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# From Exquisite to Extinct: Linguistic Human Rights in the Tibetan Diaspora || Tibetan Pragmatics, Standardization Ethics and Obligatory Bilingualism

Camille Zora Inge  
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# From Exquisite to Extinct:

## Linguistic Human Rights in the Tibetan Diaspora

|| Tibetan Pragmatics, Standardization Ethics and Obligatory Bilingualism



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| ABSTRACT

This work documents a sample of the rich qualities of Tibetan language and discusses how Buddhism is embedded and woven throughout its character. From translation compounds revealing the deeper meaning of Lord Buddha to morpho-syntactic implications of the emptiness of the self, Tibetan offers a window into an insider's understanding of Buddhist philosophy. With such a vibrant linguistic story, Tibetan language ought to be respected and upheld, taught and treasured. But, the Chinese occupation in Tibet has resulted in a physical and cultural degradation of Tibetan culture. One of the least tangible yet most affective oppressions has been upon the language itself. Amongst Tibetan school closures, obligatory education in Mandarin, arrests of Tibetan scholars and violent prohibition of cultural expression, China has been committing unjust violations of Tibet's linguistic human rights. This research, based in a Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, India, aims to defend the preservation of the Tibetan language and truthfully portray its deteriorating political status within the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China and throughout the exile diaspora.

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Divya, Mara, McKenna, Me, and Megan outside the Taj Majal in Agra, India

| INTRODUCTION

Cultural genocide in daily life means being told, in many ways, that your mother tongue is useless, your traditional knowledge is useless, your cultural attitudes and focus on lives to come as well as this life is useless. Cultural genocide banishes Tibetan language, religion and culture to a personal and private realm, while public life in all its dimensions is almost completely dominated by Chinese. Cultural genocide affects the social psychology of an entire nation. The Chinese language is presented always as the language of progress, modernity, civilization and advancement to a higher state of social evolution. Tibetans are encouraged to believe they are inferior and backward, especially the nomads and farmers.

- Gabriel Lafitte

In the past 65 years, Tibet has undergone a complete transformation of cultural, religious and linguistic freedoms. In 1949, the People's Liberation Army of China invaded eastern Tibet and seized control over the headquarters the following year. In 1951, the Tibetan Government was forced to sign the supposed *17-Point Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet*, which was a document full of unwanted promises and illogical compromises. It promised to maintain the political system of Tibet, the status and functions of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, to protect freedom of religion in the monasteries and to refrain from compulsion in the matter of reforms in Tibet. These guarantees were found to be grossly violated by the People's Republic of China (PRC), leading the Government of Tibet to repudiate the Agreement on March 11, 1959. That year, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama fled Tibet to Northern India where he established the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), also known as the Tibetan Government in Exile. At least 80,000 Tibetans sought refuge directly afterwards mostly throughout India, Nepal and Bhutan. (Currently the exile population is over 150,000, out of which about 100,000 live in India.) The CTA serves as essentially the sole legitimate representative for the Tibetan people; the administration is dedicated to truth, non-violence and genuine democracy and freedom.

In 1960, the International Commission of Jurists gave a report titled *Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic to the United Nations*, which accused the Chinese of acts of genocide in Tibet, including violating sixteen articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1965, the area that had been under the control of the Dalai Lama's government from 1951-1959 (U-Tsang and western Kham) was renamed the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR); the TAR head was under the administration of the First Secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Regional Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, who was not a Tibetan. The role of ethnic Tibetans in the higher levels of the TAR Communist Party was very limited. The Cultural Revolution lasted from 1966 through 1976, led by Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Massive destruction in attempts of cultural assimilation were oppressed upon Tibet. Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans were violently killed, and Tibetan Buddhist were forced to participate in the destruction of their monasteries at gunpoint, ultimately resulting in over 6,000 monasteries having been destroyed.

## From Exquisite to Extinct: Linguistic Human Rights in the Tibetan Diaspora

In more recent years, human rights injustices continue to occur, including the closing of Tibetan schools, arrests of innocent Tibetans, the “disappearance” of the Dalai Lama appointed 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, which have all sparked the development of NGOs and Youth Groups in the Tibetan Diaspora formed in order to spread honest awareness about the state of Tibetan suffering.

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## I | HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF TIBETAN LANGUAGE

### I.I HOW TIBETAN CAME TO BE:

#### TIBETAN BUDDHISM AND THE KAKHA<sup>1</sup>

“Currently, as much as I know, true teaching of Buddhism is being kept in Tibetan language.”<sup>2</sup>

-Tsedup Dorji, Director of TCV Gopalpur

The origins of the Classical Tibetan language, as well as the foundation of Tibetan culture, are closely rooted in the spread of Buddhism into Tibet. They essentially grew up together. Buddhism was brought to Tibet from India around the 7<sup>th</sup> century; Tibetan script was allegedly developed as a means of translating these incoming sacred Buddhist texts from Sanskrit. As the traditional account goes, the 33<sup>rd</sup> king and first Emperor of Tibet, Songtsem Gampo (569-649AD), sent one of his ministers, Thonmi Sambhota, to India in order to bring back knowledge of Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> The minister then formulated a script for Tibetan based on the Devanāgarī model<sup>4</sup> of the Indian Gupta script<sup>5</sup>. The features of this writing system are as follows:

- Type of writing system: alphasyllabary<sup>6</sup> / abugida<sup>7</sup> (where consonant-vowel sequences are written as one unit, rather than distinct letters)
- Direction of writing: left to right in horizontal lines.

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<sup>1</sup> Just as the word “alphabet” is comprised of the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, *alpha* and *beta*, the Tibetan word for alphabet, *kakha*, is a combination of the first two syllables in their alphabet.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Tsedup Dorji, the Director of the Tibetan Children’s Village School in Gopalpur, India.

<sup>3</sup> “Tibetan” last modified January 2013 <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/tibetan.htm>

<sup>4</sup> From the two Sanskrit words: *deva*, meaning “god” and *nāgarī*, meaning “city” — outputting something like “sacred script of the city”

<sup>5</sup> Note that the Tibetan script is the only aspect of the Tibetan language that comes from India, nothing else—the language shares the majority of its qualities with other South Asian (Sino-Tibetan) language groups.

<sup>6</sup> This term was suggested in 1997 by William Bright for use with Indic scripts in South Asia. The idea is that, concerning the graphic arrangement of symbols, a writing system “shares features of both alphabet and syllabary.” (William Bright, *A Matter of Typology: Alphasyllabaries and Abugidas* (Colorado: University of Colorado, 2000))

<sup>7</sup> This term, an Ethiopian name derived from the first four letters of the Ge’ez script, contrasts both with a “syllabary,” where letters with shared consonants or vowels show no particular resemblance to each other, and with a proper “alphabet,” where independent letters are used to denote both consonants and vowels. *Abugida* was suggested in 1990 by Peter Daniels. (Peter T. Daniels, *Fundamentals of Grammatology*, (New Haven: Journal of the American Oriental Society, 2000))



- Consonant letters carry an inherent vowel which can be altered or muted by means of diacritics (accent marks that distinguish sounds)
- Vowels can be written as independent letters, or by using a variety of diacritical marks which are written above, below, before or after the consonant they belong to. This feature is common to most of the alphabets of South and South East Asia.
- When consonants occur together in clusters, special conjunct letters are used.<sup>8</sup>

This genesis story does come with a fair amount of doubt to it, in that it is rather unlikely that the first documentation of written Tibetan arose from a large scroll of Buddhist philosophy in Thonmi Sambhota's handwriting. In fact, the earliest and simplest account was written seven hundred years after the events it claims to describe, and genuine ancient Tibetan historical records from Central Asia appear to contain no mention of Thonmi at all.<sup>9</sup> It is also doubted that Songtsen Gampo commissioned his minister to gather information about Buddhism solely for the purpose of Buddhist translation. The 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries were the height of the Tibetan empire. Tibet was becoming a great political power that desired to get involved in the world. What is more likely, according to Matthew Ackester, is that Tibet was run by a literate democracy that needed a language to administer their empire<sup>10</sup>; that the development of the writing system was for administrative, rather than religious purposes (at least in the beginning).<sup>11</sup> Even though translation of Buddhist text was not the *reason* for the Tibetan writing system, it certainly served as a primary influence and inspiration for the formation of the rest of the language. "One of the earliest references to writing is in the ancient annals discovered at the caves near Tun-huang, which briefly describe the principal events of each year from the death of Songtsen Gampo in 650 through 747. The entry for the year 655 reads "The King stayed at Merkhe, and prime minister Stong-tsan wrote the text of his commands to Ngor-ti.""

Tibet's isolating geography helped accumulate and preserve a distinct Tibetan culture and a virtually undisturbed history right up until the Chinese invasion forced a sudden influx of freshly formed Chinese socialist ideals. One of the most deeply affected aspects of Tibetan culture as a direct result from interaction with the Chinese settlers and government system is the Tibetan language. Usage of the Tibetan language in education, business and daily communication has, over the years, quietly yet undeniably been forced to melt away.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Devangari," last modified January 2013,

<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/devanagari.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Stephen V. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language* (New York: New York Press, 1992)

<sup>10</sup> Interview, "On the Origins of Tibetan Language" with Matthew Ackester, translator and Tibetologist, in Dharamsala, India on 24 April 2013

<sup>11</sup> Stephen V. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language*

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Law Network, *Imposing Modernity with Chinese Characteristics: The Fate of Tibetan Civilisation* (Dharamsala: Tibet Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, 2011)

SOUNDS OF THE KAKHA

The order of the letters is based on articulatory phonetics. That is to say, the syllables are organized by where in your mouth you pronounce them. As shown on the chart, there are four rows and eight columns, importantly divided before the last syllable of the fifth row.

*The first nineteen syllables*

The first row of the alphabet is reserved for velar sounds—sounds that are produced in the back of your throat. The second row is for alveo-palatal sounds—sounds that are produced between the back of your teeth and the roof of the mouth. The third row is for alveolar sounds—pronounced with the tip of the tongue at the back of the teeth. The fourth row is for bilabial sounds—pronounced with both the lips. The fifth row is again alveolar. The columns have a similarly organized progression. All of the sounds in the first column are very short with a high tone. (There are only two tones in Tibetan—“one is high in the same manner as when we are happy to remember something and say “Oh!”; the other is a low tone as when we put our feet up at the end of a long day and say “Ah”<sup>13</sup>.) The second column adds aspiration, an extra breathiness between the consonant and the vowel. The third column’s sounds are long and low. The fourth: long, low, and nasal.

The Tibetan Syllabary

1	ཀ།	ཁ།	ག།	ང།
	KA	K'A	GA	NGA
2	ཅ།	ཆ།	ཇ།	ཉ།
	CHA	CH'A	JA	NYA
3	ཏ།	ཐ།	ད།	ན།
	TA	T'A	DA	NA
4	པ།	ཕ།	བ།	མ།
	PA	P'A	BA	MA
5	ཅ།	ཆ།	ཇ།	ཉ།
	TSA	TS'A	DZA	WA
6	ཞ།	ཟ།	འ།	ཡ།
	ZHA	ZA	'A	YA
7	ར།	ལ།	ཤ།	ས།
	RA	LA	SHA	SA
8	ཏ།	ཨ།		
	HA	A		

*The second eleven syllables*

Here, the pattern is much less strict. The last syllable in the fifth row is a bilabial glide. The, the syllables in the sixth row are all low-toned. The first two syllables in the seventh row are pronounced as in English. The last two syllables in the seventh row and the first two in the eighth row are all high-toned.

<sup>13</sup> David Curtis, “Learning Tibetan Script,” last modified July 2006, [http://www.tibetanlanguage.org/PDF/Mandala2\\_LearningTibetanScript.pdf](http://www.tibetanlanguage.org/PDF/Mandala2_LearningTibetanScript.pdf)

The vertical stroke at the end of each row is called a *shad*—it is effectively Tibetan’s only punctuation mark. It is used to indicate wherever a reader might pause or take a breath (originating from the cultural norm that all reading should be performed out loud). The small raised dot is called *tseg* and marks the boundaries of the syllable.<sup>14</sup>

## I.II HOW TIBETAN LANGUAGE REPRESENTS ITS CULTURE

### THE WRITING SYSTEM

The beauty of the Tibetan writing system lies not only in its aesthetic form. The conservative nature of the Tibetan script—in that the writing system has remained virtually unchanged for thousands of years—is also a communal bond among all the dialects of Tibetan. That is, the beauty lies in its “transcendence of regionalism: all literate Tibetans share a single written language, however different their spoken dialects may be.”<sup>15</sup>

If Tibetans from different parts of Tibet are asked to give their word for “hair,” a Tibetan from Purik will say *skra*, one from Amdo will say *˘skya*, one from Kham will say *stra*, one from Tao-fu will say *stra*, and one from Bhutan or Sikkim will say *kya*. Similarly, a Ladakhi will say *sa*, a rural Central Tibetan will say *ta*, and an upper-class resident of Lhasa City will say *tsa*. But if these Tibetans are literate, and are asked to write the word they had just spoken, they will all produce the same written form, which we here transcribe as <skra>. And, if they are shown the written form <skra>, they will, again, pronounce the word differently, but they will all recognize the form and agree that—however it is pronounced—it means “hair.”<sup>16</sup>



<sup>14</sup> The word “syllable” in Tibetan is *tsheg-bar*, “between the dots.”

<sup>15</sup> Stephen V. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

This is an exceptional quality that is possibly unique to the Tibetan language. In most other languages, it is nearly impossible to prevent the modification of spelling throughout centuries of language dispersion. One of the implications of spelling variations across dialects is that it is much easier for certain dialects to die out, shedding layers from the vibrant culture of a language's history. This distinctive feature of Tibetan works to unify all of its speakers, possibly giving them the strength to uphold their language against the political force of Mandarin Chinese. In a sense, the Tibetan script is an armor that solidifies its core, making it harder to fracture.

#### THE WAY BUDDHISM LIVES IN TIBETAN:

#### TRANSLATION COMPOUNDS

The value of Classical Tibetan is also found in its revealing connection to Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism is seen in the way Tibetan is written. As complex Buddhist concepts entered the Tibetan plateau around the 9<sup>th</sup> century, new words needed to be added to the lexicon in order to appropriately express the incoming ideas.<sup>17</sup> Instead of creating entirely new words, the concepts were represented by “translation compounds”—for example, combining two preexisting adjectives to form a new noun, or combining a noun and a verb to form a new verb. The revelation is found in what words are chosen to be combined in order to effectively communicate the new theory. So, if you find the adjective *sangs-pa*, “awakened”, and combine it with *rgyas-pas*, “expanded, blossomed, fully developed”, you arrive at *sans-rgyas*: “awakened<sup>18</sup> expanded.” This forms the concept of Buddha. Combining the word for “purified” with “perfected” creates *jang chub*, “purified perfected.” This is how you represent the concept of “enlightenment.” Then, *sdug-bsngal*, a combination of “afflicted” and “exhausted,” comes to mean “suffering of the round of rebirth.” Similarly, the noun and verb (and preposition) combination *mya-ngan-las nda* means “pass beyond suffering” and implies “enter nirvana.” The combination *snod-du rung* “be proper as vessel” represents “be fit to receive teachings,” accurately portraying a “vessel” as a metaphor for the Buddhist theory of “emptiness.” The way that Tibetan language has been manipulated in its core form to be able to clearly communicate the deep philosophies of Buddhism is what drew Dorji, the Director of the TCV school in Gopalpur, to emphasize that “the root of Tibetan Buddhism lies in Tibetan language. The understanding of Buddhism entirely depends upon Tibetan language.”

#### IDIOMS, PHRASES AND COMMON METAPHORS

Another facet of language which reveals the abstract mindset of its culture is the use of idioms, phrases and common metaphors. These work to classify an everyday concept by relating it to a more widely understood, culturally agreed upon idea. Although usage of these idioms now only lives in the older generation, it does offer a clear insight into the Tibetan way of thinking. Since the values of Buddhism are

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen V. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language*

<sup>18</sup> Awakened, as from the sleep of ignorance.

indisputable among its people, referencing Buddhist philosophies in order to make sense of simpler happenings is a sure way to get your point across. Here are some examples published by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.<sup>19</sup>

*bka' gyur la shog lhan*

Lit: To put a patch on the Kangyur (the collection of the Buddha's teachings)  
Sense implied: To make an unnecessary contribution.

*gsang sngags khrom bsgrags*

Lit: To teach Tantra in a market place  
Sense implied: (sarcastic remark) A great, non-virtuous act

*skyin pa chu yin yang sla ru ma gtong*

Lit: Even if you are repaying water, don't make it thin.  
Sense implied: Be mindful of repaying one's kindness; used to indicate the best way to respond to kindness

*shi khar ma ni tsha 'don*

Lit: To chant the Mani mantra in a rush on one's death bed  
Sense implied: To do something at the last moment

*skyid la khai rtsa la mnyam za dang sdug sngon moai chu la mnyam 'thung*

Lit: Together we shall eat the grass of the mountain pass and drink the murky water of suffering  
Sense implied: To be together in times of joy and suffering (This expression is used to indicate friendship and intimacy by sharing all joys and sorrows together.)

*sangs rgyas la ka kha*

Lit: To teach Buddha the alphabet  
Sense implied: Unnecessary and improper efforts

## NONAGENTIVE SUBJECTS OF EXPERIENCE

Buddhist philosophy discusses the self, or the "ego," as a nonexistent concept—that the self is illusory. "We assume that each of us is a self, that there is an entity called 'me.' The self is just another misunderstanding, however... Everything we do in our lives depends on how we perceive our 'selves,' so if this perception is based on misunderstandings, which it inevitably is, then this misunderstanding permeates

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<sup>19</sup> Acharya Sangye T. Naga and Tsepa Rigzin, *Tibetan Quadrisyllabics, Phrases and Idioms* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1994)

everything we do, see and experience.”<sup>20</sup> This concept of beyond-the-self experience is embedded in the very grammar of Tibetan language.

Of course there is still a pronoun “I” in Tibetan, and it is usually conjugated with a corresponding first person singular verb: “I look at,” “I listen to,” “I make,” all conjugated just as you would expect. These verbs—actions of which “I” is in control—have a name. They are called “volitional verbs,” meaning that the action is voluntary. There are also actions that occur to “I” involuntarily—naturally called “involitional verbs”—such as “I see,” “I hear,” “I get sick.” The difference is that when I look at, rather than see, I am purposefully directing my gaze towards a referent. However, I cannot fully control what “I” see, what “I” hear, or when “I” get sick. This is a different, out-of-body “I.” These occurrences simply happen to “I”, around “I,” without specific egophoric intention. This “I” that is experiencing uncontrollable “seeing” can be called a nonagentive subject of experience. To express these involitional actions, “I” is no longer conjugated with its first person singular verbal counterpart. “I” is conjugated as a third person, just as if the action was occurring to a being outside of yourself. This creates something like, “I sees,” “I hears,” “I gets sick,” showing that the self does not always have power over its experience. So, Tibetan language is able to use morphological shifts in its grammar to imply one of the fundamental Buddhist concepts of the emptiness of the self.

## II | STANDARDIZATION OF THE TIBETAN LANGUAGE

### II.I WHAT IS LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION? (WHO DECIDES; WHAT DOES IT MEAN; WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?)

All languages are rich with vast diasporas of spoken dialects. No language inherently has just one set of rules for vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Naturally, as speakers migrate into various regions throughout a language map, their manner of speech will grow to differ. And, the longer time passes, the more a language will broaden into diverse language communities. There are, however, government committees that work to propose one dialect as the standard—from which we build dictionaries, endorse accents, codify grammars and broadcast news. The procedure for selecting the standard is often quite simple: the standard will come from the city, where lies the government, the money and the power. The implications of language standardization vary depending on the status of the community. It can be a source of language maintenance and strengthening of cultural integrity, or alternatively, a spark for linguistic discrimination and social conflict.<sup>21</sup> The latter often occurs when the speaking community is already an oppressed, marginalized people.

#### THE TIBETAN STANDARD

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<sup>20</sup> Zongsar Jamyang Khyentse, *What Makes You Not a Buddhist* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007)

<sup>21</sup> Trace Foundation, “Perspectives on Language Standardization,” last modified March 2010, <http://www.trace.org/events/perspectives-language-standardization>

“It is often the case that one dialect in a language is picked out as normative and other dialects stigmatized: in the case of Tibetan, the speech of Lhasa City is frequently put forward as the prestige dialect. It is not clear to me that this view is at all widespread outside of Lhasa City; the view is, however, found among those foreign linguists whose informants are from Lhasa, and among those foreigners whose work or sympathies lie with Lhasa political or religious elite.”<sup>22</sup>

-Stephan V. Beyer

A House Hearing of the 108 Congress was held in 2003 before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China discussing “The Role of Tibetan Language in Tibet’s Future.” David Germano, Professor of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, distinguishes Tibetan not as a language such as modern English, where all its speakers can more or less understand each other with ease. Tibetan, he suggests, can be thought of as “a series of languages, rather than dialects. They are often mutually incomprehensible.” Even though the Lhasa language is implied as the standard, Tibetans from Northern Kham, for example, can understand little of what Lhasa-Tibetans are saying. Germano sums up that “the divergence of dialects is extremely great. There is no standard Tibetan.” He instead defines the Lhasa language as “an emergent proto-standard Tibetan,” rather than a legitimized standard that is actually used from East to West. Germano continues to explain how, since this Lhasa language is not the standard in Eastern Tibet, that when a Tibetan from Kham or Amdo meets a Tibetan from Lhasa, they often rely on a second language to speak amongst themselves: Chinese. This implies that the lack of a standard Tibetan validates proliferating usage of Chinese, even among Tibetans. So, officially allocating a Standard Tibetan language across all of Tibet, regardless of what the standard may be, would drastically reduce the need for Tibetans to rely on Chinese as a mutually intelligible medium.

## II.II HOW TO PRESERVE THE LANGUAGE OF A SCATTERED POPULATION

One has to wonder what difference it makes to declare one dialect as the standard, especially when a language population is so diasporic. Does it really have an affect at all? It is easier to imagine the implications when you create a sort of chain of language dominance. A small community from the eastern section of Kham speaks an adaptation of the regional dialect. So, sitting above their familial speech is the established Kham dialect. Standing above that is the declared standard Lhasa dialect. And, towering once more above that is the national language, Mandarin. This all essentially (and honestly, arbitrarily) declares this innocuous community four times inferior to those who hold administrative power and linguistic influence in Tibet. Their inferiority further implies that their needs, perspectives and values will not only not have a voice, but they will not be justly preserved in the future history of Tibet.

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<sup>22</sup> Stephan V. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language*

David Germano, Professor of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, defends the requirement for the Tibetan community to establish some sort of standard language, in order to dissuade their settling for the Chinese medium.

This standard Tibetan, which has been emerging over the past two or three decades continues to not be a standard in many parts of Eastern Tibet, which means that Tibetans often rely on a second language to speak amongst themselves. So, when a Tibetan from Kham (Sichuan) or Amdo (Qinghai), meets a Tibetan from Lhasa, they might very well rely on Chinese, more typically. So the lack of this standard Tibetan across the entire region of Tibetan culture continues to be a pressing necessity. And there is another old adage which is, “any standard is better than no standard,” an issue particularly compelling in relationship to languages and communities.<sup>23</sup>

With a standardized Tibetan language, Tibet will be one step closer to shedding the need to rely on Chinese.

### III | OBLIGATORY BILINGUALISM FOR TIBETANS IN TIBET AND IN EXILE

#### III.I USEFULNESS OF TIBETAN LANGUAGE IN THE DIASPORA

The Tibetan language has no value in present-day Tibet. For instance, if a letter were mailed with an address written in Tibetan, it wouldn't reach its destination even within Tibet, let alone outside. In the case of travels, no matter how literate a person is in Tibetan, he would not be able to know the bus timing or read the seat number on his ticket. Even if one has to look for a hospital or a shop in the country headquarters or a city, the knowledge of Tibetan is useless. A person who knows only Tibetan will find it difficult even to buy daily necessities. If our language is useless in our own country, where else will it have any use? If the situation remains like this for long, the Tibetan language will become extinct one day.”

- *Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, Tibetan Scholar*

The official language of the Tibetan Autonomous Region—that is, the language of government administration, university education, and even street signs—is not Tibetan. It is Mandarin Chinese. This is not because Tibetans themselves autonomously decided to subvert to a Chinese medium. This is because the official language of the People's Republic of China, including all its regions, is determined by the PRC central government.<sup>24</sup> Now, what happens to an oppressed community when they are forced, for all practical purposes, to forgo their own language for the sake of CCP political

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<sup>23</sup> David Germano, “Teaching and Learning Tibetan: The Role of Tibetan Language in Tibet's Future,” (statement presented at the 108<sup>th</sup> US Congress House Hearing before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Washington, DC, 7 April 2003)

<sup>24</sup> Tibet Justice Center, *Options for Tibet's Future Political Status: Self-Governance Through an Autonomous Arrangement* (New Delhi: Tibetan Parliamentary & Policy Research Center, 2002)



egotism? Tibetans, at least those who wish to become educated or get a job, must submit. “Chinese language is spoken widely [in Tibet], used for most commercial and official communications and holds the dominant position in government, commerce, and academia. Under such circumstances many young Tibetans seeking to get ahead are left with little choice but to use Chinese language rather than Tibetan.”<sup>25</sup> The Tibetan Youth Congress admitted that “proficiency in Tibetan language has little practical use except for those who wish to become teachers of Tibetan language.”<sup>26</sup> One of the largest problems is the current lack of prestige of the Tibetan language. David Germano recalls the Tibetan saying, “Tibetan is not useful to fill one’s stomach” (‘bod skad brgyab na grod khog rgyag gi ma red’). That is why they believe that it is more useful to speak Chinese.<sup>27</sup>

In exile, whether it be in India, Nepal, or Bhutan, Tibetan refugees form communities within which they are free to use their own language amongst each other. The extent of their freedom of speech depends on how influenced the government is by Chinese demands. The Nepali police is heavily monitored by the Chinese, causing freedom of expression for Tibetans in Kathmandu to be repressed by the looming eyes and shoulder-draped guns of men in navy camouflage. In Dharamsala, though, where Chinese government has no reign, Tibetan flags and “Free Tibet” stickers are hung with fearless pride. So, Tibetan is useful when communicating with fellow refugees. But inevitably they will have to suppress their usage when exiting the small community and carrying out practical duties among natives. With Tibetan reaching no greater heights than casual conversation and buying fruit, the prosperity of the language has little room to flourish. Dharamsala is home to the Central Tibetan Administration, which holds the Department of Religion and Culture, the Department of Education, the Department of Information and International Relations, as well as four others that work as liaisons and supporters for Tibetan well-being and human rights, all underneath the direction of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

### III.II MULTILINGUALISM IN TIBETAN CHILDREN’S EDUCATION

Tibetan language has been continually undermined for political reasons and there is very little use of Tibetan as the language of education and administration. Chinese language is generally used to teach various subjects in school – even in those that are officially designated as “Tibetan” schools. Chinese students in Tibetan areas generally have the option to attend exclusively Chinese-medium schools. As a practical matter, proficiency in Chinese is essential to receive a higher education. China’s most prestigious universities provides instruction only in Chinese, while the lower-ranked

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<sup>25</sup> Tibetan Youth Congress, *Tibet: The Gap Between Fact and Fabrication: Tibetan Response to China’s White Papers* (Dharamsala: Tibetan Youth Congress, 2005)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> David Germano, “Teaching and Learning Tibetan: The Role of Tibetan Language in Tibet’s Future”

universities established to serve ethnic minorities allows study of only some subjects in Tibetan.<sup>28</sup>

*-US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*

Not only can Tibetans not obtain a job with only the knowledge of Tibetan, but that knowledge of their own language also has limited opportunity to reach full fluency. The language of the Tibetan higher education system is determined by the PRC for all levels above primary school. This means that Tibetans can gain about a sixth grade knowledge in their own language before submitting to Mandarin instruction. Consequently, their performance in school suffers—if a Tibetan student does not fully learn the Mandarin language—and quickly—then the actual material that is being taught will not be comprehended. Furthermore, if they do not receive proper marks in their classes, they will not be admitted into prestigious universities or get a decent job. Essentially, there is no successful way for Tibetans to navigate around living in Tibet without learning Mandarin, which also means learning deficient Tibetan.

The bilingualism that is promoted in Chinese-run schools is a shady misrepresentation of the entirely Mandarin-dominant curriculum. “The Chinese authorities often present their concept of bilingual education as a progressive education policy that confirms their commitment to ‘protect’ minority culture and languages. However, in the Tibet Autonomous Region, bilingual education has generated ‘subtractive’ bilingualism, where Tibetan children are taught Chinese language while neglecting Tibetan language.”<sup>29</sup> Even Tibetan-run schools are imposed with language restrictions for their curriculum. For instance, the University of Lhasa was founded in 1985 “to provide training for both Tibetan and Chinese cadres who are to ‘advance in Tibet’s economic development.’ But only one of the seventeen courses are taught in Tibetan. The previous head of the University, who maintained that ‘the ultimate goal [of the University] is the establishment of the centre of Tibetan culture in China,’ was replaced by a Chinese official who does not even speak Tibetan.”<sup>30</sup> In addition to Tibetan language being banned, the teaching of Tibetan culture and values is also stunted. “In reality, instruction in Chinese prevails and the educational system is used to instill dominant Chinese values in children, while denigrating Tibetan culture.”<sup>31</sup> Even in Tibetan language classes, the curriculum is “predominantly translated directly from standard Chinese-language curriculum, offering very little insight into Tibetan culture.”<sup>32</sup> The Tibetan Youth Congress strongly believes that “by

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<sup>28</sup> US Report, “China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau, US Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,” (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2004)

<sup>29</sup> Department of Information and International Relations, “Current Human Rights Situation in Tibet” (Dharamsala: Central Tibetan Administration, March 2013)

<sup>30</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, *Report of a Fact-Finding Mission and Analyses of Colonialism and Chinese Rule in Tibet, Unrepresented Nations and People’s Organization*, (The Hague, 1997)

<sup>31</sup> Tibet Justice Center, *Options for Tibet’s Future Political Status Self-Governance Through an Autonomous Arrangement*

<sup>32</sup> MRAP, “Written Statement,” (presented at the twenty-first session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations General Assembly, 12 August 2012)

repressing the use or knowledge of Tibetan language and replacing it with Chinese language with its use both in commerce and administration, China hopes to erode Tibetan cultural identity and completely integrate the next generation of Tibetans into Chinese culture. Therefore, the education system imposed upon Tibetans violates their human rights as it denies their linguistic and religious identity.<sup>33</sup>

There are multiple ways to interpret the implications of learning the Chinese language. One, that it is waving a white flag and learning the language of the oppressor; that learning Chinese is a betrayal of their faithfulness to Tibet, giving in to cultural assimilation. Upon questioning Tibetans on their feelings about learning Chinese, not nearly as much hostility was held. Tsering Palden is Tibetan by nationality but was born in exile in Nepal after her parents fled Tibet in 1962. Since then she has spent fourteen years pursuing schooling in India. She openly expressed, "Chinese is also a language and I see no harm in learning it. In fact I think it's good to learn Chinese language and take the opportunity to share about Tibet and the situation there with Chinese brothers and sisters who may not be aware or who may have many clarifications to sort considering Tibet and Tibetans, especially [those who are] living in Tibet." This concept, that Tibetans can learn Chinese without guilt because they can finally communicate to them what the Tibetans need, is quite refreshing. It shows not only that there is still hope for the revival of Tibetan's cultural freedom in Tibet, but also that there is a willingness to comply, to employ Chinese as a tool for reaching some sort of agreement. This view does, however, come from a woman who has not witnessed the oppressive Tibetan experience within Tibet and perhaps has a more blissful naïveté to the possibilities of Tibetan-Chinese reconciliation, regardless of her maturity and education.

In exile, Tibetans are still required to learn a second and third language. The first is the language of their exile nation, whether it be Hindi in India or Nepali in Nepal. This language must be learned for everyday purposes, for navigating their new place of refuge. The second is English, which is viewed as a truly "international language," one that is a social status enhancer as well as a tool for acquiring a university education and decent employment.

Throughout India, there are eight branches<sup>34</sup> of the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) residential school which instructs Tibetan refugees from kindergarten to class twelve. This institution was established by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in 1960<sup>35</sup> to "ensure that all Tibetan children under its care receive a sound education, a firm cultural identity and become self-reliant and contributing members of the Tibetan community and the world at large."<sup>36</sup> The Headmistress of the TCV in Gopalpur, Sithar Dolma, explained that Tibetan is the sole language of instruction until first grade, when

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<sup>33</sup> Tibetan Youth Congress, *Tibet: The Gap between Fact and Fabrication, Tibetan Response to China's White Papers*

<sup>34</sup> TCV Locations: Upper Dharamsala, Bylakyppe, Ladakh, Suja, Gopalpur, Lower Dharamsala, Chauntra, and Selakui.

<sup>35</sup> The TCV began in 1960 as a "Nursery for Tibetan Refugee Children." It did not reach its current state until its expansion and registration under the Societies Act as Tibetan Children's Village in 1972. ([www.tcv.org.in](http://www.tcv.org.in))

<sup>36</sup> "TCV's Mission," last modified January 2013, [www.tcv.org.in](http://www.tcv.org.in)

teachers begin English lessons. So, from class one to class six, students are receiving a predominant education in Tibetan with only their English class in English. From class six, they begin learning either Hindi or Chinese and the rest of their instruction is in English, in order to prepare them for university education. When asked about her perspective on her Tibetan students learning Chinese, she rationalized that “learning language is one thing. The Chinese, they have taken our country, that is another thing. The language? You can learn any language, you know? We don’t mind learning new language. We have been learning English, Tibetan and Hindi. Three languages... but why not Chinese? They are our neighbors...so maybe when we go back we have to talk with them, (chuckles) instead of learning French or Spanish.” When further prompted for her own feelings on the topic, Sithar Dolma reflected. “If I have to speak Chinese all the time for them... then where can I speak *my* own language?” She then reaffirmed the TCV’s language policy, reiterating “that’s why we are saying you should first learn your own language, then on top of that, then you learn another language.”<sup>37</sup>

There are parallels, however, between the ultimate result of schools both in Tibet and in exile. In the end, students walk away with a deserved ticket to university, but without a word of Tibetan written on it. Even in TCV, Tibetan students are prepared for life led in English, or Hindi, or even Chinese. Certainly there are benefits to attending TCV—at least children are instilled with the values and histories of Tibetan culture and are surrounded by general support and reinforcement. But, it is worth challenging this decision—asking, if Tibetans don’t begin promoting their language by beginning with themselves, with dedicating their linguistic lives to the prosperity of their mother tongue, when Tibetan will ever regain its prestige, how Tibet can increase the scope of “useful” Tibetan, and if the language will ever roam freely outside of the domestic sphere.

## **IV | LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND ACCURATE PORTRAYALS OF THE CONDITION OF THE TIBETAN LANGUAGE**

### **IV.1 IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING THE TIBETAN LANGUAGE**

“Language is the most important attribute of the Tibetan people’s identity. Tibetan is the primary means of communication, the language in which their literature, their spiritual texts and historical as well as scientific works are written. The Tibetan language is not only at the same high level as that of Sanskrit in terms of grammar, but is also the only one that has the capability of translating from Sanskrit without an iota of error. Therefore, Tibetan language has not only the richest and best-translated literatures, many scholars even contend that it has also the richest and largest number of literary compositions.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Interview, “On Tibetan, Buddhism and Linguistic Human Rights” Sithar Dolma, the Headmistress of the Tibetan Children’s Village School in Gopalpur, India on 23 April 2013

<sup>38</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *A Compilation of the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People, His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s Brussels Statement of 4*

*-His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

When discussing language politics and a people's right to be instructed and governed in their own language, a common question arises: what does it matter? But language is not simply a tool for communication that can be replaced by a foreign substitute. Language holds within it a living culture, a narrative history, a musical composition of sounds and a vibrancy of unique qualities that shape the definition of a community. If a language is suppressed, then so are its people. What forced language assimilation does is irreversible—if you remove the practical usages for a language, you deny its speakers the opportunity to navigate their own future. Then, once the last speaker of a language dies, the language dies with it. And although language reconstruction is a practiced science, without a living language community the language is simply an artifact, a fossil. In the case of Tibetan, not only do you bid farewell to a fascinating contributor to the linguistic science, but you also lose the deeply embedded teachings of Buddhist philosophy that are rooted within it.

If Tibetan language disappears, Buddhism will lose its significance. Strength will be lost. And therefore it is very important to preserve our language. Not just for Tibetan culture, but also for Buddhism. Buddhism is shaping our lives so much. And therefore our lives depend a lot on Buddhist culture, Buddhist ideologies, Buddhist principles, Buddhist actions. And that depends on Tibetan language.<sup>39</sup>

Nicolas Tournadre, Tibetologist and Linguistics Professor at the University of Paris, admits that there is a real threat of extinction, or at least a very serious decline of the Tibetan language and culture within two or three generations. He explains that the importance of preserving this culture lies in its extreme originality. Linguistics, medicine and architecture notwithstanding, enough justification for the preservation of the Tibetan culture is held in its literature. "Tibetan is one of the four oldest and greatest in volume and most original literatures of Asia, along with Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese literatures."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, he defends the fight for preservation by pointing out that Tibetan language is important for the Tibetan economy. The rate of unemployment in Tibet is extremely high, and "a lot of rural Tibetans, whether nomads or peasants, are almost like foreigners in their own country and they don't have the linguistic ability to find jobs." He concludes by saying, "Without the Tibetan language, it is clear that Tibet won't be Tibet anymore."

The late Panchen Lama when speaking at the first meeting of China's Institute of Tibetology in Beijing in 1988, had serious concerns over the loss of the Tibetan culture

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*December 2008 and the Chinese State Council's Press Briefing of 10 November 2008, (Dharamsala: Department of Information and International Relations, 2009)*

<sup>39</sup> Interview, "On Tibetan, Buddhism and Linguistic Human Rights" Tsedup Dorji, the Director of the Tibetan Children's Village School in Gopalpur, India on 23 April 2013

<sup>40</sup> Nicolas Tournadre, "Teaching and Learning Tibetan: The Role of Tibetan Language in Tibet's Future" (statement presented at the 108<sup>th</sup> US Congress House Hearing before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Washington, DC, 7 April 2003)

and language, and even back then he had said that “it is shameful to have to say that the Tibetan language must be studied and used in Tibet. The land that has managed well with its own Tibetan language over 1,300 years has lost its language completely just within two decades after its liberation by the Communist Party. This is the reason why we have to appeal for the promotion of the use of Tibetan language in Tibet.”<sup>41</sup>

#### IV.II DISCREPANCIES IN PORTRAYALS OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The reason why China is able to slip by with blatantly abusing Tibetan’s linguistic human rights is that they either publish entirely erroneous, “life-is-good” portrayals of Tibetans’ freedom, or they refuse to discuss the topic at all. This account of the *Legislation on Tibetan Language*, written by Professor Zhou Wei and published by the China Tibetology Research Centre, is so drastically inaccurate relative to reality, that it deserves to be quoted in full.

Chinese Legislation on minority languages is based on the ethnic policies. It emphasizes its unification with the Constitution and the equality of all ethnic languages... The legislation on Tibetan language in Tibet effectively protects the linguistic rights and interests of the Tibetans and promotes the development of Tibetan language. Firstly, the freedom of Tibetan study, use and development are respected and guaranteed further. Second, as Tibetan language work has been brought onto the track of the legal system, Tibetan is made more extensive use of. Thirdly, there have been exciting improvements on Tibetan standardization and information processing. Fourthly, Tibetan translation, publishing, press and network systems have been set up. Fifthly, Tibetan teaching is strengthened, the bilingual teaching of Tibetan and Chinese is becoming perfect, and the teaching quality is improved continuously. Sixthly, the Tibetan language work organizations become perfect and the professional Tibetan talent team grows stronger. Tibetan cooperation organizations have been set up across provinces. Seventhly, there have been a lot of achievements on all aspects of Tibetan research and Tibetan-applied scientific research. Eighthly, people from various nationalities study languages from each other and more and more people master both Tibetan and Chinese. Ninthly, Tibetan use is paid more attention in administration, judicial procedures and service industry.<sup>42</sup>

“By failing to enact laws that adequately protect both minority languages and the rights of its ethnic minority peoples to be educated in their own mother tongues, China is ignoring some of its most basic obligations as a member of the United Nations and participant of numerous international conventions. As China claims Tibet as part of its

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<sup>41</sup> Human Rights Law Network, *Imposing Modernity with Chinese Characteristics: The Fate of Tibetan Civilisation* (Dharamsala: Tibet Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, 2011)

<sup>42</sup> Zhou Wei, *Legislation on Tibetan Language* (China: China Tibetology Research Centre)

legitimate territory, China is obliged to respect and uphold the cultural linguistic rights of the Tibetan people.”<sup>43</sup> The result of this light-hearted propaganda is that the outside world is not made aware of the injustices imposed upon Tibetans. Since China’s voice is so loud, it muffles and denies the hushed protests of Tibetans. Chinese officials do not feel the need to justify the majority of on goings in Tibet because they display Tibet as a part of China, defended by the Mongol Empire conquering in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This is illogical reasoning, though, that would lead to many ancient empires being able to claim ownership over various countries.

David Germano agrees that the Chinese government propagates false portrayals of the Tibetan state of affairs. “I think it is true to say that Chinese officials and Chinese news media often portray Tibetans as moving briskly toward a modern prosperous future, one of universal literacy and full integration into the Chinese cultural and economic mainstream. A great many Tibetans paint the future less enthusiastically, citing concerns about whether their most fundamental self-identifiers, particularly their language, will survive the profound changes underway throughout the Tibetan areas of China.”<sup>44</sup>

Tibetans’ freedom of expression has been repressed, contradicted by the Chinese Constitution and concretely displayed in the interdiction of online transmission of the Tibetan Discussion. “Although the Chinese Constitution provides for freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, demonstration (Article 35) and religious belief (Article 36), the Chinese authorities have been denying these rights to the Tibetan people. The current situation in Tibet is grim with a pervasive atmosphere of undeclared Martial Law. Websites of exile Tibetan media organizations cannot be accessed from Tibet. Discussion forums and blogs in the Tibetan language, such as Sangdhor.com and Rangdrol.net, are blocked since February 3, 2012.”<sup>45</sup> The Tibet Justice Center elaborated on the vast prohibition of freedom of expression. “Any independent information or expression other than Chinese government viewpoints are restricted and considered ‘subversive.’ Tibetans who speak to foreign reporters, share information regarding protests through mobile phones or e-mail are charged with ‘leaking state secrets’ and are given lengthy prison sentences.”<sup>46</sup> The Tibetan Youth Congress takes on a frank, critical tone when discussing the realities of Chinese restrictions on learning Tibetan in schools.

The phasing out of Tibetan language in Tibetan schools and universities indicates the vicious intention of the Chinese authorities to deny Tibetan students the right to be taught in their mother tongue. Chinese officials in the “TAR” display a striking and ominous trend to intensify the sinicization of Tibetans in Tibet

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<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Law Network, *Imposing Modernity with Chinese Characteristics: The Fate of Tibetan Civilisation*

<sup>44</sup> David Germano, “Teaching and Learning Tibetan: The Role of Tibetan Language in Tibet’s Future”

<sup>45</sup> Department of Information and International Relations, “Current Human Rights Situation in Tibet”

<sup>46</sup> Tibet Justice Center, *Options for Tibet’s Future Political Status Self-Governance Through an Autonomous Arrangement*

through the targeting of Tibetan language as they link it with Tibetan nationalism and hence to a propensity for ‘splittist’ activities. Chinese leaders perceive Tibetan language as a proper target of both the current campaign against the pro-independence movement and the nation wide campaign to eradicate traditional beliefs.<sup>47</sup>

It is clear that the prosperity of a people’s mother tongue is a right that has been brutally violated by the Chinese government. Their injustices have been hidden by false portrayals of reality; the CCP has now repeatedly been called out on hypocrisy and deceit. The truth is unraveling, and all that is left to do is frame it with a loud enough voice.

#### IV.III WHAT HAS BEEN DONE & WHAT OUGHT TO BE DONE FOR THE MAINTANENCE OF TIBETAN LANGUAGE

The TAR government fails to provide genuine self-rule for Tibetans. The reasons are several. First, the TAR government controls few governmental powers. Even as to those powers, ultimate control rests with the PRC’s central government. Second, the TAR government is controlled by members of the PRC’s Communist Party, many of which are Chinese. Thirdly, the Communist’s policies are based on atheist philosophy which is not compatible with Tibetan culture. The structural set up of the TAR is therefore such that a genuine Tibetan self-governance is virtually impossible.<sup>48</sup>

- *Tibet Justice Center*

In 1960, The International Commission of Jurists examined evidence relating to human rights within the structure of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as announced by the General Assembly of the United Nations. After taking into account the human, economic and social rights, they found that the Chinese communist authorities had violated Article 3, 5, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Tibet. The Committee declared that acts of genocide had been committed in Tibet in an attempt to destroy the Tibetans as a religious group, though insufficient evidence was found regarding the destruction of Tibetans as a race, nation or ethnic group which is required for declaring this as a genocide in international law.<sup>49</sup>

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have called upon the Chinese authorities to address the underlying grievances of Tibetans by namely carrying out a comprehensive review of the human rights situation across the Tibetan plateau. Such

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<sup>47</sup> Tibetan Youth Congress, *Tibet: The Gap between Fact and Fabrication, Tibetan Response to China’s White Papers*

<sup>48</sup> Tibet Justice Center, *Options for Tibet’s Future Political Status Self-Governance Through an Autonomous Arrangement. Tibetan Parliamentary & Policy Research Center*

<sup>49</sup> International Commission of Jurists, “Report on Tibet and the Chinese People’s Republic (1960),” last modified January 2013, [www.tibetjustice.org](http://www.tibetjustice.org)



an initiative would be undertaken with the aim to end legal and policy restrictions and breach human rights in the region.”<sup>50</sup>

His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognizes the core change that needs to be implemented before anyone can discuss further developments of Tibetan. “In order for Tibetans to use and develop their own language, Tibetan must be respected as the main spoken and written language. Similarly, the principal language of the Tibetan autonomous areas needs to be Tibetan.”<sup>51</sup>

Nicolas Tournadre holds four basic propositions for the revival of Tibetan language. First, he explains that Tibet ought to promote Tibetan language and culture in the educational system, balancing the scale for true Tibetan-Chinese bilingual education. This, he explains, will require exerting pressure upon the Chinese government to advertise this new law. Second, he adds that it is important to promote standard spoken Tibetan in order to decrease unemployment and illiteracy rates. He suggests funding projects that will publish classical texts written in vernacular language. Also, he believes the West can help by creating literary prizes and awards for Tibetan writers, organizing cultural festivals for artists and writers, and creating calligraphy and spelling competitions. The West can support radio broadcasting in order to publicize classic Tibetan literature and pay teachers in Tibet to record traditional music and folk tales onto tapes. He encourages investing in “anything that makes the Tibetans feel that their language and culture does have prestige.”<sup>52</sup>

Tournadre, even through witnessing fifteen years of Tibetan language loss from within Tibet, reveals that he has hope. “I am still a little optimistic. I think if we exert pressure, and take measures, and implement different projects, we can still ameliorate the situation. I don't think it is over. A civilization of 1,300 years of literature cannot disappear like that. I do believe it is still possible to do something.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Department of Information and International Relations, “Current Human Rights Situation in Tibet”

<sup>51</sup> His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *A Compilation of the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Brussels Statement of 4 December 2008 and the Chinese State Council's Press Briefing of 10 November 2008*

<sup>52</sup> Nicolas Tournadre, “Teaching and Learning Tibetan: The Role of Tibetan Language in Tibet's Future”

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

## V | CONCLUSION

The Tibetan language holds within it a tapestry of rich, unique histories, woven together by the subtle threads of Buddhist philosophy. The language is also responsible for one of the oldest, greatest and most original literatures of Asia, sitting alongside Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese. Tibetan is the language of an exquisite nonviolent culture that has suffered extremely violent attacks by the Chinese Communist Party. Tibetan deserves veneration, autonomy and prestige. With support and outside funding, with the tools to strengthen their voice, many have not lost hope that Tibetan can be revived, rewarded and respected. This work has shown that an awareness for the Tibetan struggle, a standardized Tibetan and a truly bilingual upbringing will surely aid the path to prosperity, to linguistic human rights, and to a free Tibet.

| APPENDIX I

COMPLETE LIST OF SCHOOLS CLOSED FOR TEACHING TIBETAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE<sup>54</sup>

- May 2012 A Tibetan orphanage school in Kanlho (Gansu Province) which houses around 50 students was forcibly closed down on charge of giving prime priority to the Tibetan language and culture.
- April 2012 The Chinese authorities forcibly closed a school which was established in 1987 by Tibetans, to teach and promote Tibetan culture and language (Karze County, Eastern Tibet, Sichuan Province) and ordered the parents to send students to government schools where only Chinese education is provided.
- January 2010 The Chinese authorities forcibly shut down an intermediate school and an elementary school in Machu County. These schools have planned to hold a joint seminar on Tibetan language entitled “Bhoemi Kyiduk Nyamnyong` meaning “Tibetan people’s happiness and sufferings to be experienced together,” a slogan of student protest in 2008. The authorities closed down the schools due to the nature of the seminar and its tendency to attract many Tibetans.
- 2009 The Chinese authorities forcibly shut down a Vocational Educational School (Driru County, Nagchu Prefecture in TAR). The vocational school taught a wide range of subjects such as Tibetan, English, Chinese, medicine, art and mural paintings. In the same year Chinese authorities shut down Pad-kar school, alleging the school of arousing Tibetan nationalistic sentiments and teaching “splittist” ideas and curriculum.
- April 2008 The Chinese authorities of Ngaba closed down a school run by Taksang Lhamo Kirti Monastery, citing the “student’s participation in the protest.”
- July 2003 The Chinese authorities closed down Kirti Monastic School, which was founded in 1994. The monastic school was earlier closed briefly in March 2002 but later reopened after repeated appeal from the local Tibetans. On 29 July 2003, when the school was closed for vacation, Chinese officials visited the school and brought down the Chinese national flag hoisted in the school compound and declared the closure of the school officially. The authorities further ordered that those who wish to study can join the government run co-education school in the county.
- 2000 The Chinese authorities closed down Gyatso orphanage school founded by Bangri Tsamtrul Rinpoche in 1996. The founder was sentenced to 15 years and his wife Nyima Choedon to 10 years imprisonment, under charge of “endangering state security.”

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<sup>54</sup> Written statement by the Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l’amitié entre les peuples (MRAP). Human Rights Council, twenty-first session. United Nations General Assembly. 21 August 2012.

| APPENDIX II

COMPLETE LIST OF ARTICLES IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS THAT HAVE BEEN VIOLATED BY CHINA TOWARDS TIBET

The COMMITTEE came to the conclusion that the Chinese authorities in Tibet had violated the following human rights, which the COMMITTEE considered to be the standards of behavior in the common opinion of civilized nations:

ARTICLE 3

The right to life, liberty and security of person was violated by acts of murder, rape and arbitrary imprisonment.

ARTICLE 5

Torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment were inflicted on the Tibetans on a large scale.

ARTICLE 9

Arbitrary arrests and detention were carried out.

ARTICLE 12

Rights of privacy, of home and family life were persistently violated by the forcible transfer of members of the family and by indoctrination turning children against their parents. Children from infancy upwards were removed contrary to the wishes of the parents.

ARTICLE 13

Freedom of movement within, to and from Tibet was denied by large-scale deportations.

ARTICLE 16

The voluntary nature of marriage was denied by forcing monks and lamas to marry.

ARTICLE 17

The right not to be arbitrarily deprived of private property was violated by the confiscation and compulsory acquisition of private property otherwise than on payment of just compensation and in accordance with the freely expressed wish of the Tibetan People.

ARTICLE 18

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion were denied by acts of genocide against Buddhists in Tibet and by other systematic acts designed to eradicate religious belief in Tibet.

ARTICLE 19

Freedom of expression and opinion was denied by the destruction of scriptures, the imprisonment of members of the Mimang group and the cruel punishments inflicted on critics of the regime.

ARTICLE 20

The right of free assembly and association was violated by the suppression of the Mimang movement and the prohibition of meetings other than those called by the Chinese.

## From Exquisite to Extinct: Linguistic Human Rights in the Tibetan Diaspora

### ARTICLE 21

The right to democratic government was denied by the imposition from outside of rule by and under the Chinese Communist Party.

### ARTICLE 22

The economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for the dignity and free development of the personality of man were denied. The economic resources of Tibet were used to meet the needs of the Chinese. Social changes were adverse to the interests of the majority of the Tibetan people. The old culture of Tibet, including its religion, was attacked in an attempt to eradicate it.

### ARTICLE 24

The right to reasonable working conditions was violated by the exaction of labour under harsh and ill-paid conditions.

### ARTICLE 25

A reasonable standard of living was denied by the use of the Tibetan economy to meet the needs of the Chinese settling in Tibet.

### ARTICLE 26

The right to liberal education primarily in accordance with the choice of parents was denied by compulsory indoctrination, sometimes after deportation, in communist philosophy.

### ARTICLE 27

The Tibetans were not allowed to participate in the cultural life of their own community, a culture which the Chinese have set out to destroy.

Chinese allegations that the Tibetans enjoyed no human rights before the entry of the Chinese were found to be based on distorted and exaggerated accounts of life in Tibet. Accusations against the Tibetan "rebels" of rape, plunder and torture were found in cases of plunder to have been deliberately fabricated and in other cases unworthy of belief for this and other reasons.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> International Commission of Jurists, "Report on Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic (1960)," last modified January 2013, [www.tibetjustice.org](http://www.tibetjustice.org)

| METHODOLOGY

My independent study period was spent in McLeod Ganj, Upper Dharamsala for two and a half weeks. I chose this location due to its proximity to the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA), as well as the freedom of expression held by its Tibetans in exile. During this time I volunteered daily as an English conversation teacher at The Tibet Hope Center, a small NGO founded by a young Tibetan refugee in hopes of spreading awareness about the unjust occurrences in the Tibetan diaspora. Classes ran from 11:00am to 12:30pm and consisted of a lightly structured conversation guide of various topics. I gained the majority of my information, however, from reading books. Lots of books. The first few days were spent perusing local bookshops where I was able to find at least five sources that were relevant to my topic. Then, I travelled down to the LTWA and spent an entire day reading works published by Tibetan NGOs and the CTA. After the first week I travelled to the Tibetan Children's Village in Gopalpur, about a one hour journey that, due to my inability to speak more than a word of Hindi and my genetically inept navigational skills, took me five hours. Upon arrival I was able to interview the Director of the TCV, Tsedup Dorji as well as the Headmistress, Sithar Dolma, about their views on the Tibetan language and how the TCV is working to preserve it. I then interviewed my host brother from my homestay in Kathmandu who is currently enrolled in class twelve at TCV.

The next day I made an appointment with the Director of the Department of Information and International Relations, Kalden Chomo, to discuss the CTA's role, accomplishments and struggles in preserving the Tibetan language. Kalden was able to share with me a proposal that they had written to the United Nations about the state of Tibet's linguistic human rights, as well as a list of many of the schools that have been closed due to their instruction of Tibetan supposedly promoting 'splittist' attitudes against China.

I was limited in that, factoring in mid-journey overnights in Delhi, I did not have much time actually in Dharamsala. With more time I would have scheduled more interviews throughout the CTA and TCV, the latter for which I would have focused on talking to more of the class twelve students about their personal views on multilingual education.

| INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Sociolinguistics of Tibetan Language

Do you think Tibetan language is connected to Buddhism?

Do you see Buddhist values within the words or the grammar of Tibetan language?

Do you think Tibetan culture has influenced the Tibetan language?

If so, how? Where in the language do you see the connections?

Standardization of Tibetan Language

What dialect of Tibetan do you speak?

How do you feel about the Lhasa dialect becoming the standard for Tibetan?

How do you feel about Mandarin being the national language of the TAR?

Obligatory Bilingualism for Tibetans in exile

What languages do your parents speak?

What languages do you speak?

When/where did you learn these other languages?

How do you feel about learning other languages?

How do you feel about Tibetans learning Chinese?

Do you think Tibetan language is useful in Tibet?

When can you use Tibetan in Tibet, and when do you have to use Chinese?

How do you feel about the amount of Tibetan that is taught in schools in Tibet?

Do you think Tibetan language is useful in exile?

When can you use Tibetan in exile?

Do you think Tibetan language has changed since you left Tibet?

How do you think we can preserve the Tibetan language?

| SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

If anyone would like to carry out a similar study, I support you fully. I would recommend starting early—there is an incredible amount of material published around this topic, and very little time to get through it all. Definitely get in touch with the CTA as soon as you can and schedule appointments with the Department of Education, the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy and the Department of Information and International Relations. Also, continue Tibetan lessons during ISP if you can. It will keep you in the zone. This was something I had planned to do that unfortunately didn't work out. Most importantly, there is no better place to conduct this research than in Dharamsala. Not only is it the location of the Central Tibetan Administration, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives and the Tibetan Children's Village School, but it is also one of the few places that Tibetans have true freedom of expression—not to mention there are dozens and dozens of little book shops where you will surely find an armful of useful texts. But yes, Dharamsala—for an aspiring Tibetologist, it is truly a refreshing and uplifting atmosphere.



If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to e-mail me at [camille.inge@gmail.com](mailto:camille.inge@gmail.com)



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| PHOTOS

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Central Tibetan Administration  
Department of Information  
and International Resources,  
Department of Education and  
Centre for Human Rights and  
Democracy | Dharamsala



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