuals scrutinize the actions of government authority through popular press and media.

This liberal “type,” however, obscures the roles played by knowledgeable persons living under colonial or authoritarian regimes, for vernacular intellectuals often did not, and do not, have the access or power to publically analyze the actions of government through popular press or media because as these media are under the government control. In Tibet, during Muge Samten’s time, media was the primary apparatus of the Chinese colonial bureaucracy’s political propaganda. The twentieth century Tibetan intellectual Muge Samten (1913-1993) lived under the colonial authority of China, and his career as an educated person, monastic scholar, and government official, is hard to characterize according to the liberal understanding of “intellectuals.” As the term has also been widely used by scholars of history to refer to an educated elite regardless of their stance towards authority, it is to history and studies of colonized states that I turn to in this thesis.

Intellectuals play an important role in preserving their society’s traditions. In Darin Barney’s overview of intellectuals, he quotes S.N. Eisenstadt, who defines intellectuals “as creators and carriers of traditions, as participating in the symbolic and institutional frameworks of such traditions or as performing their functions as the conscience of society within the framework of existing tradition” (Barney 1994, 90). Intellectuals serve to integrate members of a society into an ordered whole. Barney quotes Edward Shils (1969, 47), who argues in this vein that intellectuals “are indispensable to any society, an effective collaboration between intellectuals and the authorities which govern society is a requirement for order and continuity in public life and for the integration of wider reaches of the laity into society” (Barney 1994, 91). Both Eisenstadt and Shils point to the way that intellectuals preserve traditions and integrate their societies. Integration requires collaboration with authorities in modern societies and assumes the mutual dependency of authority and the intellectual elite in mobilizing the populace and in governing their society.

However, for scholars like Noam Chomsky, it is the relation to authority that defines intellectuals. For Chomsky, intellectuals are separated into two types based on whether they critique authority or collaborate with authority: “value-oriented intellectuals” and “technocratic and policy-oriented intellectuals.” The former pose challenges to democratic governments and

the latter articulates policies within established institutions (Chomsky 2016, 5-21). Chomsky clearly sees the intellectual who critiques authority as the most authentic. This, to my mind, is too simple. Whether an intellectual is able to critique their society and its authority depends upon their political, religious, and cultural context. I stress here that intellectuals everywhere must behave according to the dynamics of political power in the society to which they belong, or they risk suppression, imprisonment, exile, and even death. It is within these limits that all intellectuals deploy their institutional and social capital in pursuit of their values and goals. It is important to see the similarities between so-called “value-oriented” and “policy-oriented” types—to see them on a continuum of increasing political restriction—when we examine the case of vernacular intellectuals, such as Muge Samten, who must work under a foreign, colonizing power.

In the Tibetan literary context, the Tibetan language lacks an equivalent term for the concept of an “intellectual.” The nearest term is the noun *mkhas pa*, used to denote male monastic scholars and lay intellectuals. There is also a feminine form, *mkhas ma*, that refers to female lay intellectuals. “Scholar” is perhaps the best translation. In the *Entrance Gate for the Scholar* (*mkhas pa 'jug pa'i sgo*) by the twelfth century Tibetan scholar-monk, Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen<sup>1</sup> (1182-1251), *mkhas pa* is defined as “someone who knows all knowledge without any doubts, or someone who knows the particular subject that he studied” (Dhongthog 1967, 6-7). Sakya Pandita describes three roles for scholars (*mkhas pa*): (1) propagation (*chad*), which is oral teaching of students; (2) deliberation (*rtsod*), which primarily refers to debate; and, (3) written composition (*rtsom*), which is the production of texts in classical Tibetan. These three roles, or responsibilities, are mentioned frequently in Tibetan monastic curricula, and are

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<sup>1</sup> Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen (*sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan* (1182 - 1251) was a leader of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism. A prominent Buddhist scholar, he is considered to be the Fourth Sakya Hierarch and Sixth Sakya Trizin and one of the most important figures in the Sakya lineage. Kunga Gyeltsen is generally known simply as Sakya Pandita, a title given to him in recognition of his scholarly achievements and knowledge of Sanskrit. He was also proficient in the five great sciences of Buddhist philosophy, medicine, grammar, dialectics and sacred Sanskrit literature as well as the minor sciences of rhetoric, synonymies, poetry, dancing and astrology.



considered common practice for monastic scholars. Muge Samten trained from childhood at several monasteries and was well versed in these scholarly skills.

Although “scholar” (*mkhas pa*) is used widely for people who have general, scholarly knowledge of many subjects, according to existing textual sources on Muge Samten, he is not addressed as “scholar”, instead he is called “polymath” (*mkhas dbang*). In the first volume of his collected works, for example, the editorial team addresses him as polymath (Samten 1996, 1), conveying that he is a superior monastic scholar, with superlative knowledge of all subjects that are part of Buddhist curricula, including logic, grammar, art, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, drama, synonyms, poetry, and literature. Whether we call Muge Samten scholar or polymath, both terms refer to his accumulated knowledge and its superior level. As well, advisors to state authority in Tibet were often scholars or polymaths, although known by their official political titles. The Tibetan terms might originally come from a Buddhist educational or monastic context, but those who were named scholars or polymaths played a role similar to the one identified by the English term intellectual. So, for the purposes of this thesis, I will translate Tibetan term “scholar” (*mkhas pa*) and “polymath” (*mkhas dbang*) as “intellectual” going forward. It was intellectuals like Muge Samten who was active within and the intersections of the Tibetan community and Chinese authority. He possessed both traditional, monastic knowledge as well as an official, technocratic role in the Chinese state apparatus. On a continuum of intellectuals that includes Chomsky’s “value-oriented” and “policy-oriented” types, Muge Samten should be understood as a “policy-oriented” type falling towards the end of extreme political restriction under Chinese authority. To the extent he was able, he employed his official authority subtly, challenging and changing Chinese policy on Tibetan language and religion.

### **1.1.1 Vernacular Intellectuals**

Scholars of South Asia, especially during the British colonial period (1858-1947), have proposed the term “vernacular intellectual” to describe their careers during the rule of a foreign state. In that context, a vernacular intellectual functioned under colonial power and operated in both the language of the colonizer and their own vernacular. They mediated between discourses in these two languages, and positions of expertise in these two societies, and were forced to adapt to the

demands of the colonial authority. The work of Yogendra Malik, and Deena Khatkhate on Indian “vernacular intellectuals” helps us to understand Muge Samten’s career under China’s political power.

In Khatkhate’s account, vernacular intellectuals who are imitative often borrow ideas and values from Western culture. Those who are assimilative reform and adapt the Indian culture to meet the basic needs of the time and situation. Those who are assertive perform activities in terms of reassertion and revival of cultural values of India and seek to free Indian culture from British impact. Those who are creative are expected to think originally in the area of physical and social science. In Malik’s view, all of Khatkhate’s various types can be reduced to two categories: “normative” and “situational.” In other words, for Malik, the intellectuals whose roles were normative perform various socio-cultural activities by employing their traditional knowledge and authority to preserve Indian culture such as religious values, devotional literature, erotic poetry and challenge the status quo. And the intellectuals whose roles were situational perform various literary and political activities under foreign rule that maintain the colonial occupation in India. These distinctions fundamentally characterize the roles of vernacular intellectuals under foreign power.

According to Malik’s survey of the literature, vernacular intellectuals have been classified in various ways in terms of their roles and status under colonial power. When India was under British rule, “vernacular intellectuals” were the articulate members of the community. They also served as a link between “Eastern” and “Western” knowledge and provided a bridge between the English-speaking, westernized political elites, and local communities. Mostly importantly, they had a major impact upon social reforms and creation of political and social consciousness among the Indian public that would come to challenge the status quo.

These roles mentioned above are not restricted to Tibet and India; they could be applied to Chinese intellectuals, too. In the Chinese context, according to Timothy Cheek, intellectuals either work for the government to spread its ideology and propaganda in accordance with the political situation, or they mobilize their powers in an effort to avoid and work in opposition to the establishment. Cheek breaks this down further into four types of intellectuals under the

political dominance of PRC, which are ideological, academic, professional, and critical (Cheek, 1997, 313). Cheek's discussion of the way that a critical intellectual must function in China is similar to how vernacular intellectuals functioned under British rule. Namely, critical intellectuals attempted to preserve what they saw as best about Chinese culture through their traditional knowledge and cultural capital, but they had to be very careful and subtle in terms of mobilizing their activities. In contrast, these who are ideological chose to work for the government under less flexible political circumstances and spread political propaganda to the public.

Extending the concept of "vernacular intellectual" to Tibet, which can be considered nation occupied by China, we see that Muge Samten performed as a vernacular intellectual by taking into account both his monastic and official roles. These two roles can be analyzed through Malik's categories of "situational" and "normative" for his activities under Chinese authority. As a Tibetan vernacular intellectual, he worked within the Chinese government to introduce communist ideas and ideology to Tibet through the production of dictionaries, editing of official periodicals, and translation of government documents. In other words, he mediated between two communities and adapted to Chinese authority. But, Muge Samten also employed his monastic knowledge and authority to subtly resist China's political power for the benefit of Tibetan language, religion, and culture, when this power was exercised within his official purview. Muge Samten worked to preserve monastic religious knowledge, ceremonies, and practices through the preservation of Tibetan language. He used his official travel for political meetings to achieve these goals. While on official business at monasteries during the late Cultural Revolution (mid-1970s), for example, he would covertly participate in rituals, ordinations, and empowerments. And, when Chinese authorities finally relaxed prohibitions on Buddhist practice, this activity became even more frequent, all in service of preserving Buddhist monastic knowledge and lineages.

Muge Samten's autobiography, entitled *The Author's Reflections on His Own History*, is a rich resource to analyze his vernacular intellectual role and the extent to which he attempted to prevent the decline of Tibetan culture within the complex sociopolitical transformations of

Communist China. From his autobiography, I draw four main themes relevant to his career as a vernacular intellectual: dictionary projects, language reform, resistance, and revival. Through these themes, I will explore how he employed both his traditional knowledge and official authority to respond to the political power that the Chinese government imposed upon Tibetans and its culture. These chapters further illustrate the unequal relationship between knowledge and power that existed under the Chinese regime, and how Muge Samten's vernacular intellectual roles played out in that unequal socio-political setting. These chapters are an illustration of how Muge Samten responded to the dominant political power of Communist China.

## **1.2 Review of Scholarship on Muge Samten and His Scholarly Works**

There is a limited amount of existing scholarship on Muge Samten's life and works in English. Available papers and books briefly mention him and cite his works in relation to his scholarly contributions towards Tibetan language, historical writings, religious commentaries, political translations, and cultural revival. However, no scholar has fully analyzed his life and works, neither in English nor in Tibetan. Thus, analyzing his autobiography is critical to understanding his life and works under Communist China. A textual examination of his autobiography can further shed light on the so-called sociopolitical reforms such as the 'democratic reforms' of the early 1950s and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) implemented in Tibet as a means of assimilating Tibet into Communist China's larger political project.

His autobiography provides a fascinating window into how Muge Samten understood his own subtle interventions into Chinese colonial policy. His interventions drew on both his monastic knowledge and official authority. He saw himself as striving to protect what he defined as traditional Tibetan culture, predominantly Buddhism, against the Chinese official attempts to simplify the written language, erase particle usages, verb tenses, and to introduce Chinese punctuations to Tibetan grammar; though seemingly contradictory, these responses illustrate elements of both acquiescence and resistance. Muge Samten emphasized Tibetan language, religion and history as essential parts of traditional Tibetan culture over material culture such as monastic buildings, and infrastructure.

In Janet Upton's "Notes Towards a Native Tibetan Ethnology: An Introduction to and Annotated Translation of "Muge Samtan's Essays on Dakpo (*dwags po*)"<sup>2</sup> (2000), she translates two of Muge Samten's shorter works: "On the Question of the Dakpo (*dwags po*) Nationality (*mi rigs*)" and "A Discussion of My Views on the Matter of the Dakpo (*dwags po*) Nationality (*mi rigs*)." The original Tibetan essays were published in the Tibetan journal *Light Rain (sbrang char)* in 1981 and 1989 respectively. They challenged the official Chinese claim that "Tibetans" from the Dakpo region were not ethnically Tibetan. This claim was made in the early 1980s and the report of the Sichuan Provincial Nationalities Research Institute on "Tibetans from the Pema Region (C. Baima Zangren<sup>3</sup>)," . In Upton's introduction, she wrote:

As Muge Samten's articles attest, the claim that the Dakpo (*dwags po*) were not Tibetan was met with much disbelief on the part of Tibetan intellectuals, but he was one of the few to openly challenge the official arguments, and in doing so has provided us with a wealth of local historical and cultural information about Tibetan customs in the borderlands. (Upton 2000, 5)

In addition, Ashild Kolas and Monika Thowsen, in the co-authored book, *On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier* (2005), present Muge Samten's Dakpo argument in the context of the same term in Chinese, *minzu*, used for both "ethnic minorities"<sup>4</sup> and "nationalities" in China (2005, 37-43). They cited Muge Samten's argument that Tibetans from Dakpo area are Tibetan, not another ethnic group, for their language, customs, religious traditions, eating habits, dress, architecture, and social organization are similar.

There are extremely few instances of Tibetan scholars challenging the official representation of local Tibetan history in the early 1980s; Tibetans were still recovering from the traumatic experience of the Cultural Revolution. Keeping this in mind, Muge Samten was singularly brave in speaking out against the bizarre claim that Dakpo Tibetans were not Tibetan, challenging the official narrative. In short, these two essays authored by Muge Samten can be

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<sup>2</sup> Here I used Wylie transliteration to keep the names in Tibetan consistent.

<sup>3</sup> Baima Zangren is a Chinese term used for Dakpo (*dwags po*) Tibetans.

<sup>4</sup> The Chinese term *minzu* (民族) can mean the inhabitants of a country or the different ethnic groups within a country.

understood as a means of preserving local Tibetan history, setting an example for other Tibetan scholars to speak out against ideological misrepresentations. These essays illustrate Muge Samten's use of his cultural capital and official authority to criticize the official presentation of Tibetan local history.

In Nicole Willock's article "Tibetan Buddhist Scholars and the Cultural Revolution: Narratives of Spiritual Achievement and Supporting Tibetan Culture" (2019), she quotes passages from Muge Samten's autobiography about the Cultural Revolution, highlighting his Buddhist interpretations of his life experiences: "They seized all of our things, led us around the market and struggled against us. However, this didn't hurt my mind. I thought, this is the natural state of *samsara*" (Samten 1996, 590-591). Willock also connects Muge Samten's religious acts as in accord with Tsongkhapa's advice in "The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment," which emphasizes the importance of meditating on the flaws of cyclic existence (*samsara*) in order to develop the desire for enlightenment (Willock 2017, 9). In another article entitled "Rekindling Ashes of the Dharma and the Formation of Modern Tibetan Studies: The Busy Life of Alak Tseten Zhabdrung" in *Latse Journal* (2009-2010), Willock considers Muge Samten one of the three great scholars of twentieth century Tibet.

In contrast to Willock's conclusion that Muge Samten considered the Cultural Revolution an opportunity for "spiritual advancement," I argue that it is difficult to discern whether Muge Samten's acts were directly related to Tsongkhapa's teachings and whether or not Muge Samten studied the text as a young monk. If we look at the passages carefully and read between the lines, the text indicates that Muge Samten shouted a Buddhist prayer with a loud voice along with "Red Guards" revolutionary slogans (Samten 1996, 590-593). The text does not say that he resisted publicly, but his shouting of prayers is a kind of resistance, for he chose his own prayer and made it into a *dharma* song, an act which was not permitted during the Cultural Revolution.

In Tsering Namgyal's biography of Muge Samten Gyatso in *The Treasury of Lives* (2011), he summarizes his life and works chronologically without interpretation. In the following articles written by Pema Bhum, "'Heartbeat of a New Generation' Revisited" in *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change* (2008), and in the in the *Latse Journal*, "The Dictionary of New

Terms and Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary” (2005) and “Tibetan Language Journals and Magazines in Three Periods” (2014-2015), he mentions Muge Samten briefly in relation to modern Tibetan literature and the compilation of dictionaries and periodicals. Similarly, in Sangye Gyatso’s “Modern Tibetan Literature and the Rise of Writer Coteries” in *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change* (2008), Muge Samten is mentioned along with other Tibetan monastic scholars who had made considerable contributions to modern Tibetan literature.

Sangye Tendhar Naga’s “Aspects of Traditional Tibetan Learning” in *The Tibet Journal* (2006) highlighted Muge Samten’s works on Tibetan language and grammar. In Khagang Palden Thar’s “South Jang or Ha Stele” in *The Tibet Journal* (2005), he writes, “Muge Samten claimed that Jang referred to the Jang people in Yunnan who were initially conquered by Tibetan dynastic rulers and later became close to Tibetans and their habits, religion, custom, and tradition” (61). In Elliot Sperling’s “Tibetan Buddhism, Perceived and Imagined along the Ming-Era Sino-Tibetan Frontier” in *Buddhism Between Tibet & China* (2009), he also cited Muge Samten’s “eight great plains” arguments about the border areas between the two territories.

Besides Upton’s translations and Willock’s interpretations of Muge Samten, Muge Samten is referred to without any critical analysis. As I mentioned earlier, there is a curious lack of scholarship on Muge Samten in English considering his importance in the development of modern Tibetan language, to say nothing of his individual acts of subtle resistance. In Tibetan language as yet there are no reviews of his scholarly works besides commemorations organized by the coalitions of local government, education institutions, and his students. For example, they organized Muge Samten’s Centennial Conference at Southwestern University of Nationalities in 2014, and another cultural conference on Muge Samten in 2016.

A Tibetan professor, Palmo<sup>5</sup> (*dpal mo*), from Northwestern University of Nationalities published a brief summary of the remarks made about Muge Samten by Tibetan scholars at the

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<sup>5</sup> Palmo is a professor at the Northwest Nationalities University in Lanzhou. She is also a prominent Tibetan female writer whose works have been published widely in literary magazines including *Dang Char* (*sbrang char*), *Tibetan Art and Literature* (*dod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*) and others. In 2006, she published an anthology of poems by

Centennial Conference on the China-Tibet Website. Alak Dorshi (*a lags dor zhi*) described Muge Samten's excellent scholarly skills in writing, teaching, and debating (Buddhist debate), noting that he was a pioneer in terms of preserving the Tibetan language, especially through averting the language reform proposed by the State. Alak Dorshi further notes that Muge Samten possessed the "trinity" of integrity, courage, and altruism in his work of preserving Tibetan language, culture, religion, and history during the darkest period of Tibetan history.

According to Palmo's note, one of Muge Samten's disciples, Dong Yonten Gyatso, (*ldong yon tan rgya mtsho*) considered Muge Samten the second Thonmi Sambhota (*thon mi sam bho ta*), who is recognized as the inventor of Tibetan scripts in 7<sup>th</sup> century. These summaries available in Tibetan language provide a glimpse of the significance of Muge Samten's life and works, however they fail to analyze specific texts or projects.

Of note is difference in the way that Muge Samten is presented in English and Tibetan. In English, the particular works that he produced are analyzed, highlighting specific aspects of his life and work in the context of the Cultural Revolution and the nationality classification projects of the early 1980s. In contrast, in Tibetan language scholarship, his scholarly life and works are praised without discussing any particular works that he produced, but recognizing him as a "preserver" of Tibetan culture and language. In the end, although scholarship touches upon some of Muge Samten's writings on Tibetan local history, Tibetan language, and his perspective on the Cultural Revolution, none examine his entire body of work. It is vital to analyze at least one of his works in its entirety. Here I examine his complete autobiography as essential and new contribution to an understanding of his life and works.

Regarding the paucity of literature on Muge Samten's life and works in English and Tibetan, one factor is that Tibetan Studies in the west has tended to focus on central Tibet, not the regions of Kham and Amdo. And so, the materials accumulated and published by missionaries, travelers, diplomats and journalists in the west over the centuries generally pertain

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twenty-three Tibetan women writers living inside and outside Tibet called Sholung (*gszho lung*), named for the ornamental metal double-hook worn by nomad women on their belts to carry milk buckets.



to central Tibet. Adding to this is the lack of interest in literary developments inside Tibet since the 1950's in western scholarship, particularly concerning contemporary Tibetan scholars, language, and literature (Shakya 2006, 9). As Muge Samten was a contemporary scholar from Amdo, having spent most of his life there, it is not surprising that he has not been a subject of scholarly study.

As Muge Samten's writings embrace history, language, religion, culture, medicine and poetry in Tibetan language, an interdisciplinary approach is needed to understand his life. His autobiography narrates chronologically the literary works that he produced during his lifetime under various political, social and religious settings of China. I will approach his autobiography from historical, religious, and social perspectives while employing close reading as a method, since Muge Samten's autobiography is borne out of a series of texts. Through textual analysis, Muge Samten's responses to and recollections of the vast transformations affecting Tibetan language and religion can be understood.

Lastly, it is critical to understand that there was pervasive political control of literary production in Tibet, and thus scholars had to perform assigned tasks under repressive conditions. Thus, as Lama Jabb has said, "we need to be acutely aware of double meaning, ambiguities, and coded language concealed within their writings" (2015, 25). We must understand that Muge Samten's autobiography also is full of such ambiguities and coded meanings. It is precisely through acknowledging these meanings that we are able to discern Muge Samten's use of his monastic knowledge and his official position within the government; doing so reveals elements of his resistance to the political forces.

### **1.3 The Structure of Muge Samten's Autobiography**

While Tibetan literature embodies both religious and secular themes, religious life-writing has been the dominant literary genre. The introduction of Buddhism to Tibet and subsequent proliferation of monastic communities, followed by the flourishing of Buddhist studies and lineages, can be considered the basis of the vast production of religious life-writing in Tibetan history. Religious masters, incarnates, abbots, and scholars are often the main contributors to this genre and they can be found in either biographical or autobiographical forms.

Religious life writing also developed into various subgenres such as “legendary stories” (*rgos brjod*),<sup>6</sup> “birth stories” (*skyes rabs*),<sup>7</sup> and “biography” (*rnam thar*). Recently, the emergence of memoirs by ordinary Tibetans, including laypeople, former political prisoners, former government officials and others, represent an additional and significant body of life-writing, particularly in the time since the China’s occupation of Tibet. These latter genres not associated with religious life, rather, they are personal stories. These life writings are called variously “life story,” “personal history,” or “memoirs.”<sup>8</sup>

In Tibetan literature, religious life writing can be further subdivided into three types: biography (*rnam thar*), autobiography (*rang rnam*), and secret biography (*sang rnam*). Their theme concern the subjects' spiritual liberation from suffering, or *khora ba* (S. *samsara*),<sup>9</sup> through their religious practice. Tibetan autobiographies or biographies can vary widely in terms of their contents and styles, but they mainly are concerned with miracles at the time of birth, significant life events, devotion to religious studies, religious practices and their religious awakening in the quest toward enlightenment. Even though religious themes are pervasive in both autobiographies and biographies, some religious leaders blend political events into biographies, such as in the case of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s autobiography.

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<sup>6</sup> *rgos brjod* is applied generically to (S. *avadāna*) stories of former lives of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but it is also used for lay politicians as well, such as Khalon Thokjol (*bka' blon rgo brjod*), an autobiography of Dokhar Pa Tsering Wangyal (*mdo mkhar ba tshe ring dbang rgyal*, 1697-1763), was an eighteenth century lay official who served in a number of offices such as district commissioner of Shigatse, and chamberlain and secretary to the Taktse Regent (*stag rtse de si*), eventually rising to the position of Cabinet Minister under the rule of Polhane. He was also a celebrated literary figure and polymath, with interests ranging from Sanskrit poetics, Tibetan grammar and esoteric tantric practices. He is credited with writing what is arguably the first Tibetan novel, *The Tale of the Incomparable Prince* (*gzhon nu zla med kyi rtam gyud*, 1718).

<sup>7</sup> *skyes rabs* or birth stories (S. *jātaka*), or defined groups of stories of the lives of immediate lives of the Buddha and other important teachers.

<sup>8</sup> Pema Bhum’s “*Six Stars with a Crooked Neck*”, Dawa Norbu’s “*Tibet: The Road Ahead*”, Naktsang Nulo’s “*My Tibetan Childhood*”, and Melvyn Goldstein’s “*A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phuntso Wangye*” are some examples of ordinary Tibetans’ life writing stories, beside the traditional literature of thokjol (*rgos brjod*), songrab (*skyes rabs*), and namthar (*rnam thar*) that are commonly used.

<sup>9</sup> In Tibetan, *khora ba* means circle of existence, it is often translated as *Samsāra*. Samsara in Buddhism carries the idea of the condition of suffering and endless rebirth.

However, Muge Samten's autobiography is highly idiosyncratic in that it does not fall into any of the usual categories, in spite of his religious life and rather typical monastic studies. Instead, his autobiography includes a blend of religious, political, and social activities, most of which occurred under the rule of Communist China. Perhaps it is significant that his life story is entitled the *Author's Reflections on His Own History* and went as far as saying that his personal history was not meant as a traditional biography (*rnam thar*):

Many of my students consistently asked me to write a *rnam thar* these days, but I believe that *rnam thar* is concerned with the enlightened state by means of complete practice of the true path showing full liberation through cessation of suffering. Someone like me, who is full of delusions, attachments, and hatred, without having received full teachings and experienced awakening, has nothing valuable to share with the world. (Samten 1996, 527)

The reason why Muge Samten does not consider his autobiography a *rnam thar* is an interesting point to consider. He quotes the Fifth Dalai Lama's<sup>10</sup> criticism of *rnam thar* writing that they are full of rhetoric, self-promoting ideas, distorted meanings and false claims (Samten 1996, 527). He further adds that it is not a virtuous act if one writes promoting one's own image, trying to find faults of others and imposing distorted speech upon others in one's *namthar*. These actions can lead to affliction and generate bad karma.

Muge Samten, however, also added that it is crucial to write autobiography by quoting another Buddhist scholar, Yongthong Dorjee Palsang (*g.yung ston rdo rje dpal sang*)<sup>11</sup>:

Most of the *rnam thar* written by students are full of effusive praises of their masters and that often dissimulates or distorts the real image of the master's life. That is why,

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<sup>10</sup> Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (*ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–1682*) was the Fifth Dalai Lama, and the first Dalai Lama to wield effective temporal and spiritual power over all Tibet. He is often referred to simply as the Great Fifth, being a key religious and temporal leader of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibet. He is credited with unifying all Tibet after a Mongol military intervention which ended a protracted era of civil wars. As an independent head of state, he established diplomatic relations with China and other regional countries. He produced 24 volumes of scholarly and religious works on a wide range of subjects in Tibetan.

<sup>11</sup> Yungton Dorjee Palsang (*g.yung ston rdo rje dpal sang*) was born in Tsongdu in 1284. He was a disciple of Surton Jampa Sangay (*zur ston byams pa sangs rgyas*), who gave him the important Nyingma tantras of Gongpa Dupai Do and the Dzogchen Semde. He composed a highly regarded commentary on the (*S. Guhyagarbha*) titled "*the Clear Mirror*". He also studied with a number of important teachers, including Buton Rinchen drub (*bu ston rin chen grub– 1364*) and Rangjung Dojee, the Third Karmapa (1290 – 1364).

it is important to write your own story, briefly, by yourself, and without any exaggerations. (Samten 1996, 528)

Muge Samten makes two important points regarding *rnam thar* writing: first, he does not want to write a story that consists of self-promotion, rhetoric, and false speech; second, he views writing his own story without including any exaggerations as significant. Muge Samten writes, “I will briefly tell my story, for if I tell my story, or my personal history, and tell of the worldly changes that happened during that time period, it will be a good resource and material for others to analyze and assess the past history in the future” (Samten 1996, 528).

There are three vital points associated with his reasons for writing an autobiography. These are ‘the story of his existence,’ ‘the changes that occurred during his lifetime,’ and ‘the source materials for analyzing the past history.’ He intended his autobiography to enable future generations to analyze the historical circumstances and the enormous political, social, and cultural transformation that occurred throughout Tibet during his lifetime, and thus, to be used for understanding life in Tibet under China’s occupation. He presents himself as an example of how one had to respond to the occupation and to shifts in political power, how one had to navigate life as a traditionally trained scholar-monk under the Communist regime.

Muge Samten’s autobiography is one hundred eighty-two pages in length including an additional fifteen pages describing his funeral as added by his disciples. The full name of his life story is translated as *The Author’s Reflections on His Own History (rtsom pa po rang gi byung ba brjod pa rang gsal a dar sha zhes bya ba bzhugs so)*. As I mentioned earlier, Muge Samten did not consider his life story a *rnam thar* but considered it a “story of existence.” Referring to it as “self-mirrored,” suggests that the story reflects clarity, authenticity, and honesty to readers.

His autobiography is written chronologically with specific dates of the events in which he took part. As such, it is divided into eight chapters including ‘On My Birth’, ‘Becoming a Monk and Joining Muge Tashi Khorlo monastery’, ‘About Studying at Labrang Monastery’, ‘Visiting Beijing in the name of the Secretary of Labrang Tashi monastery (*blab rang bkra shis khyil*) and Becoming a Government Official’, ‘Becoming a Teacher at Muge Tashi Khorlo (*dmu dge bkra shis khor lo*) monastery’, ‘Working at Mangya Press’, ‘Great Works as a Member of Provincial

Political Bureaus and Vice-Chairman of the Prefecture Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference', and the final chapter, 'Addition of the Funeral'.

The chapters about his birth, monkhood, Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery, and Labrang Monastery are concerned with his family background, his monastic studies, his teachers, monastic accomplishments and his legacy in the monastic communities (Samten 1996, 528-569). These chapters are about how he achieved cultural capital within monastic communities during the early years of his life prior to the communist takeover of Tibet.

The subsequent chapters deal with Muge Samten's visit to Beijing, work as a government official, work at Mangya press, life as a member of the provincial CPPCC Standing Committee and his role as the Vice President of the Prefecture Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. These sections are concerned with the political, cultural, social changes brought to Tibet by China in the attempt to integrate Tibet and its people into modern China. The second to last chapter has a political title but is actually about his contributions to the religious revival of the 1980's and only briefly discusses language reforms and dictionary projects.

I categorize these chapters into four main themes of dictionary projects, language reform, resistance, and revival because they encompass the situational and normative roles that Muge Samten performed in various political situations. Through these categories, I explore how he employed both his traditional knowledge and official authority to respond to the political power that the Chinese government imposed upon Tibetans. These chapters further illustrate the unequal relationship between knowledge and power that existed under the Chinese regime, and how Muge Samten's situational and normative roles played out in that unequal socio-political setting. These chapters explore his response to China's occupation of Tibet.

#### **1.4 His Birthplace and Monastic Studies**

Muge Samten's birth year, 1913, was a momentous year in Tibetan political history. British India and the Tibetan government in Lhasa signed the Shimla Accord asserting that Tibet was not under Chinese rule. As such, in that year, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso (*thub bstan rgya mtsho*) declared independence after returning from India following three years of exile

(Shakabpa 1976, 629-640). Even though Muge Samten was not directly affected by these events, the complex political situation in central Tibet at that time would come to negatively impact Tibetans in the eastern regions of Tibet, namely Kham and Amdo.

Amdo (*a mdo*), Muge Samten's geographical birthplace, is a critical region in the Tibetan cultural sphere because of its importance to its overall scholastic and political influence, in large part stemming from the immense monastic-complexes that functioned like cities unto themselves. From the fifteenth century onwards, this region became a political and religious power center for both Mongols and Manchus. Also, for centuries, Amdo was neither under Chinese nor Tibetan government. It had been autonomous, ruled by their local monasteries and chieftains.

Amdo itself is a historical term which can be traced back to the twelfth century, meaning "periphery" or "borderland," based on an understanding of Tibet as constituted of *chol kha gsum*: the three traditional provinces of Utsang, Kham, and Amdo. As Lama Jabb stated, since 1959, the land of the three traditional provinces "roughly corresponds to the Tibetan plateau and is composed of Tibetan territories now incorporated into the five different Chinese provinces of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan, and Sichuan" (2015, 42).

Muge Samten was born to a family named Gyongme Khorkotsang (*gyong smad 'khor lo tshang*) in a place called Muge (*dmu dge*), which is in present-day Zungchu County, Ngawa Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China. In his autobiography, he considers his birth place within the traditional geographical demarcation of Tibet, "Tibet, the upper region, is said to resemble a reservoir lake, the middle region, channels, and the lower region, fertile fields. My birth place is the land of forests" (Samten 1996, 529). He further wrote that the people of his birthplace originated from central Tibet, the descendents of those soldiers who stayed after the Tang army was defeated at the border area during the Tibetan imperial period (Samten, 1996). From this it is clear that modern Chinese geopolitical divisions did not hold much importance in Muge Samten's view of his early life.

He learned basic Tibetan reading and Buddhist teachings from both his father and his uncle, Je Lobzang Choden Pel Zangpo, (*rje blo bzang chos ldan dpal bzang po*) who previously

served as abbot at Amchok Tsenyi Monastery<sup>12</sup> (*a mchog mtshan nyid dgon*), and later served as abbot at Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery<sup>13</sup> (*dmu dge bkra shis 'khor lo dgon*). Muge Samten joined Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery when he was eleven years old with the encouragement of his grandfather and uncle.

Muge Tashi Khorlo monastery was founded by the well-known Buddhist scholar Tsakho Ngawang Drakpa<sup>14</sup> (*tsha kho ngag dbang grags pa*), who was one of the main disciples as well as the secretary of Geluk school founder and reformer Tsongkhapa<sup>15</sup> (*rje tsong kha pa*). Later, he came to Amdo to spread Buddhism and to build Geluk Buddhist institutions in particular. Muge Tashi Khorlo was one of them. This monastery was gifted to the Second Jamyang Shepa<sup>16</sup> (*'jam dbyangs bzhad pa*) later, and it became a branch of Labrang monastery<sup>17</sup> (*bla brang dgon pa*). At Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery, Muge Samten studied various Buddhist texts on rhetoric and literature, the root text on tenets, the doctrine of Buddhist paths and stages, and so on.

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<sup>12</sup> mchog mtshan nyid dgon was founded in 1823 by Amchok Kunchok Tenpai Gyaltzen. The monastery is located in Aba (Ngawa) county in Sichuan province, China.

<sup>13</sup> Dmu dge bkra shis khor lo dgon was founded by Tsakho Ngawang Drakpa in 1397 and is located in Aba (Ngawa) county in Sichuan province, China.

<sup>14</sup> Tsakho Ngawang Drakpa (*tsha kho ngag dbang grags pa*) is one of the main disciples of Je Tsongkhapa. He later played a key role in terms of establishing Geluk schools and disseminating Geluk tradition in Amdo, eastern Tibet.

<sup>15</sup> Tsongkhapa (*tsong kha pa, 1357–1419*) was born in Amdo. He was a famous teacher of Tibetan Buddhism, and whose activities led to the formation of the Geluk school in Tibet. He is also known by his ordained name Losang Drakpa or simply as "Je Rinpoche". He published two main treatises called *Lamrim Chenmo* and *Ngakrim Chenmo*. Through his students and himself, he made an extremely significant impact on the development of Buddhism in Tibet and his influence extended to Mongolia and China at large.

<sup>16</sup> Jamyang Konchog Jigme Wangpo (*jam dbyangs dkon mchog jigs med dbang po, 1728-1791*) was born in a noble family at a place called Dechen Drampa Nang in southern Amdo. During his life time, he introduced course and established schools for tantric studies in Amchok monastery, Tashi Gephel monastery, Meshulkarpo Shong monastery, and Muge monastery. In addition, he headed and maintained nearly forty monasteries in Amdo. He composed works on a variety of subjects that include hagiography, philosophy, Buddhist cosmology, and sadhana. His collected works run to over twelve volumes.

<sup>17</sup> Labrang monastery is located in Xiahe County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu, in the traditional Tibetan area of Amdo. It is the largest monastery in the traditional Tibetan region of Amdo and established in 1709 by first Jamyang Shepa Ngawang Tsongdru. The monastery is situated at the strategic intersection of two major Asian cultures, Tibetan and Mongolian. In the early 20th century, it housed several thousand monks. Labrang was also a gathering point for numerous annual religious festivals and was the seat of a Tibetan power base that strove to maintain regional autonomy through the shifting alliances and bloody conflicts that took place between 1700 and 1950.

When Muge Samten turned twenty-two (1935), he joined Labrang Monastery, founded in 1709 by the First Jamyang Zhepa<sup>18</sup> (*'jam dbyangs bzhad pa*). Labrang Monastery was an ideal place for Muge Samten to advance his studies of Buddhism, while also avoiding the political strife in his hometown. In the following year, there was an influx of Red Army soldiers from Shusang Chang. As a result, some monks escaped to join Labrang monastery (Samten 1996, 541). As the situation in his hometown declined, Muge Samten also left to join Labrang monastery with a local Tulku called Gyatso (*sprul sku rgya mtsho*); he did not receive permission from his family to leave.

According to his autobiography, he initially rented a room at the private house of Yongzin Kalsang Paljor Sangpo<sup>19</sup> (*yongs 'dzin skal bzang dpal 'byor bzang po*) and joined Thosam Ling college. He also started studying under the guidance of a teacher called Konchok Samdrub (*dkon mchog bsam 'grub*), later the teacher of the Sixth Jamyang Shepa, Jamyang Lobzang Jigme Tubten Chokyi Nyima<sup>20</sup> (1948-). He also had a vivid memory of the particular year that the Ninth Panchen Lobsang Chokyi Nyima Gelek Namgyal<sup>21</sup> (*pan chen blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma dge legs rnam rgyal, 1883-1937*) visited Labrang Monastery and gave teachings on the Kālachakra Tantra. He also noted that the Second World War was imminent, revealing that Muge Samten had at least some knowledge of current events beyond Tibet.

After a few years of studying dialectics at Labrang monastery, Muge Samten began further studies of the five major treatises including the perfection of wisdom (S.

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<sup>18</sup> Jamyang Shepa Ngawang Tsondu (*jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson grus, 1648 - 1721*) is one of the six incarnate teachers, or "tulkus" of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. Each has been among the most prestigious teachers at Labrang Tashi khyil monastery in Amdo, (now in Gansu province, China). The scholarly works of the first Jamyang Shepa are still studied in monastic colleges today, especially his '*Great Exposition of the Middle Way*', a textbook for study of Madhyamika philosophy, and his '*Great Exposition of Tenets*', which sets forth the Gelugpa presentation of the (*S. Prasangika-Madhyamika*) view of emptiness.

<sup>19</sup> Muge Samten wrote a short biography (p. 405-435) of Yongzin Kalsang Paljor Sangpo in the first volume of his scholarly work collections.

<sup>20</sup> Jamyang Lobzang Jigme Thubten Chokyi Nyima (1948) was born in Gangca (*Kangtsha*) in Qinghai and is the 6th Jamyang Shepa Rinpoche. He is the head of Labrang monastery and also the Deputy Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Society.

<sup>21</sup> Thubten Choekyi Nyima (1883–1937) was the Ninth Panchen Lama of Tibet. Thubten Choekyi Nyima is the 9th in his lineage, as recognized by Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, the traditional seat of Panchen Lamas.



*prajñāpāramitā*), middle way (S. *mādhyamaka*), valid cognition (S. *pramāṇa*), phenomenology (S. *abhidharma*), and monastic disciplines (S. *vinaya*) under prominent monastic scholars. His main tutors at the monastery were Khen Rinpoche Ngawang Gelek (mkhan rin po ngag dbang dge legs), Jigme Trinle Gyatso (*jigs med 'phrin las rgya mtsho* 1849-1946), and Geshe Ngawa Monlam (*dge bshes rnga ba smon lam*) (Samten, 1996). Studying under these scholars wasn't free and required that services be provided. Muge Samten wrote:

I studied under Geshe Ngawa Monlam. I performed good services for him. I sewed his old clothes, I tended the fire, collected firewood, and searched for books. I also studied hard and he was pleased with my diligence. (Samten 1996, 547)

Muge Samten also studied other traditional fields of knowledge including language, poetry, history, astronomy, and calligraphy under the guidance of Geshe Okyil Jamyang Lekshe (*dge bshes oM 'khyil 'jam dbyangs legs bshad*)

When Muge Samten turned thirty-two, the Fifth Jamyang Shepa Lobsang Jamyang Yeshi Tenpai Gyaltzen<sup>22</sup> (1916-1947) returned to Labrang from Lhasa and established a monastic school at Labrang. He then assigned Muge Samten schoolmaster, responsible for teaching poetry and grammar. Muge Samten initially declined the position, but changed his mind when Jamyang Shepa said the following to him:

In these days, political revolution is becoming pervasive globally, like ocean waves ebbing and flowing. Because of my previous karma, I am designated to this great position and thus I am encouraged not to ignore the wellbeing of our community. People are spreading rumors. You students have been selected as the best, and I hope that you will all study hard. I even assigned Muge Samten, who is excellent in both religious and secular scholarship, to lead you all. I hope you all respect him and follow his guidance. (Samten 1996, 563)

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<sup>22</sup> The Fifth Jamyang Shepa Lobsang Jamyang Yeshi Tenpai Gyaltzen was born in late 1916 in Tsema Dong, one of eight small towns in the Litang region. He received the designation of (*M.Hutuktu*) and a golden seal from the Government of Beijing in 1933. He was appointed the president of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission in 1938 by the Republican government of China. He established schools and granted permission at his monastery in order to preserve Tibetan traditions. He passed away at the age of thirty-three in 1947 in Amdo, Tibet.

Muge Samten also mentioned that Jamyang Shepa used to tell him regularly that even though the condition of Buddhism was like a lamp that is becoming extinguished without oil, he employed every means to preserve it. (Samten 1996, 563).

In 1948, two years after Muge Samten received his Geshe degree, the People's Liberation Army came to Labrang and held a so-called "liberation meeting" at the monastery. Muge Samten attended the meeting. After it, Muge Samten left Labrang monastery and went to Beijing. At Beijing, he met Geshe Sherab Gyatso (*shes rab rgya mtsho*) who advised him to work for Chinese government:

In 1950, when I was 37, I went to Beijing with Geshe Sherab Gyatso<sup>23</sup> (*dge bshes shes rab rgya mtsho*) and some high placed Xinjiang officials... As I like education, I wanted to go to a school to learn Chinese and English, but Yang Jingren<sup>24</sup> said that I should become an official because they [the government] needed me. Especially since Sichuan, Kham and Central Tibet were not liberated yet, Tibetan language work and Tibetan officials were very critical for them. Geshe Sherab Gyatso asked me to accept the request, and also said that I could work in support of religion and for Tibetans with a role as a government official. (Samten 1996, 574-575)

Jamyang Zhepa's tireless efforts of using every means to preserve Tibetan Buddhism and Geshe Sherab Gyatso's advice to accept the government official post influenced Muge Samten to be flexible and resilient, according to the socio-political situation in Tibet in the following years. There are at least two possible interpretations of the teachers' advice. Jamyang Zhepa is suggesting that to preserve Tibetan Buddhism, one must go to great lengths in spite of the

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<sup>23</sup> Geshe Sherab Gyatso (1884–1968), was a Tibetan religious teacher and a politician who served in the Chinese government in the 1950s. He associated himself first with the Nationalist Government of Republic of China and then with the Communist of People's Republic of China. He held a number of government posts in Tibetan areas under the People's Republic of China. He was also initially the vice-president and later the president of the Buddhist Association of China; the latter position he held until 1966. He was imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution and died in 1968. 9

<sup>24</sup> Yang Jingren (1918 – 2001) was a high-ranking government official of People's Republic of China. He was born in Lanzhou, Gansu Province in China. He was the head of the United Front Work Department from 1982 to 1985. He also had been the vice chairman of 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> CPPCC, National Committee (1988-1998), member of 13<sup>th</sup> CPC, Central Committee (1987-1992), vice-chairman of 6<sup>th</sup> CPPCC, National Committee (1983-1988), member of 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> CPC, Central Committee (1977-1987). In addition, he was one of the key figures working with Tibetan government in Lhasa and Tibetan religious leaders to legitimize China's invasion of Tibet in the early 1950s as mentioned in Muge Samten's autobiography.

imposing political circumstances. Geshe Sherab Gyatso's advice persuaded Muge Samten to act according to the situation, indicating that he should work within the system with for the benefit of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetans. Therefore, both Jamyang Shepa and Geshe Sherab Gyatso prompted Muge Samten to employ his monastic knowledge and official authority to respond to China's occupation. The four main themes mentioned above will frame the analysis of Muge Samten's response to the political authority of Communist China.

## Chapter 2: Dictionary Projects

At the behest of Communist China, Muge Samten and other Tibetan scholar-monks compiled bilingual dictionaries such as the first four volumes of *The Dictionary of New Terms* for official use, and later they worked upon the several editions of the *Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary* and translated important government documents into Tibetan for wide distribution, including the 1954 Chinese constitution and Chairman Mao's speeches. They were also put to work translating selected articles from Chinese periodicals, such as the *People's Pictorial*, recompiled into separate Tibetan magazine issues. Although they did this as part of the Chinese government's efforts to introduce communist ideas and political ideologies to the Tibetans, such translations served to transform preexisting knowledge systems. Vernacular intellectuals were key players in the introduction and adaptation of new knowledge to Tibetans.

Despite Muge Samten's engagement with these political projects, we are also able to observe the nuance and subtlety of his reactions to them. For example, in his account of attending a meeting for compiling bilingual dictionaries, he used language that indicated he had no choice, such as 'I had to' and 'I was asked.' This language also conveys his reluctance to engage in these projects. Yet, he was part of producing the linguistic apparatus through these dictionary projects that would help to subjugate traditional Tibetan knowledge systems. Modified Tibetan cultural worldviews were thus made possible by the standardization of a new political language. This chapter provides the historical background of the Muge Samten's involvement in these dictionary projects.

### 2.1 How Scholars Monks Introduced Communism to Tibet

When Communist China invaded Tibet in the 1950s, the state faced difficulties integrating Tibet into its political systems. For Communist China, governing Tibet and its people required a complete reshaping of administrative, linguistic, ideological, and political systems. It had limited exposure to modernity or its discourses prior to this invasion. As Tsering Shakya writes, "Tibet has for centuries remained culturally and socially isolated from the major political events of the world, and 20th-century political phenomena such as socialism and nationalism had no major

impact on Tibetan society or on the development of Tibetan culture” (2006, 157). Communist political ideas were totally foreign to the vast majority of the Tibetan people in the three provinces of Tibet as defined in the vernacular (*chol kha gsum*): Utsang, Kham, and Amdo.<sup>25</sup> There were no words for communicating communist political ideas to Tibetans. To address this, Chinese Communist Party’s Publishing House of Minority Nationalities (*Minzu Chubanshe*, 民族出版社)<sup>26</sup>, and their regional publishing houses such as Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House (C. *Qinghai minzu chuban she*, 青海民族出版社), Gansu Nationalities Publishing House (C. *Gansu minzu chuban she*, 甘肃民族出版社), Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House (C. *Sichuan minzu chuban she*, 四川民族出版社), and Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House (C. *Yunan minzu chuban she*, 云南民族出版社), began to translate communist ideological materials and administrative documents into Tibetan. This was a significant alteration of the language and can be considered another kind of invasion. These four major Nationalities Publishing Houses controlled all literary publications inside Tibet and did not publish any sensitive materials in the Tibetan language.

Muge Samten, and his team of scholar-monks in Beijing, were involved in *both* the translation of documents and compilation of dictionaries (based on those translations) that would become the standard for the Tibetan language from that time onward. For these translations and dictionaries to become a reality, the Chinese government required the cooperation of Tibetan monastic scholars. Tibetan traditional intellectuals who were key figures in the dictionary projects included Geshe Sherab Gyatso (1884-1968), Tsetan Zhabdrung (1910-1985), Sungrab Gyatso (1896-1982), Dorjee Gyalpo (1913-1992), Jamphel Gyatso (1938-), Horkhang Sonam Palbar (1919-1994), Muge Samten (1913-1993), and Thubten Nyima (1943-). Their deep knowledge of Tibetan and their cooperation were critical. I call this group the “dictionary team.” As will be discussed below, one of the most powerful documents Muge Samten and these scholar-monks were involved with—which also served as a source for dictionary terms—was the

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<sup>25</sup> The Tibetan Empire was divided into three provinces (*chol kha gsum*): Utsang, Amdo and Kham. The names are still widely used both inside and outside Tibet. Tibetan government-in-exile still claims that these three regions constitute Tibet.

<sup>26</sup> The Publishing House of Minority Nationalities is a publishing house established in 1953, as a division of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission.

translation of Mao's speech at Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. The underlying concepts of the speech were to encourage the writers to reflect the life of the working class and to serve politics and the advancement of socialism. Later, the speech introduced the style, purpose, and outcome of literature to contemporary Tibetan writers and largely influenced their writings in Tibetan language.

In the 1950s, after China had strengthened its control over Tibet, the government started recruiting Tibetan intellectuals to work on dictionary projects with the goal of producing a new language capable of integrating Tibetans into a new political structure. Tibetan scholar-monks, intellectuals in the traditional sense, were brought to Beijing, most of them in their yellow and red monastic robes, to work with the officials and technocrats of the central Chinese government. In 1952, at an office in the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing, one imagines these scholar-monks sitting in chairs, working at desks, handling standard A4 paper, making carbon copies, possibly for the first time in their lives. Tibetan and Chinese translators started creating lists of corresponding Chinese and Tibetan terms, which sometimes involved establishing new Tibetan words (Bhum 2005, 14). *The Dictionary of New Terms in Four Volumes (tha snyad gсар sgrig deb bzhe)*<sup>27</sup> was compiled and published in 1950s. The volumes were only circulated amongst translators and government officials, not the general public. The first volume of *The Dictionary of New Terms* was printed 1954 with more than 2,000 entries, including terms like “Communist Party” (*gung khran tang*), “chairman” (*gtso dzin*), “bourgeois” (*'byor ldan gral rim*), “class” (*tal rim*), and so forth. The second volume was published in 1955, a third volume in 1957, followed by a fourth volume later that same year. All of them were not made for the public or for wide distribution like the “Chinese-Tibetan Dictionaries” published later, based upon these ‘new terms’ and were distributed across Tibet.

According to Pema Bhum, the terms in the second volume of the “New Terms” were selected from Tibetan translations of nine documents covering law, administration, and government systems, including the 1954 *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (C.

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<sup>27</sup> These four dictionaries of new terms later become the basis of the “Chinese-Tibetan Dictionaries.”

*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xianfa*, 中华人民共和国宪法).<sup>28</sup> Geshe Sherab Gyatso, a Drepung Monastery-trained Geshe<sup>29</sup> who was debating partner to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, is said to have reviewed the Tibetan translations carefully prior to printing them. In the early 1950s, Geshe Sherab Gyatso was appointed deputy Chairman of the PRC's Qinghai Provincial Government and he would play a major role in terms of bringing Tibet into alignment with modern China.

Entries in the third volume of the “New Terms” were issued for the Second and Third Plenaries of the First National People's Congress in China.<sup>30</sup> Terms in the fourth volume came from more than thirty translations published by the Nationalities Publishing House from 1954 to 1956, including Mao's speeches at the Forum on Culture at Yen'an.<sup>31</sup> This forum significantly impacted the selection literary subjects in Tibetan language for Tibetan writers, the direction of writers' thought, and even writing style. For the fourth volume, translations of selected articles from magazines like the *Peoples Pictorial*<sup>32</sup> (C. *Renmin huabao* 人民画报) and *Nationalities Pictorial* (C. *Minzu huabao* 民族画报) made by Muge Samten and his “magazine team” (see below for the other members) provided the raw material for dictionary entries (Bhum 2005, 13-

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<sup>28</sup> *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China*. is nominally the supreme law within China. The current version was adopted by the Fifth National People's Congress on December 4, 1982, with further revisions in 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004 and 2018. The Constitution has five sections which are the preamble, general principles, fundamental rights and duties of citizens, structure of the state, the national flag and the emblems of the state.

<sup>29</sup> Geshe (*dge bshes*) means teacher literally in Tibetan. However, it is commonly used as a Tibetan Buddhist academic degree for monks. The degree is emphasized primarily by Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>30</sup> The First National People's Congress was from 1954 to 1959. During the first session in 1954, the Congress passed the 1954 Constitution of the People's Republic of China. They also elected the state leaders such as Chairman of the People's Republic of China, Vice Chairman of the People's Republic of China, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Premier of the State Council, and others.

<sup>31</sup> The Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art (C. *Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui* 延安文艺座谈会) was held in May 1942 in the city of Yan'an. The speeches given by Mao Zedong at the Forum were later edited, published, and distributed across China. Mao's speeches addressed the role of literature and art in China, highlighting the two notions that all art should reflect the life of the working class and that art should serve to advance socialism. The Tibetan translation of these speeches brought great chances to Tibetan literature and Tibetan writers in terms of integrating them into Chinese political landscape.

<sup>32</sup> *People's Pictorial* is also known as *China Pictorial*. It was first published in 1950 as a Chinese monthly magazine. Its publication was allowed during the Cultural Revolution and it was instrumental in promoting the revolution and fulfillment of the political agenda of the Communist China.

15). Again, these four volumes were only circulated among official translators and were not available to the general public.

These four volumes of the “New Terms” laid the foundation for three editions of a dictionary for broader official use: the *Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary* (T. *bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*; C. *Zang han zidian* 藏汉字典). This dictionary was printed by government publishing houses and made available to every government office throughout Tibet. The publishing houses of minority nationalities<sup>33</sup> of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, Yunnan were the main distribution points for the published dictionary, which became the primary reference text of political administration of Tibet and for political terms in Tibetan. These dictionary projects eventually standardized Tibetan terms for facilitating political control of Tibet in all levels of administrations. The first edition of the *Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary* was published in 1964 with more than 31,000 entries, the second edition was printed in 1976 with more than 53,000 entries, and finally the latest edition was published in 1991 with 80,000 entries. In establishing a pervasive language of political administration throughout Tibet, the government established uniform means of political communication. The implementation of this language was critical to the integration of Tibetan people into a new Chinese political landscape.

## 2.2 Muge Samten, A Monk in Beijing

Muge Samten became an official by accident. One might say he was in the right place at the right time. According to Muge Samten’s account, he had accompanied Geshe Sherab Gyatso<sup>34</sup> on a trip to Beijing, with the hope of attending school to learn Chinese and English. After he arrived, however, Yang Jingren recruited him to be a government official. Yang told him that the Chinese

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<sup>33</sup> The Publishing House of Minority Nationalities (C. *Minzu Chubanshe*, 民族出版社) is established in 1953 as a division of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. This house oversees the literary production of minority languages across China.

<sup>34</sup> Geshe Sherab Gyatso (1884–1968), was a Tibetan religious teacher and a politician who served in the Chinese government in the 1950s. He associated himself first with the Nationalist Government of Republic of China and then with the Communist of People's Republic of China. He held a number of government posts in Tibetan areas under the People's Republic of China. He was also initially the vice-president and later the president of the Buddhist Association of China; the latter position he held until 1966. He was imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution and died in 1968.



government needed him for his ability in the Tibetan language; Tibetan officials would be crucial for the work of liberating other parts of Tibet such as Sichuan, Kham, and Central Tibet. Geshe Sherab Gyatso agreed, asking Muge to accept a position as an official. Gyatso felt that Muge could most effectively work in support of Buddhism and for Tibetans as an official. In the end, Muge Samten accepted the post and was installed in the office of Ethnic Affairs Commission (C. *Guojia minzu weiyuanhui*, 国家民委) in Beijing. There he met Dorjee Tseten (*rdo rje tshe brtan*), Phunta (*phun bkra*), and Sonam Gyatso (*bsod nams rgya mtsho*). Together, they would be what I call the “magazine team.” He worked in that office doing proof reading and editing the *Peoples Pictorial* (Samten 1996, 574-575).

Thus began Muge Samten’s first engagement with government sponsored projects aimed at introducing communist propaganda to Tibet. As mentioned, *Peoples Pictorial* was first translated into Tibetan in 1951. In its original form it was a Chinese monthly magazine first published in 1950. The title of the magazine stylistically displayed the handwriting of Mao Zedong; the magazine was instrumental in promoting the revolution and political propaganda in Tibetan. In addition to the Chinese and Tibetan editions, there were editions in English, Korean, Japanese, Arabic, French, German, Italian, and Russian. The *Peoples Pictorial* was translated from Chinese; there was not a single original article written in Tibetan. The contents mainly focused on prosperous aspects of people’s lives in China, the country’s economic development, and the harmonious relationship among various ethnic groups under Chinese Communist leadership (Bhum 2014-2015, 9-23).

As the title of the magazine indicates, the primary media consisted of images rather than narrative text, though the limited narrative was translated into Tibetan. Through pictures, the Chinese government was promoting its political policy towards Tibetans and celebrating the “peaceful” liberation of Tibet. These visual representations were intended to become seared into the minds of Tibetans. We can also likely assume that using images was a practical choice since the majority of Tibetans at that time were illiterate.

However, it was Muge Samten’s situational cooperation and adaptiveness, along with the persuasiveness of Yang Jingren and Geshe Sherab Gyatso, that encouraged him to work for the

Office of Minority Affairs and the *Peoples Pictorial*. As described in Muge Samten's autobiography, Yang Jingren advised Muge Samten to become an official because the government needed him. Geshe Sherab Gyatso also urged him to accept the position through which he could work on behalf of Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan people. One likely interpretation is that Yang Jingren forced Muge Samten to work for Chinese government and Geshe Sherab Gyatso offered some consolation as to why the post could be productive. However, both of them did not allow him to pursue his interests learning English and Chinese. In fact, Muge Samten's writings portray a situation in which he was compelled to make his decision partly because of the persistence of his colleagues and also due to the complicated political reality.

While Muge Samten was in Beijing, he also proofread the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet. About this he wrote: “Ngapo (*nga phod*)<sup>35</sup> and Tibetan delegation arrived in Beijing through India and approved the Seventeen Point Agreement.<sup>36</sup> I had to participate (*zhungs dgos byung*) in publishing and editing it” (Samten 1996, 576). In this context, “had to” is the main verb used by Muge Samten to describe his situational and compelled performance in proofreading the controversial document.

In addition to his post at the Office of Ethnic Affairs Commission and his involvement for the *Peoples Pictorial* and other translation work, Muge Samten was also recruited for the “Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary” projects:

In 1959, when I was 46, I had to disrobe. In May of that year, I was asked to go to Beijing to work on the first Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary and to review the first volume of Mao Zedong’s *Collected Speeches*. Tseten Zhabdrung<sup>37</sup> arrived there later and we shared a room together. We quickly become good friends as he had a calm disposition and great passion for Tibetan culture... (Samten 1996, 587)

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<sup>35</sup> Nga phod Ngag dbang jigs med (1910 – 2009) was a Tibetan senior government official who assumed various important political and military responsibilities both before and after 1951 in Tibet under China.

<sup>36</sup> Seventeen Point Agreement is controversial document in which China’s claim that Tibet is part of the People’s Republic of China is affirmed. This 1951 agreement was later repudiated by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

<sup>37</sup> Alak Tseten Zhabdrung (1910 – 1985) is considered one of the three great scholars of twentieth century Tibet. He is credited with preserving many aspects of Tibetan culture under China.

Muge Samten continued working on the second and third volumes of the dictionary in subsequent years (Samten 1996, 596-599).

Reading through his account of the dictionary projects, two primary phrases “I had to” and “I was asked” appeared repeatedly in the passages and provide some insight into the background of Muge Samten’s roles involvement in the dictionary projects and other translation work for the Chinese government. Phrases like “I had to” and “I was asked” suggest tacit submission to political authority. It can be argued that the Chinese Communist powers skillfully used a Tibetan scholar’s cultural capital in the process of establishing political control of Tibet.

Based on Muge Samten’s account, we can also assume that there was no possible way he and other scholars could mobilize and freely exercise a challenge to the pervasive political authority. Moreover, in an environment where free expression was not possible, Muge Samten had to use veiled and subtle language such as “I had to” and “I was asked” to relay his probable reluctance to engage in these projects. “I had to” and “I was asked” express the nuance of resistance since they connote a lack of agency. However, in some cases Muge Samten transcended this subtle language and even more openly criticized the dictionary projects as well. According to his account:

I went to Chengdu with Samdup and Monlam, helping to compile the third volume of the Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary, which included six thousand religious terms. They didn’t include all of them and also distorted some of the definitions. (Samten 1996, 598)

We can draw a few assumptions about Muge Samten's use of the word *Del lok (grel log)* in Tibetan that is translated “distortion” in this context. When Muge Samten criticized the fact that the meaning of some religious terms was distorted, he was making the argument that his knowledge, gained from a lifelong of learning in the traditional monastic system, did not support the meaning of these terms and further that they were incorrectly interpreted. His disapproval of the definitions of religious terms could suggest rejection of the dictionary projects in general. Indeed, the dictionary projects were harbinger of the successful integration Tibetan language into China’s political system.

Despite the fact that these references to subtle resistance are not elaborated upon, we can assume a certain level of distaste for the project on Muge Samten's part. In fact, the phrasing reflects the deep courage that Muge Samten had; even just saying that some meanings were distorted was a brave statement that at the same time indicated a changing political atmosphere across China. After Mao's death, the party's ideological stance had shifted from a rigid orthodoxy to more flexible and pragmatic policy of winning over the minority groups (Shakya, 1999). In short, we could say that Muge Samten's actions occurred in response to the major political transformations throughout Tibet.

### **2.3 Contextualizing the Project**

The cultural historian Peter Burke writes, "conquerors usually knew little about the resources of the lands that they have taken over, or the cultures of the inhabitants" (Burke 2016, 32). Indeed this is why projects like the "Chinese-Tibetan Dictionaries" and periodical translation were so critical to the success of the Communist Chinese state; the primary purpose of producing dictionaries and publishing translations of periodicals in Tibetan was not simply political occupation alone, but also to transform Tibetan discourse and systems of knowledge. This meant that the traditional knowledge systems of Tibetans, such as monastic learning, along with embedded worldviews that had persisted at least a millennium, would become subordinate to a new ideology and new manner of expression.

Traditional Tibetan knowledge systems, based in part on Indian Buddhist precedents, emphasize five major sciences and five minor sciences. In this system, all knowledge can be categorized. The five major sciences are Arts, Medicine, Grammar, Logic, and Buddhism; and the minor sciences are Poetry, Astrology, Homonyms, Drama, and Rhetoric. Tibetans' understanding of the world was largely based on these sciences and their categories. However, the introduction of communist ideas and dictionary projects not only transformed Tibetan orders of knowledge, but also affected ordinary communication and worldviews, eventually bringing a new system of knowledge into the Tibetan landscape.

One could look at the dictionary projects as a relatively benign act of cultural exchange that merely translated new ideas from one culture to another. However, this assumption would

ignore the dynamics of power. As Burke states, “encounters include conquests, producing colonial situations in which knowledges coexisted on unequal terms. The knowledge of the conquerors became dominant, while local knowledge was subjugated” (Burke 2016, 35). In the case of Tibetan language, translated government documents and new political terms established a new political language of governance over Tibet by replacing or subjugating the traditional forms and categories of knowledge. In fact, even in the monolingual Tibetan dictionaries published alongside these “Chinese-Tibetan Dictionaries,” religious meanings of Tibetan terms were misinterpreted and distorted. One example: In the Tibetan dictionary *dag yig sar duk (dag yig gsar sgrig)*, the term *Ngodup (dngos grub)*<sup>38</sup> is defined as “blind faith” (Samten 1979, 192).

In the case of the word “class,” the Chinese character *jie*, meaning “row” or “step” is used as the source language to translate the term into Tibetan as *tal ram (gral rim)*. These translations thus brought new connotations to commonly used words thereby altering the nuances of Tibetan language used in communication and social relations. We could further argue that these new political meanings and concepts fundamentally distorted Tibetan concepts of human relationships, social structure, religious organizations, and cultural ceremonies in various settings.

The dictionary projects standardized Tibetan terms for governmental administration and communist thought. China therefore established a whole new language of political administration that was capable of governing Tibetans. Tibetan monastic intellectuals like Muge Samten and others were employed in the service of China and under its control. As Foucault said, “knowledge constantly induces effect of power” (quoted in Burke 2016, 98), the cultural capital of these Tibetan intellectuals became an enormous resource for the Chinese government establishing their political power over Tibet. These dictionary projects further illustrate the subjugation of traditional Tibetan knowledge systems and a distortion of Tibetan cultural worldviews made possible by the creation and standardization of a new political language.

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<sup>38</sup> In Tibetan, *Ngodup (dngos grub)* means outcome or accomplishment of practices of *mantra*.

## Chapter 3: Resistance

The term “resistance,” as used in colonial studies, refers to resistance that takes place within conformity and concealment. Resistance of the colonized is often performed, translated, and communicated through ambiguous language at sites of power and knowledge production. Anthropologist James Scott (1987) calls these types of resistance “weapons of the weak” and includes acts like “pilfering, feigned ignorance, foot-dragging, sabotage, arson, flight...” (quoted in Burke 2005, 91). The subtle meanings of resistance language also suffuse the situational roles that Muge Samten “had to” perform in various political settings during the Cultural Revolution.

This chapter discusses the Cultural Revolution and Muge Samten’s perspectives of it. In Muge Samten’s autobiography, we can observe the presence of resistance employed in various situations, constrained by socio-political conditions inside Tibet. The underlying meanings of these acts should be understood carefully in the context of China’s political dominance.

### 3.1 Cultural Revolution

For Tibetans, the Cultural Revolution<sup>39</sup> was a destructive force affecting Tibetan religion, language, physical and mental well-being, leaving indelible scars in individual and collective memory. Under the political propaganda campaign, “Destruction of the Four Olds,” the so-called exploitative elements of Tibetan culture, its religious sites and cultural figures were targeted, struggled against, and eventually destroyed. There are many oral and written accounts of this dark period. In Dawa Norbu’s memoir *Tibet: The Road Ahead*, he described his aunt’s visit to Tibet during the Cultural Revolution:

By the time, Aunt Dechen visited the holy city in 1968, only the famous Sakya Lhakang Chenmo was intact; all the rest had been razed to the ground. Some ruined remains are still visible in Rinchen Gang and Demchok. Otherwise, the destruction

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<sup>39</sup> The Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 until 1976, launched by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China. Its initial goal was to preserve Communist Ideology in the country by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Mao Zedong Thought as the dominant ideology within the Party. The Revolution marked Mao's return to a position of power after the failures of his Great Leap Forward. The movement paralyzed China politically and negatively affected both the economy and society of the country to a highly significant degree.

was so thorough and complete that one can no longer locate even the previous sites of monasteries and temples. (1997, 271)

This is one of many accounts illustrating how thoroughly destructive the Cultural Revolution was to Tibetans across the plateau. Cultural sites, which had been the centers of social, economic and intellectual activities, were razed, thus destroying the physical evidence of Tibetan history. The memories in people's minds were in many cases the only remnants of local history. In a sense, the Cultural Revolution can be considered a history of memory for Tibetans since the physical sites were eliminated.

In Pema Bhum's memoir, *Six Stars with a Crooked Neck* (2001), he offers a grim view:

During the Cultural Revolution, certain Tibetan scriptures and other texts were considered "poisonous weeds." Most were either burned, thrown into rivers, or ground into manure; some were stowed away as "secret treasures" (*gsang gtser*) by a few brave souls. (Bhum 2001, 87)

Both Dawa Norbu<sup>40</sup> and Pema Bhum's<sup>41</sup> accounts of the Cultural Revolution bear witness to the destruction of Tibetan culture through the elimination of the cultural sites where, for centuries, Tibetans produced their knowledge through the creation of vibrant textual forms and crafting of a unique material culture. And yet, the Cultural Revolution was not able to erase were personal memories that reside in the individual bodies of Tibetans.

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<sup>40</sup> Dawa Norbu (1949-2006) was born in Tibet in 1949, one year before the China's invasion, and escaped with his family in 1959. He was educated at St. Stephens College in Delhi, India and received his doctorate from University of California, Berkeley (1976- 1982). He later worked as a professor of Central Asian Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is the author of *Red Star Over Tibet* (1974), *Tibet: The Road Ahead* (1998), and *China's Tibet Policy*. He has had scholarly publications in journals such as *China Quarterly*, *Asian Survey*, *Royal Central Asian Society Journal*, *International Studies*, and *Pacific Affairs*.

<sup>41</sup> Pema Bhum was born in Tibet. He has published two Tibetan memoirs of the Cultural Revolution. His first memoir, *Six Stars with a Crooked Neck* (2001), was published by Tibet Times. His second memoir, *Remembering Dorjee Tsering*, was published by Amnye Machen Institute in Dharamsala, India, of which he is a founding director. He has also authored several academic papers on Tibetan literature and taught at Northwest Nationalities University in Lanzhou and Indiana University. He is the direct of the Latse Tibetan Contemporary Library in New York. In addition, Pema Bhum was one of Muge Samten's students at the Northwestern Nationalities University in 1986. Muge Samten taught Sanskrit to some Tibetan graduate students including Pema Bhum at that University.

### 3.2 Muge Samten's Perspectives of the Cultural Revolution

Among the many Tibetan accounts of the Cultural Revolution, Muge Samten's is unique and worthy of close study. In his autobiography, Muge Samten wrote:

In the year 1966, when I was 53, the political catastrophe called the Cultural Revolution happened. In October, at the county political office, the Red Guards<sup>42</sup> arrested us, five people including me, and seized all of our properties, took us around the market, and struggled against us, but I didn't feel sad. Instead, by considering it as the nature of cyclic existence (*samsara*), I tried to meditate upon the idea of impermanence, and the inherent flaws of *samsara*. My previous Lojong (*blo sbyong*)<sup>43</sup> and Lam rim (*lam rim*)<sup>44</sup> studies helped me. However, they [Red Guards] continued arresting people... (Samten 1996, 592)

Terminology employed by Muge Samten includes “arrest,” “seizing properties,” and “struggling against,” and sheds light on what befell millions of people in the process of “Destroying the Four Olds” in China. However, Muge Samten refrains from describing feelings of suffering, anger, and despair; instead he employs Buddhist language, writing of impermanence, the nature of cyclic existence, and the inherent nature of *samsara*. Further, he cites his Buddhist mind training as a means of understanding and accepting the situation. In other words, he was equipped with a mental culture and knowledge capable of protecting him. The language used conveys the depth of his monastic training. There is a subtle personal response to the political situation in that special context.

The religious practices in which he engaged during this time can be understood as a subtle resistance as well, for people often tell how they were tortured by these traumatic political reforms. But what Muge Samten presents is the opposite of denunciation or suffering. We might assume, based on his reference to Buddhist mind-trainings of Lojong and Lam rim, that he had stronger defensive mechanisms than most and could endure the political situation imposed by the

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<sup>42</sup> Red Guards (*Weibing* (红卫兵)) were a student mass paramilitary social movement mobilized by Mao Zedong in 1966 and 1967, during the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>43</sup> Lojong (*blo sbyong*) in Tibetan means “mind training”.

<sup>44</sup> Lamrim (*lam rim*) in Tibetan means “stages of the path” to enlightenment are major components of Buddhist monastic training.



colonial state. Engaging in meditation and mind-training, then, was portrayed as a useful defense against the political authority.

Muge Samten continued detailing of his experiences of being “struggled against” during the Cultural Revolution:

When I was being taking around the market, they [the Red Guards] asked me to wear my monk robe and the cap that we used to wear in retreat. They also asked me to put some religious texts on my back, carrying some pages of Kadam Lekbum (*bka gdams glegs bam*), a rosary, and a section of the biography of Jowo (*jo bo*). They pushed me through the streets while noisily shouting slogans. I felt happiness inside and wanted to recite a *dharma* song... May all the suffering of others fall upon me; may all the virtuous actions that I practiced benefit others. I shouted these prayers with their slogans. They heard it sometimes but didn't understand. They mused that I was singing revolutionary slogans and brought some foolish Tibetan children to listen to me, but like the Chinese, they were not able to understand my prayers. (Samten 1996, 592)

It is interesting to look at Muge Samten's subtle resistance in this context. He is in a confined space where he is forced to dress and move according to orders, yet he is singing *dharma* songs rather than shouting the political slogans. His act of prayers is, in fact, covert resistance based on a specialized vernacular: Buddhist Tibetan. He did not stay silent or sing the revolutionary slogans that the Red Guards sang. Instead, he chose his own prayer and converted it into a *dharma* song—an illicit act than went unnoticed by the Red Guards but would have been understood by other, educated Tibetans. We could argue that singing *dharma* songs was an obvious and oppositional reaction to the political slogans in that situational setting.

We can also look at the situations where Muge Samtem expressed hopelessness, applying the same careful analysis of his use of language. In what follows, he provided a detail account of a situation he encountered in 1967:

Some people made many allegations about me. Even some leaders asked me to accept them and said that the punishment would be immense if I didn't. Some of my close friends said same thing. When I was hopeless, my teacher came into my dream one night and advised me not to accept everything that is asked of me. Lin Zong Man had to wear the "Left Wing Cap," for he accepted everything that others imposed.

Therefore, I just wrote them saying that I don't remember this and that and nothing happened to me. (Samten 1996, 594)

In the above context, it is interesting to look at his situational response, based on a typical Buddhist religious event of receiving crucial information in a dream: in this case, his teacher's advice. His reaction is meant to connote his innocence, and reinforce his denials by reference to his teacher.

As we know, under the political propaganda of "Destruction of the Four Olds" in China, everything was situational, and everyone was constrained by the political situation without much freedom or flexibility. Within this constrained situation, Muge Samtem relates that he was able to resist in covert or subtle ways. Of course, Muge Samten was constrained by his official roles before the Cultural Revolution as well. Muge Samten wrote in his autobiography, that:

In 1957, I had to attend a meeting in Chengdu criticizing the leftists. But, since the religious reform was yet to happen, I wore my monk robe to represent my monkhood and pretended that I was not able to understand Chinese. So, I didn't have to criticize anyone in that meeting. (Samten 1996, 585)

Feigning ignorance is a typical weapon of the weak. In this context, we are able to see two things: first, he represented himself as a monk to the audience (something he would not be able to do in later years) ; and, second, he acted as if he was unable to speak Chinese so that he could avoid criticizing anyone at the meeting. Both acts were situational for Muge Samtem, for "had to" again was the language that he used. Even though he knew that religious reform that would prevent him from wearing his robe was imminent, he still performed his traditional role in that liminal political space. He was also aware of the consequences of knowing Chinese in that he might be asked to criticize others in the Chinese language, and follow the government's public transcript. He chose instead to disguise his language ability in Chinese . Muge Samtem appeared, audaciously, as a monk, and managed to avoid engaging in leftist denunciation.

## Chapter 4: Language Reform

Muge Samten challenged the political authority that introduced the language reform by using Chairman Mao's speeches, his official authority, and most significantly his knowledge of Tibetan language. Muge Samten's commitment to the preservation of Tibetan language in the face of political efforts toward may have contributed to the ultimate demise of the proposed reforms. Considering the unequal distribution of power, a Tibetan vernacular intellectual publicly disagreeing with the official party position Muge Samten's dissent on policy towards a minority language can indeed be regarded as resistance.

This chapter presents the historical background of the language reform and Muge Samten's response to it. The language reform was introduced by the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing. They propagated Chairman Mao's speeches, Socialist reforms, and promoted the Cultural Revolution, part of which included language reform, which entailed drastic changes to the Tibetan language such as colloquial language integration into written Tibetan, simplification of particle usages and verb tenses, and introduction of English punctuation to Tibetan grammar.

### 4.1 Historical Background of the Language Reform

The year 1969 was the midpoint of the Cultural Revolution. Proposals for Tibetan language reform surfaced in the sweep of the sociopolitical storms triggered by Chairman Mao and the Community Party and their efforts to eliminate the "Four Olds" (old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits) and establish the "Four News." Chinese propaganda boldly urged the people to "create the new by smashing the old" (Shakya 1999, 317). Therefore, the "olds" of Tibetan culture, religion, history, and language were besieged by this political movement. According to Muge Samten's autobiography:

In 1969, the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing organized a course entitled "Studying Chairman Mao's Speeches" to reform Tibetan language, they stirred up the Tibetan language grammar system and it appeared useless then. They published a reform paper called Neldu (*gnad bsdus*) meaning essential points and distributed it widely across Tibet. As such, Tibetan newspapers and magazines came to seem neither Tibetan nor Chinese. Based on Neldu, the Nationalities Publishing House in

Sichuan composed a Tibetan grammar book. I wrote a critique of the language reform. Although the critique wasn't complete, I presented the draft to others for their feedback but never got any response from them. (Samten 1996, 597-598)

The historical background of language reform can provide a glimpse into the intended reforms. The reform was crafted to integrate three major changes into Tibetan language system: to introduce more colloquial language to the written language; to remove Tibetan punctuation and replace them with English punctuation; and to reduce Tibetan particles and make them singular in most grammatical cases. Muge Samten offers a detailed account of the purpose of these reforms:

Quoting some speeches of Chairman Mao, the writers of Neldu (*gnad bsdus*) said that Tibetan language needs to be reformed. They don't want to change the script. Instead, they want to reform Tibetan language, Tibetan grammar, Tibetan cases and particles. Also, they mentioned, since the socialist reforms and particularly the Cultural Revolution of proletarians, Tibetan language went through great changes including simplifying the particle usages in spoken language and changes of verb tenses. (Samten 1996, 140)

It was Chairman Mao's speeches, larger socialist reforms, and the ideology of the Cultural Revolution as a whole, that provided those who drafted Neldu the justification they needed to introduce language reform in Tibet. However, the Nationalities Publishing House in Sichuan's grammar itself cannot provide the complete picture of the historical narrative or situation; is necessary to study the outcome of the reform in various contexts. Muge Samten provided further details:

Also, they composed Tibetan textbooks in which Tibetan particles couldn't be studied, for they removed the phonetic based Tibetan particles such as terminative particle (*slar bsdu*),<sup>45</sup> ornament-conjunction particle (*rgyan sdud*),<sup>46</sup> differentiation and

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<sup>45</sup> In Tibetan grammar, it is called *lha dul (slar bsdu)* meaning terminative particles. There are eleven terminative particles including *go, ngo, do, no, bo, mo, ro, lo, so, and to*. They are used as terminators of a sentence and have two functions; they either simply indicate that the verb that they are suffixed with is the final verb of a sentence or they can both act as the verb to be and a terminate sentence simultaneously.

<sup>46</sup> In Tibetan grammar, it is called *Gyen Dul (rgyan sdud)* meaning ornament-conjunction particles. They have three particles including *kyang, yang, and ang*. They have two functions: Emphasizing and including.

inclusion particle (*byed sdud*),<sup>47</sup> separation and inclusion particle (*dgar sdud*),<sup>48</sup> continuative particle (*lhag bcas*),<sup>49</sup> and completing particle (*rdzogs tsig*)<sup>50</sup> from the grammar. Instead, they integrated the characters only based signs language such as question mark (?), comma (,), semicolon (;), colon (:), full-stop (.), apostrophe (‘), inverted comma (“”), parentheses (), dash (-), hyphen (/), and so forth into Tibetan writing. (Samten 1996, 145)

This reform subverted the system of Tibetan phonetic punctuation that underpins Tibetan traditional reading and writing. Instead of using differentiation and inclusion particles (*byed sdud*) for questions, they introduced the question mark sign into Tibetan language. The question mark is primarily a sign of question, nothing else. However, in Tibetan grammar, differentiation and inclusion particles (*byed sdud*) carry the idea of question mark as well as nuances of both differentiation and inclusion through eleven particles used in various contexts. The question mark is simple, and the latter is complex and deep in terms of its usage and meaning. However, the reform was not just about removing Tibetan particles alone, it went further. According to Muge Samten:

By shouting that Tibetan written language should conform to the spoken language, they replaced standard common preposition, conjunctions, and adverbs with colloquial words. That is very dangerous for the sustainability of standard Tibetan language. For instance, they employed *zang* (*tsang*)<sup>51</sup> as a ‘reasoning particle’ instead of sustaining the standard ‘reasoning particles’ such as *thab* (*stabs*), *sher* (*phyir*),<sup>52</sup> and *shi* (*gshis*). They further replaced *drub shel* (*sgrub byed*),<sup>53</sup> *chul shel* (*gcod byed*), and *len shel*

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<sup>47</sup> In Tibetan grammar, it is called *Jal Dul* (*byed sdud*) meaning differentiation and inclusion particles. They are *gam*, *ngam*, *dma*, *nam*, *ram*, *lam*, *sam*, and *tam*. They are a group of non-case particles with the function of differentiation and inclusion.

<sup>48</sup> In Tibetan grammar, it is called *Gar Dul* (*dgar sdud*) meaning separation and inclusion particles. They are *nas* and *las*.

<sup>49</sup> In Tibetan grammar, it is called *Lhak Ju* (*lhag bcas*) meaning continuative particles. They are *te*, *de*, and *sta* and indicate that something more is coming when we use each of them in a sentence.

<sup>50</sup> In Tibetan grammar, it is called *Zoe Tsik* (*rdzogs tsig*) meaning completing particles. They function like a completing word and their synonyms are *slar bsdu* and *zla sdud*.

<sup>51</sup> It is colloquial word that is used as a reasoning particle in conversations. However, it is not complex in terms of its usage and meaning comparing to ‘*stabs*’, ‘*phyir*’ and ‘*gshis*’. Also, ‘*tsang*’ is hard to find in writing language.

<sup>52</sup> It carries the meaning of because, for what reason, that is why, because of, due to, since, and so forth. It also acts as a reasoning particle and also both ‘*stabs*’ and ‘*gshis*’ carry the same meaning.

<sup>53</sup> It means basis of argument, premise, proof, correct proof or reasoning. Both “*gcod byed*” and “*len byed*” carry the same idea.

(*len byed*) with *yas*.<sup>54</sup> They also removed the standard noun *khal bar* (*khyad par*)<sup>55</sup> and replaced it with *he pak* (*he bad*)<sup>56</sup> ... (Samten 1996, 146)

When several conjunctions are replaced by one colloquial particle, it can be considered destructive. Firstly, the complexity and specificity of these conjunctions is lost. Secondly, it is hard to draw out the nuance and subtlety of certain content based upon these conjunctions in Tibetan, for the reform was trying to solidify to use one “reasoning particle” for every usage. Finally, this colloquial language replacement deconstructs Tibetan grammar in which the standard conjunctions have specific usages and meanings.

Knowing full well the destruction that the language reform imposed upon Tibetan language and its writing system, Muge Samten looked at these language reforms critically. As the writers of *Neldu* used Chairman Mao's speeches and the Cultural Revolution to validate their purpose of language reform, Muge Samten conversely employed Chairman Mao's speech to criticize them and the reform. He said:

Chairman Mao said that everyone should respect each nationalities culture, religion, faith. Furthermore, no one should be forced to study Chinese. Instead, we all should support their efforts of employing their language and educating people through it. (Samten 1996, 135)

Alongside Chairman Mao's speech, Muge Samten also rebutted the social reforms that the *Neldu* writers misused in legitimizing the language reform. He said:

Since Tibetan language was constructed, developed, upgraded, and thrived over thousands of years, they don't have a good foundation of linguistic and philosophical arguments saying that Tibetan language went through major changes by socialist reforms and the Cultural Revolution. Also, this is a total destruction or absurd action triggered by those who don't understand Tibetan language. (Samten 1996, 142)

Muge Samten provides further argument against the simplification of Tibetan language, specifically the efforts toward making it more colloquial:

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<sup>54</sup> It is colloquial word meaning premise, but less complex in terms of its usage and meaning comparing to “*gcod byed*”, “*len byed*”, and “*sgrub byed*”. Also, “*yas*” is hard to find in writing language.

<sup>55</sup> It means attribute or qualification or particular or distinction. It is more complex in terms of its usage and meaning comparing to “*he bad*”.

<sup>56</sup> It means difference.

Even though they said that they simplified Tibetan language through the reform, they made it more complex in reality. For instance, instead of saying mei (*med*), they use yo pa ma rei (*yod pa ma red*) and yo pa yin pa m rei (*yod pa yin pa ma red*). For yo (*yod*), they created yo pa rei (*yod pa red*), yo pa yin pa rei (*yod pa yin pa red*) and so forth. Therefore, this reform created a lot of redundant phrases for the shorter phrases in Tibetan and that eventually made the language more confusing and obscure... (Samten 1996, 147)

According to Muge Samten's autobiography, Muge Samten's strong critique of language reform and strong evidence-based arguments published in Tibetan, with efforts from other scholars, the language reform initiated in 1969 was terminated in 1980:

In 1980, when I was 67, I attended the meeting on minority language discussion. After 12 days of argument, we concluded that the language reform called Neldi (*gnad bsdus*) is an invalid reform. Gradually, magazines and newspapers are began publishing in standard Tibetan and that helped to save Tibetan language from the fundamental destruction brought by the reform. I continued to work on the dictionary project and other teachings. My criticism of the reform called 'analytical critique of Neldi (*gnad bsdus kyi dgag yig mtha dpyad*) was published by the office of Tibetan Chinese Dictionary and distributed among officials. I even have received a praise letter from Dungkar Lobsang Trinley<sup>57</sup> in Beijing. (Samten 1996, 601)

#### 4.2 Contextualizing Muge Samten's Response

At this point, we have some understanding of the language reform introduced by the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing. They propagated Chairman Mao's speeches, socialist reforms and the Cultural Revolution to validate language reform, which brought drastic changes to Tibetan language such as colloquial language integration, simplification of particle usages and verb tenses, and introduction of Chinese punctuations to Tibetan grammar.

In contradiction with the prevailing party intentions, Muge Samten employed his cultural capital to challenge and criticize the language reform through various means. For instance, when the writers of Neldi used Chairman Mao's speeches as a means of bolstering reforms to Tibetan

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<sup>57</sup> Dungkar Lozang Trinle (1927–1997) was one of the most important Tibetan historians of the 20th century. He is remembered for the monumental reference work, *Dungkar's Grand Dictionary* (*dung dkar tshig mdzod*) printed in 2002, and for *The Merging of Religious and Secular Rule in Tibet* (*bod-kyi chos srid zung-'brel skor bshad-pa*) published in 1981, that was later translated into English in 1991 by Chen Guansheng.

language, Muge Samten also employed Chairman Mao's speeches, but to support his opposition to reforms. Muge Samten reiterated a speech by Mao that declared the significance of Tibetan language and people's rights of preserving language as a means of challenging the previously ingrained political ideas.

For their argument that Tibetan language went through the major changes under these political reform in a short period of time, Muge Samten explicated the long historical development of Tibetan language to invalidate their argument; most of the language reformers had very little experience studying Tibetan language. In this context, Muge Samten's traditional knowledge challenged the government's political power imposing the reform upon Tibetan language. However, this unequal relationship between Muge Samten's knowledge and their political power presents native's reason and occupier's force around the language reform.

Reformers sought integration of colloquial language into standard Tibetan through the simplification of Tibetan particles. To counteract these efforts, Muge Samten revealed the reform to be based on ignorance. In other words, in his response, he detailed the omissions and factual inaccuracies regarding the Tibetan language. Again, Muge Samten emphasizes his expertise of Tibetan language as an intellectual tool to invalid their reasons of reforming Tibetan language.

Therefore, the personal awareness of the political situation, the knowledge of historical development of Tibetan language, and the expertise of Tibetan grammar are cultural capital that Muge Samten's skillfully employed to challenge the government. Tibetan language, and more specifically, the written language, is the primary means by which Tibetans maintain their unity in both private and public arenas. The unified standard of written Tibetan language can be understood as a powerful symbol of the unity that Muge Samten was trying to sustain.

If we consider the relationship between Muge Samten's traditional knowledge and Chinese government's overwhelming political authority within a larger context of colonial studies, we can understand the broad consequences of language reforms to occupied people. Studies of colonial situations suggest:

Some individuals, groups, and institutions (the church, the state or the university, for instance) are authorities, in the sense that they have the power to authorize or reject



knowledges, to declare to be orthodox or heterodox, useful or useless, reliable or unreliable, indeed to define what counts as knowledge or science in a particular place and time. (Burke 2016, 15)

In the context of language reform, the institutions such as Chinese government and the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing were the authority that used their power to authorize or reject the Tibetan language knowledge possessed by Muge Samten. However, conquerors usually knew little about the resources of the land that they had taken over or about the cultures of the inhabitants (Burke 2016, 32). Muge Samten touched upon their ignorance of the Tibetan language and its system and said the reform was initiated by those who were not able to even understand Tibetan.

One could argue that the reform was actually intended to improve Tibetan language, as the Communist Party claimed. However, in reality these efforts were meant to weaken the Tibetan language. If the language system was destroyed, Tibetans would lose their common language to communicate each other universally. Without a common language, they would be divided into smaller groups, making it more difficult to preserve their common history, memory, culture, and so forth. Having a common language or standard language is a powerful weapon of resistance of the oppressed who are often intentionally divided when their language systems are weakened through politically purposed language reforms.

Integration of Tibetan colloquial language into formal language entailed replacing Tibetan punctuation and reducing Tibetan particles. Rather than being considered as reforms, these actions are better understood as tools of linguistic destruction that would be capable of erasing expressions, memories, and stories possible through the use of formal language. These so-called reforms were a type of symbolic violence upon the Tibetan language. Without standard language, Tibetans would have less freedom and flexibility, constraining creativity and innovation due to limited phrases, particles, and punctuations that were proposed in these reforms. Muge Samten's skillful use of his traditional knowledge in the context of language reform can be understood as an act of resistance. Muge Samten's commitment to the preservation of Tibetan language in the face of political efforts toward may have contributed to the ultimate demise of the proposed reforms. Considering the unequal distribution of power -- a Tibetan

former monk publicly disagreeing with the official party position on a minority language --  
Muge Samten's dissent indeed can indeed be regarded as resistance.

## **Chapter 5: Cultural Revival**

In Muge Samten's account, the revival indicates that his blend of official authority and traditional knowledge created a space for Tibetan religion and language to develop. As Tibetan Buddhism is grounded in its complex teachings, empowerments, transmissions and ordinations, the continuation of the tradition depends in large part on scholar monks who can lead instruction and rituals. Therefore, Muge Samten ensured that these four fields (teachings, empowerments, transmissions, and ordination) of Buddhist scholastic activity were revived.

The complete destruction of Tibetan religious sites occurred regularly over a two-decade span from the late 1950s to early 1970s. Scholars often think of the destruction associated with the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as limited to that decade, but this was not the case in Tibet. The dismantling of temples and religious sites was undertaken by youthful squads of Red Guards comprised of both Tibetan and Chinese soldiers, and deeply impacted Muge Samten. There was no way that he could escape what was happening across Tibet. This politically initiated destruction remained until 1978 when revival began and temples were rebuilt. Beyond the physical temple, Muge Samten was committed to the revival of religious teachings and Tibetan language. He further employed his official post and traditional knowledge to respond China's occupation and its integration of Tibet in a way that very likely prevented further degradation of Tibetan language and religion.

### **5.1 Historical Destruction**

Before addressing cultural revivals, it is crucial to understand or study the decline or destruction that happened to cultural sites where Tibetan religious studies, cultural practices and social orders situated for thousands of years. Revivals thus could be translated into various forms such as re-emergence, re-establishment, new development, and innovation or adaptation of the political, social, and economic circumstances in China's occupied Tibet. Throughout its history, Tibet experienced several tumultuous stages of political reforms before the inception of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. In addition, some Tibetan monasteries in eastern regions of Tibet had encountered the destruction inflicted by the Red Guards during the "Long

March” (1934-1935), a historic trek of Chinese Communists which resulted in the relocation of the communist revolutionary base from southeastern to northwestern China with the emergence of Mao Zedong (1893-1976) as the party leader. According to Muge Samten’s autobiography:

In the previous year, the Red Army came to Muge. The Kuomintang Army,<sup>58</sup> therefore, resided in Muge Monastery to stop the Red Army.<sup>59</sup> It became obvious that the Kuomintang Army wasn’t strong enough to defeat the Red Army. So they burned down the monastery and left nothing. In the following year, there was another influx of Red Army soldiers and it was said that they were from Shusang Chang. As a result, some monks escaped to join Labrang Monastery. (Samten 1996, 541)

But the Long March was relatively short in duration, and its effects were centered on a few places such as Ngawa (C. *Aba*) and Kandze (C. *Gansu*) Prefectures. The political reforms that swept China after the establishment of PRC had a great impact on Tibet and its regions. In the early 1950s, the Chinese government began to implement the ‘socialist transformation’(C. *shehui zhuyi gaizao*; T. *spyi tshogs bcos sgyur*) in Tibet and in China. Under Mao Zedong’s leadership, the campaign aimed to eliminate the private sectors. In Tibet, monastic properties were then confiscated, and religious leaders were persecuted. The campaign called for accelerating the collectivization of rural China, sending local officials in most areas scurrying to create new collectives (Goldstein & Kapstein 1998, 9).

The PRC began to initiate “democratic reform” (T. *mang gtso bcos sgyur*; C. *Minzhu gaige*) in Tibet, particularly in all Tibetan areas outside the borders of the present-day Tibet Autonomous Region. The reforms were the first massive land redistribution program implemented by the Communist government.

The monasteries in the remaining parts of the TAR were left undisturbed until 1959 (Kolas & Thowsen 2005, 49). In 1959, the Tibetan government in Lhasa lost whatever political

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<sup>58</sup> The National Revolutionary Army (NRA) was the military arm of the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*) from 1925 until 1947 in the Republic of China.

<sup>59</sup> People's Red Army (C. *Zhongguo Renmin Hongjun*, 中國人民紅軍) commonly known as the Chinese Red Army was the armed forces of the Communist Party of China from 1928 to 1937. In the later stage of the Chinese Civil War, they were eventually renamed as the People’s Liberation Army.

independence had been nominally granted and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and his government fled to India seeking political refuge.

In the sweep of these political reforms, the course of Muge Samten's life and studies started to change at Labrang monastery. According to his account:

I was worried that the religious teachings would decline because of the reforms. So, I prayed for the re-emergence of Buddhist teachings. In 1956, I went to attend the meeting in Chengdu and the reform was announced. Many farming areas were reformed. In 1957, I was obligated to attend the meeting of the protest of the left-wing<sup>60</sup> in Chengdu. Since the religious reform was yet to start, I continued wearing my monk robes and pretended that I was not able to speak Chinese. As a result, I wasn't forced to speak against anybody at the meeting (Samten 1996, 585-586).

Muge Samten had escaped from a small local monastery to the large monastery of Labrang. He attended political reform meetings, performed prayers of revival of Buddhist teachings, and pretended not to speak Chinese at party gatherings. These actions offer glimpses into the sociopolitical situation across Tibet at the time. Muge Samten used the language of destruction, hinting at the loss and hopelessness that he must have experienced. His story is merely one among the countless experiences of cultural destruction that Tibetans faced during these political reforms.

Political reforms did not stop after the “democratic reforms” in both Tibet and China. Muge Samten had to disrobe in 1959 because of the political situation in Tibet and was asked by the Publishing House of Minority Nationalities (*C. Minzu Chubanshe*, 民族出版社) to go to Beijing to work on government-initiated translation projects and to review the first volume of Mao Zedong's *Collected Speeches* with other Tibetan scholars from various regions of Tibet (Samten 1996, 587). Not long after the “democratic reform,” the Cultural Revolution brought further destruction to Tibet and its culture:

The worst destruction of religious sites occurred during this period, when Red Guards destroyed monasteries, temples, shrines all over the Tibetan plateau. According to estimates by Tibetan exiles, of the approximately 6000 monasteries, temples, shrines,

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<sup>60</sup> left-wing politicians were the ones who were left than that of the central Maoist leaders and the term has been used more broadly to denounce any orientation it considers further 'left' than the party line

that they claim existed in Tibetans areas, only about a dozen were undamaged. (Kolas & Thowsen 2005, 48)

According to Muge Samten, he and his friends were arrested at the local county politburo, and their personal properties were confiscated by Red Guards in 1966 and they were taken to the street for a “struggle session” (Samten 1996, 591). The “struggle session” was a form of public humiliation and torture that was used by the Communist Party of China, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. During a the “struggle session,” the target of struggle is made to admit various crimes before the public who would verbally and physically abuse the victim until he or she confessed.

## **5.2 Contextualizing the Buddhist Revival**

The general consensus is that the revival period began with the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Chinese Communist Party Congress in 1978. However, the local officials had begun to relax their position on religion earlier in the 1970s. Some Tibetans were granted permission to travel to India for teachings and government funds were provided to repair some major religious sites such as Potala (*po ta la*) Palace, Jokhang (*jo khang*) Temple, and even Drepung (*bras spungs*) Monastery in Lhasa:

In 1974, a group of forty Tibetans was allowed to attend a sermon given by the Dalai Lama in Bihar, in northern India. The major policy shift occurred in 1978, after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress. Beginning in the early 1980s, the CCP drew up new guidelines to reform its policy on religion, and religious freedom was officially restored in the 1982 revision of the constitution. Many Tibetans were eager to begin rebuilding their local shrines and monasteries, and an impressive amount of voluntary work and donations has since been devoted to monastic reconstruction. (Kolas & Thowsen 2005, 49)

Also, it is worthwhile to point out a few assumptions about the revival in various contexts. Tsering Shakya asserts that Deng Xiaoping’s shift of the Party’s ideological stance toward a more flexible and pragmatic policy of winning over the minority groups were harbinger of revivals in Tibet (1999, 371). In some parts of Tibet, the situation began to ease a little after 1980, especially after Hu Yaobang ’s visit to Sakya Monastery, after which monks were permitted to resume their religious practices (Norbu 1997, 277). Goldstein writes:

Beijing moved to intensify a strategy of trying to win the approval and loyalty of Tibetans in Tibet by allocating increased funds for development. This policy was finalized at the Second Tibet Work Conference held in Beijing in 1984. It approved forty-two major construction projects in Tibet... (1998, 13)

The flexible policy initiated in Tibet was aimed at winning over Tibetans and rebuilding their loyalty. Reconstruction of cultural sites seemed to be the main feature of the government strategy in Tibet.

However, the approval of a mere forty-two major construction projects in Tibet should be understood against the background of the 6,000 monasteries that were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Although many monasteries were rebuilt, local communities and pilgrims provided the vast majority of funding for the reconstruction and restoration; these acts are considered a form of “religious merit” for Buddhists. For instance, “Kandze Monastery, one of the important Gelukpa monasteries located in Kandze County, received only 10,000-20,000 (Chinese *yuan*), although the government report claims it received 440,000” (Kolas & Thowsen 2005, 53). According to Muge Samten’s account:

In 1973, when I was 60, I was released. Compensation was 13000 Chinese Yuan toward salaries and my property that was confiscated. I spent 3000 for religious purposes, gave 2000 to each of my sisters and deposited 2000 into the bank (Samten 1996, 596).

The compensation was merely symbolic. According to unpublished documents, the local government in Ngaba Prefecture paid 8,762 Yuan to the people who had lost property worth a total of 998,303 (Kolas & Thowsen 2005, 51). These reparations did not match the actual loss in material or other terms and can be understood as a strategy for winning over the Tibetans.

One significant feature of the revival was the enactment of a flexible policy on Tibet that included government compensation for Tibetans and government support for monasteries, all policies aimed at winning the approval and loyalty of Tibetans. Economic inducements, such as compensation, were a means to the ultimate goal of integration, as China sought to integrate Tibet into their political framework and assert that Tibet was an inalienable part of China. Because of the efforts toward political and social integration, Muge Samten was again appointed

as a government official. About this he wrote: “In 1977, when I was 64, I attended the fourth Provincial CPPCC Standing Committee meeting of Sichuan Province, and I was appointed as a member. I then was taken to tour the province” (Samten 1996, 596).

In the next year, 1978, Muge Samten was appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Prefecture Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. In addition, in the summer of that year, he organized the second Tibetan studies program in Ngawa, taught Tibetan language and grammar to the public, composed a grammar book (*blo gsal dga ston*), and continued working for the dictionary projects in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. He also attended a meeting of provincial politburo later that year (Samten 1996, 600). During these years, Muge Samten was busy teaching Tibetan language to the public and publishing grammar books alongside his new government post and participation in political meetings.

Of note is the fact that in his autobiography he does not mention any details about the political meetings he attended. He mentions only the title and date of each meeting but does not elaborate further. In contrast, Muge Samten provided extremely detailed accounts of what he taught and published, describing the work he did toward the preservation of Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan language, and other cultural activities. The unevenness of in his representations of activities concerning Tibetan language and culture it is striking; it is clear that his accounts dealing with Tibetan language and religion take precedence over the accounts of political activities. One must conclude that he sought to downplay his government post and his role in the political integration of Tibet.

With a new government post, he continued working on Tibetan language and religion at various government meetings:

In 1980, when I was 67, I attended the meeting upon minorities' language discussion. After twelve days of arguments, we concluded that the language reform draft called ‘Naldhi’ is not invalid. Gradually, magazines and newspapers are being publishing in standard Tibetan and that helped to save Tibetan language from the fundamental destruction brought by the reform. I continued to work on the dictionary project and other teachings in that winter. My critique entitled *An Analytical Critique of Neldi* (*gnad bsdus kyi dgag yig mtha dpyad*) was published by the office of Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary and distributed amongst the officials. I even have received a letter of praise



from Dungkar Lobsang Trinley in Beijing. Beside these things, I composed (*blo gsal rigs sgo*). In that summer, I went to Barkham (*bar khams*) and with the financial support of the Barkham education department, we composed four textbooks for the primary schools and some other books to educate the illiterate Tibetan population (Samten 1996, 601).

In addition to his critiques of the language reform at the minority's language meeting at Beijing, he didn't hesitate to attack documents published pertaining to religious policies. According to his account:

In 1981, they had the autonomous prefecture level religious members meeting. During the meeting, the religious policy was influenced by the leftists, and they published factually incorrect documents. I went to Chengdu for the provincial politburo members meeting and later also attended to the provincial United Front Work Department religious affairs meeting. During the meeting, I pointed out the wrongful actions imposed upon religious policy. We had both provincial politburo meeting and provincial People's Congress meeting. During these meetings, the decision was made to re-open Muge Monastery and ensuring that it would be managed by the provincial government. We even had an agreement document signed. (Samten 1996, 602)

Here we can draw a few assumptions about Muge Samten's account of the minority language discussion meeting and the prefecture level religious policy meeting. Firstly, as mentioned before, he did not provide detailed accounts of these meetings except the arguments that he presented at the meeting for Tibetan language and religion. Secondly, he portrays himself as criticizing government policy by using his government post. Thirdly, he is employing his traditional knowledge as cultural capital to challenge those who lacked deep knowledge of Tibetan language and yet proposed the reform. Finally, he is performing in his government post using normative power to criticize the oppressive policy on Tibetan religion.

With his official post, he seemed to choose these meetings as an opportunity to question the government policies imposed upon Tibetan language, religion, and culture at large. He is employed his official authority to remedy the destruction of Tibetan language and religion. When he criticized the language reform drafts and official policies on religion, he was not just using his official authority to criticize reforms, but also asserted his traditional Tibetan knowledge. In

essence, he is employing both his traditional knowledge and official authority for maximum impact.

With the revival of Tibetan cultural sites including monasteries, local temples and shrines sought both government funds and local Tibetans' contributions. Muge Samten used both his official authority and traditional cultural capital to correct historical mistakes, preserve the traditional knowledge, and create a space for Tibetan culture, language, and religion within the Communist system. We could further assume that Muge Samten saw the government integration of Tibet into their framework as an opportunity to make the best use of the integration to benefit Tibet and its people in various sociocultural settings.

Even though Muge Samten continued attacking government policies on Tibetan language and religion, he kept his government position. According to his account:

In 1983, I taught *the treasure of poetry (snyan ngag yang srid snag mdzod)* to the Classical Tibetan studies class at Beijing Nationalities University in Beijing. We had the Fifth Sichuan Provincial Politburo meeting in that year, and I was again appointed the board member and also vice- chairman of the Prefecture Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. (Samten 1996, 606)

His re-appointment to a political post provided him with more freedom and flexibility to work for the revival of Tibetan culture, religion, and language at various intuitions and circumstances.

According to his account:

In the end of November in 1984, I went to Beijing to attend the meeting of the Buddhist Association of China. I went to Gomang Monastery after returning from Beijing to teach Refuge Prayer, Guru Puja, Hundred Deities in Tushita, White Manjushri Prayer, Three Lineage Accomplishment, White and Green Tara Prayers, Outer, Inner, and Secret Ritual Prayer of Dharmaraja, Permission Rituals of White Manjushri, White Akshobhya, Sixteen Arhats Prayer, Oral transmission of A Guide to Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Chanting the Names of Manjushri, Amitayus Sutra, Commentary on the Seven Point Mind Training to the monks. After that, I went to my place in the county. Upon the request of Kirti Rinpoche, I gave the initiation, or empowerment, of White Manjushri and Sixteen Arhats Prayer to 160 monks of Kirti Monastery and 50 monks of Hotsik Monastery. (Samten 1996, 608)

In addition to giving instructions about various Geluk texts and initiation of religious empowerment, he also continued giving transmissions and offering ordinations to the monks at various monasteries. According to his account:

In March, I went to Gomang Gar to practice fifteen-day sojong ritual (*gso sbyong*) and gave novice monastic ordination to more than 100 monks. After that, for four days, at the request of Gomang Gar, I taught the teaching of three vows to the monastic assembly and recited the practices of the peaceful and wrathful Manjushri prayers and white Manjushri prayers too. (Samten 1996, 609)

In addition to Gomang Monastery, Muge Samten was invited to many other monasteries, such as Daktsa Chosang monastery (*'stag tsha chos bzang gling'*), Tsenyi monastery (*'mtshan nyid dgon pa'*), Muge monastery (*'dmu dge dgon'*), Chokten Chok monastery (*'mchod rten icogs kyi dgon pa'*), Labrang monastery (*blab rang dgon pa'*), Dongrik monastery (*'gdong ru dgon'*), Golok Khangsar monastery (*go log khang gsar dgon*), Ngokshel monastery (*'sngo shul dgon'*), and Chamdo monastery (*'chab mdoi dgon'*), to give teachings, provide empowerments, offer transmission, and give ordination to the monks at large.

Since 1984, besides attending government meetings as before, Muge Samten devoted his efforts to the revival of Buddhism at various Buddhist institutions and to promoting Tibetan language at different schools throughout Amdo. In particular, for the religious revival, he chiefly focused on four fields of activity that include giving teachings (*khrid bton*), giving empowerments (*rjes gnang*), giving transmissions (*lung bton*), and giving ordinations (*sdom pa phog*).

I argue that Muge Samten was deeply committed to the revival of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan language. As Tibetan Buddhism is grounded in its complex teachings, empowerments, transmissions and ordinations, the continuation of the tradition depends in large part on scholar monks who can lead instruction and rituals. That is why Muge Samten emphasized these these four fields Buddhist scholastic of activity. Visiting monasteries sustained these traditions, a critical step in revival since giving instructions, initiations, and empowerments teachings are essential to the continuity of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In reviving the tradition of monastic ordination, Muge Samten was reviving an essential component of Tibetan Buddhism. Language

is also the medium through which Tibetan religion, culture, history, knowledge, and experience are preserved, produced, and created. Therefore, language is a fundamental component of keeping Tibetan discourse alive under the Communist regime. In essence, the revival in Muge Samten's account indicates that his blend of official authority and traditional knowledge created a space for Tibetan religion and language to continue. Muge Samten employed his official post and traditional knowledge to respond China's occupation and its integration of Tibet in a way that very likely prevented further degradation of Tibetan language and religion.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Muge Samten was a prolific intellectual. The significance of his life can be seen in the effect his writings and direct involvement in party policies. On the one hand, one must recognize his accomplishments as a Buddhist scholar at Labrang, having received the highest possible distinction of the Geshe degree in 1946 before the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Later, he joined the government and worked on various projects assigned by the government, also holding high official positions in the prefecture government. He was Vice-Chairman of the Prefecture Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. As a government official, he produced extensive materials on Tibetan grammar, literature, history, Buddhism, astronomy, and so forth. His works were collected and published in six volumes by the Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House in 1997.

The chapters in his autobiography entitled *The Author's Reflections on His Own History* are a rich resource through which to analyze Muge Samten's monastic training and official political role as he responded to the decline of Tibetan culture within the complex sociopolitical transformations of Communist China. In this thesis, I emphasized four major themes of dictionary projects, language reform, resistance, and revival that illustrate how Muge Samten exercised his monastic knowledge and official authority in reaction to the complex political circumstances in Tibet. In addition, his reaction and response were subtle, nuanced, and even ambiguous, as becomes clear when closely reading his autobiography.

In terms of the dictionary projects and other translation works for the Chinese government, history tells us that Muge Samten worked on all volumes of "The Dictionary of New Terms" and "The Chinese Tibetan Dictionaries" in different time periods. In reflecting on his involvement in these projects, the two phrases that he consistently employed were "I had to" and "I was asked." These two phrases suggest tacit submission to political authority and also reveal the confined space that was available for a Tibetan scholar like Muge Samten to exercise a challenge to the pervasive political authority. Therefore, Muge Samten had to use veiled and subtle language such as "I had to" and "I was asked" to relay his probable reluctance to engage

in these projects. “I had to” and “I was asked” also express the nuance of resistance since they connote a lack of agency.

The Cultural Revolution came to Tibet while Muge Samten was in the process of working on these dictionary projects. It was a destructive force affecting Tibetan religion, language, and physical being, leaving irreversible scars on individuals and on collective memory. The terminology described by Muge Samten includes “arrest,” “seizing property,” and “struggle” shedding light on the catastrophe that befell millions of people in the process of destroying the “Four Olds” in China. Even though avenues for free expression were few during the Cultural Revolution, Muge Samten sang a *dharma* song as he mentioned in his autobiography. Within this confined, heavily restricted space, he was singing *dharma* songs rather than shouting the political slogans. Therefore, his act of prayers is a subtle indication of resistance, for he refused to keep quiet or sing the revolutionary slogans that the “Red Guards” sang. Instead, he chose his own prayer and converted it into a *dharma* song that was, in fact, prohibited during the Cultural Revolution. His recollection of shouting these meanings of resistance in that context.

In the midst of the Cultural Revolution in 1969, the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing organized a course titled “Studying Chairman Mao’s Speeches” to reform Tibetan language. To implement the reform, they propagated Chairman Mao’s speech, Socialist reforms and the Cultural Revolution to validate the language reform, for they brought drastic changes to Tibetan language such as colloquial language integration, simplification of particle usages and verb tenses, and introduction of Chinese punctuations to Tibetan grammar. They also published a reform paper called *Neldi* and distributed it widely across Tibet.

In contradiction with the prevailing party intention, Muge Samten employed his cultural capital to challenge and criticize the language reform through various means. When the writers of *Neldi* used Chairman Mao’s speeches as a means of bolstering reforms to Tibetan language, Muge Samten also employed Chairman Mao’s speeches, but to support his opposition to reforms. He explicated the long historical development of Tibetan language to invalidate their argument: most of the language reformers had very little experience studying Tibetan language. He further detailed the omissions and factual inaccuracies regarding the Tibetan language. In

other words, Muge Samten emphasized in order to invalidate their reasons for reforming Tibetan language.

Cultural revival started after the Cultural Revolution in Tibet and one significant feature of it was the enactment of a flexible policy upon Tibet aimed at winning the approval and loyalty of Tibetans. With the revival of Tibetan cultural sites including monasteries, local temples, and shrines through both government financial funds and local Tibetans' donations, Muge Samten started using both his official authority and cultural capital in to work toward preserving atraditional knowledge, and to create a space for Tibetan culture, language, and religion within the Communist system.

Muge Samten was particularly committed to the revival of religious teachings. In particular, he chiefly focused on four fields of activity that include giving teachings, giving empowerments, giving transmissions, and giving ordinations. As Tibetan Buddhism is grounded in its complex teachings, empowerments, transmissions, and ordinations, the continuation of the tradition depends in large part on scholar monks who can lead instruction and rituals. Therefore, Muge Samten ensured that these four fields Buddhist scholastic of activity were revived.

In essence, these four major themes are part of his autobiography, and they depicted his subtle, flexible, and nuanced response to Chinese authority. However, Muge Samten's life and works are versatile and highly profound in various socio-cultural settings. To understand them all, I encourage the reader to analyze his other works compiled in these six volumes by the Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House in 1997.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: The Historical Timeline of Muge Samten's Life and Works:

- 1904: Born to a farming family named Gyongme Khorlotsang
- 1925: Took ordination at Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery
- 1934: Enrolled in the Geluk monastery of Labrang Tashikyi, studying sutra and tantra under various great masters such as Gyamkho Tulku (*rgyam kho sprul sku*), Konchok Samdrub (*dkon mchog bsam grub*), Jamyang Lekshe (*jam dbyangs legs bshad*), Jigme Damchok Gyatso (*jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho*), and Ngo Lama Lago (*dngos bla ma bla go*) for more than nine years.
- 1946: Completed his monastic studies and earned the Geshe Dorampa (*dge bshes rdo ram ba*) degree.
- 1948: Assigned as the schoolmaster of the newly established monastic school at Labrang Monastery when the Fifth Jamyang Shepa, Lobsang Jamyang Yeshe (*blo bzang jam dbyangs ye shes*) returned from Lhasa.
- 1950: Appointed to secretary (*drung chen mkhan po*) of Labrang Monastery by the Sixth Gungtang Jigme Tenpai Wangchuk.
- 1951: Accompanied Jetsun Sherab Gyatso (*reje btsun shes rab rgya mtsho*, 1884-1968) to Beijing to work at the office of minority affairs where he met Dorjee Tseten, Phunta, and Sonam Gyatso, engaged in proof reading and editing of the "Peoples Pictorial".
- 1953: Given the responsibility of teaching Buddhist metaphysics at the Monastic College of Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery.
- 1957: Ordered back to Beijing to edit the Tibetan translation of Mao Zedong's writing and of the Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary.
- 1967: Transferred to Barkham (*bar kham*), the capital of Ngawa Prefecture, Sichuan, for "re-education".
- 1977: Attended the Fourth Provincial CPPCC Standing Committee meeting of Sichuan Province and was appointed as a member.
- 1978: Appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Prefecture Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

- 1980: Went to Beijing for a meeting on ‘national minority’ languages, during which he strongly criticized the reform proposed by Chinese government.
- 1982: Invited to take part in a meeting of China astronomy in Lhasa and he was selected as the Vice-president of the Astronomy Association.
- 1983: Taught his two grammar books “*bod kyi yi ge’i spyi rnam blog gsal jug ngogs*” (published 1979) and “*brda sprod blo gsal dga ston*” to two hundred students for fifteen days in Lhuchuk country in Ganlho prefecture.
- 1986: Invited to lecture on Tibetan history, religion, and language at several major universities in China including the Southwestern Minorities University in Chengdu, the Northwestern Minorities University in Lanzhou.
- 1987: Composed a Tibetan history book “*bod kyi lo rgyus kun dga’I me long*”.
- 1989: Composed his autobiography “Self-Mirror of the Author’s Story of Existence” (*rtsom pa po rang gi byung ba brjod pa rang gsal a dar sha zhes by aba bzhungs so*).
- 1993: Passed away at Muge Tashi Khorlo Monastery.
- 1997: Works were collected and published in six volumes by the Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House, and again in 2009 by the Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House.

## Appendix 2: New Translations from Muge Samten's Autobiography:

The passages below are the main reference points I used in this thesis, and they are my translations of Muge Samten's autobiography from Tibetan to English.

### From Chapter 1:

Many of my students consistently asked me to write an autobiography (*rnam thar*) these days, but I believe that, as autobiography is concerned with the enlightened state by means of complete practice of the true path showing full liberation through cessation of suffering, someone like me, who is full of delusions, attachments, and hatred, without having received full teachings and experienced awakening, has nothing valuable to share with the world (Samten 1996, 527).

[...]

Most of the autobiographies written by students are effusive praises of their masters and that often dissimulates or distorts the real image of the master's life. That is why, it is important to write your own story, briefly, by yourself, and without any exaggerations (Samten 1996, 528).

[...]

I will briefly tell my story, for if I tell my story, or the story of my existence, and tell of the worldly changes that happened during that time period, it will be a good resource and material to analyze and assess the past history in the future" (Samten 1996, 528).

[...]

I studied under Geshe Ngawa Monlam. I performed good services for him. I sewed his old clothes, I tended the fire, collected firewood, and searched for books. I also studied hard and he was pleased with my diligence (Samten 1996, 547).

[...]

In these days, political revolution is becoming pervasive globally, like ocean waves ebbing and flowing. Because of my previous karma, I am designated to this great position and thus I am encouraged not to ignore the wellbeing of our community. People are spreading rumors. You students have been selected as the best, and I hope that you will all study hard. I even assigned Muge Samten, who is excellent in both

religious and secular scholarship, to lead you all. I hope you all respect him and follow his guidance (Samten 1996, 563).

[...]

In 1950, when I was 37, I went to Beijing with Geshe Sherab Gyatso (dge bshes shes rab rgya mtsho) and some high placed Xinjiang officials... As I like education, I wanted to go to a school to learn Chinese and English, but Yang Jingren said that I should become an official because they (the government) needed me. Especially since Sichuan, Kham and Central Tibet were not liberated yet, Tibetan language work and Tibetan officials were very critical for them. Geshe Sherab Gyatso asked me to accept the request, and also said that I could work in support of religion and for Tibetans with a role as a government official (Samten 1996, 574-575).

### **From Chapter 2:**

In 1950, when I was 37, I went to Beijing with Geshe Sherab Gyatso (dge bshes shesrab rgya mtsho) and some high ranking Xinjiang officials... As I liked education, I wanted to go to a school to learn Chinese and English, but Yang Jingren said that I should become a government official because they needed me. Since Sichuan, Kham and Central Tibet were not liberated yet, Tibetan language work and Tibetan officials were very crucial to them. Geshe Sherab Gyatso asked me to accept a position, and also said that I could work in support of Buddhism and for Tibetans with a role as a government official. Therefore, I accepted the post. I was moved to the office of minority affairs and there I met Dorjee Tseten, Phunta, and Sonam Gyatso. I worked in that office doing proof reading and editing the *“Peoples Pictorial”* (Samten 1996, 574-575).

[...]

In 1959, when I was 46, I had to disrobe. In May of that year, I was asked (shog zer) to go to Beijing to work on the first Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary and to review the first volume of Mao Zedong’s “Collected Speeches.” Tseten Zhabdrung arrived there later and we shared a room together. We quickly become good friends as he had a calm disposition and great passion for Tibetan culture... (Samten 1996, 587).

[...]

I went to Chengdu with Samdup and Monlam, helping to compile the third volume of Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary, which included six thousand religious terms. They didn’t include all of them and also distorted some of the definitions (Samten 1996, 598).

### **From Chapter 3:**

In the year 1966, when I was 53, the political catastrophe called the Cultural Revolution happened. In October, at the county political office, the Red Guards arrested us, five people including me, and seized all of our things, took us around the market, and struggled against us, but I didn't feel sad, instead, by considering it as the nature of cyclic existence (*samsara*), I tried to meditate upon the idea of impermanence, and the inherent flaws of *samsara*. My previous *Lojong* (blo sbyong) and *Lamrim* (lam rim) studies helped me. However, they (Red Guards) continued arresting people... (Muge, 1996. 592).

[...]

When I was being taken around the market, they [the Red Guards] asked me to wear my monk robe and the cap that we used to wear in retreat. They also asked me to put some religious texts on my back, carrying some pages of Kadam Legbum, a rosary, and a section of the biography of Jowo. They pushed me through the streets with noisy shouting slogans. I felt happiness inside and wanted to recite a *dharma song*... May all the suffering of others fall upon me; may all the virtuous actions that I practiced benefit others. I shouted these prayers with their slogan. They heard it sometimes but didn't understand. They were just saying that I was speaking some revolt slogans and brought some foolish Tibetan kids to listen to me, but like the Chinese, they were not able to understand my prayers (Samten 1996, 592).

[...]

Some people made many allegations about me. Even some leaders asked me to accept them and said that the punishment would be immense if I didn't. Some of my close friends said same thing. When I was hopeless, my teacher came into my dream one night and advised me not to accept everything that is asked of me. Lin Zong Man had to wear the 'Left Wing Cap', for he accepted everything that others imposed. Therefore, I just wrote them saying that I don't remember this and that and nothing happened to me. (Samten 1996, 594).

[...]

In 1957, I had to attend a meeting in Chengdu criticizing the leftist. But, since the religious reform was yet to happen, I wore my monk robe to represent my monkhood and pretended that I was not able to understand Chinese. So, I didn't have to criticize anyone in that meeting" (Samten 1996, 585).

#### **From Chapter 4:**



In 1969, the Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing organized a course entitled “Studying Chairman Mao’s Speeches” to reform Tibetan language, they stirred up the Tibetan language grammar and it appeared useless. They published a reform paper called “gnad bsdus” [essential points] and distributed it widely across Tibet. As such, Tibetan newspapers and magazines came to seem neither Tibetan nor Chinese. Based on “gnad bsdus,” the Nationalities Publishing House in Sichuan composed a Tibetan grammar book. I wrote a critique of the language reform, the critique wasn’t complete, but I presented the incomplete form to others for their feedback but never got any response from them. (Samten 1996, 597-598).

[...]

Quoting some speeches of Chairman Mao, the writers of “gnad bsdus” said that Tibetan language needs to be reformed. They don’t want to change the script. Instead, they want to reform Tibetan language, Tibetan grammar, Tibetan cases and particles. Also, since the socialist reforms and particularly the Cultural Revolution of proletarians, Tibetan language went through great changes including simplifying the particle usages in spoken language and changes of verb tenses (Samten 1996, 140).

[...]

Also, they composed Tibetan textbooks in which Tibetan particles don’t need be studied, for they removed the phonetic based Tibetan particles such as terminative particle (slar bsdu), ornament-conjunction particle (rgyan sdud), differentiation and inclusion particle (byed sdud) separation and inclusion particle (dgar sdud) continuative particle (lhag bcas) completing particle (rdzogs tsig) from the grammar. Instead, they integrated the characters only based signs language such as question mark (?), comma (,), semicolon (;), colon (:), full-stop (.), apostrophe (’), inverted comma (“”), parentheses (), dash (-), hyphen (/), and so forth into Tibetan writing (Samten 1996, 145).

[...]

By shouting that Tibetan language should conform to the spoken language, they replaced standard common preposition, conjunctions, and adverbs with colloquial words. That is very, dangerous for the sustainability of standard Tibetan language. For instance, they employed (tsang) as a ‘reasoning particle’ instead of sustaining the standard ‘reasoning particles’ such as (stabs), (phyir), and (gshis). They further replaced (sgrub byed), (gcod byed), and (len byed) with (yas). They also removed the standard noun (khyad par) and replaced it with (he bad) ...” (Samten 1996, 146)

[...]

Chairman Mao said that everyone should respect each nationalities culture, religion, faith. Furthermore, no one should be forced to study Chinese. Instead, we all should

support their efforts of employing their language and educating people through it (Samten 1996, 135).

[...]

Since Tibetan language was constructed, developed, upgraded, and thrived over thousands of years, they don't have a good foundation of linguistic and philosophical arguments saying that Tibetan language went through major changes by socialist reforms and the Cultural Revolution. Also, this is a total destruction or absurd action triggered by those who don't understand Tibetan language (Samten 1996, 142).

[...]

Even though they said that they simplified Tibetan language through the reform, they made it more complex in reality. For instance, instead of saying (med), they use (yod pa ma red) and (yod pa yin pa ma red). For (yod), they created (yod pa red), (yod pa yin pa red) and so forth. Therefore, this reform created a lot of reductant phrases for the shorter phrases in Tibetan and that eventually made the language more confusing and obscure..." (Samten 1996, 147)

[...]

In 1980, when I was 67, I attended the meeting upon minority's language discussion. After 12 days of argument, we concluded that the language reform called "gnad bsdus" is not invalid language. Gradually, magazines and newspapers are began publishing in standard Tibetan and that helped to save Tibetan language from the fundamental destruction brought by the reform. I continued to work on the dictionary project and other teachings. My criticism of the reform called 'analytical critique of gnad bsdus' (gnad bsdus kyi dgag yig mtha dpyad) was published by the office of Tibetan Chinese Dictionary and distributed among officials. I even have received a praise letter from Dungkar Lobsang Trinley in Beijing" (Samten 1996, 601).

## **From Chapter 5:**

In the previous year, the Red Army came to Muge. The Kuomintang Army, therefore, resided in Muge Monastery to stop the Red Army. It became obvious that the Kuomintang Army wasn't strong enough to defeat the Red Army. They therefore burned down the monastery and left nothing. In the following year, there was another influx of Red Army soldiers, and it was said that they were from Shusang Chang. As a result, some monks escaped to join Labrang Monastery. (Samten 1996, 541).

[...]

I was worried that the religious teachings will decline because of the reforms. So, I prayed for the re-emergence of Buddhist teachings. In 1956, I went to attend the

meeting in Chengdu and the reform was announced. Many parts of farming areas were reformed. In 1957, I had to attend the meeting of the protest of the left-wing in Chengdu. Since the religious reform was yet to start, I continued wearing my monk robes and pretended that I was not able to speak Chinese. Therefore, I wasn't forced to speak against anybody at the meeting (Samten 1996, 585-586).

[...]

In 1973, when I was 60, I was released. Compensation was 13000 [Chinese Yuan] toward salaries and my property that was confiscated. I spent 3000 for religious purposes, gave 2000 to my sisters and deposited 2000 into the bank (Samten 1996, 596).

[...]

In 1977, when I was 64, I attended the forth Provincial CPPCC Standing Committee meeting of Sichuan Province, and I was appointed as a member. I then was taken to tour the province" (Samten 1996, 596).

[...]

In 1980, when I was 67, I attended the meeting upon minorities' language discussion. After 12 days of arguments, we concluded that the language reform draft called 'Naldhi' is not invalid. Gradually, magazines and newspapers are began publishing in standard Tibetan and that helped to save Tibetan language from the fundamental destruction brought by the reform. I continued to work on the dictionary project and other teachings in that winter. My critique entitled *An Analytical Critique of Gnad Bsdus* (gnad bsdus kyi dgag yig mtha dpyad) was published by the office of Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary and distributed amongst = officials. I even have received a letter of praise from Dungkar Lobsang Trinley in Beijing. Beside these things, I composed (blo gsal rigs sgo). In that summer, I went to Barkham and with the financial support of the Barkham education department, we composed four textbooks for the primary schools and some other books to educate the illiterate Tibetan population (Samten 1996, 601).

[...]

In 1981, they had the autonomous prefecture level religious members meeting. During the meeting, the religious policy was influenced by the leftists, and they published factually incorrect documents. I went to Chengdu for the provincial politburo members meeting and later also attended to the provincial United Front Work Department religious affairs meeting. During the meeting, I pointed out the wrongful actions imposed upon religious policy. We had both provincial politburo meeting and provincial People's Congress meeting. During these meetings, made the decision to

re-open Muge Monastery and ensuring that it would be managed by the provincial government. We even had an agreement document signed” (Samten 1996, 602).

[...]

In 1983, I taught (snyan ngag yang srid snag mdzod) to the Classical Tibetan studies class at Beijing Nationalities University in Beijing. We had the Fifth Sichuan Provincial Politburo meeting in that year, and I was again appointed the board member and also vice- chairman of the Prefecture Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Samten 1996, 606).

[...]

In the end of November in 1984, I went to Beijing to attend the meeting of the Buddhist Association of China. I went to Gomang Monastery after returning from Beijing to teach Refuge Prayer, Guru Puja, Hundred Deities in Tushita, White Manjushri Prayer, Three Lineage Accomplishment, White and Green Tara Prayers, Outer, Inner, and Secret Ritual Prayer of Dharmaraja, Permission Rituals of White Manjushri, White Akshobhya, Sixteen Arhats Prayer, Oral transmission of A Guide to Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, Chanting the Names of Manjushri, Amitayus Sutra, Commentary on the Seven Point Mind Training to the monks. After that, I went to my place in the county. Upon the request of Kirti Rinpoche, I gave the initiation, or empowerment, of White Manjushri and Sixteen Arhats Prayer to 160 monks of Kirti Monastery and 50 monks of Hotsik Monastery (Samten 1996, 608)

[...]

In March, I went to Gomang Gar to practice fifteen-day *gso sbyong* ritual and gave novice monastic ordination to more than 100 monks. After that, for four days, at the request of the Gomang Gar, I taught the teaching of three vows to the monastic assembly and recited the practices of the peaceful and wrathful Manjushri prayers and white Manjushri prayers too. (Samten 1996, 609).