

The Mingled Melody: Remembering the Tibetan March 10th Uprising¹

Lama Jabb²

Suffering ages, but can never be forgotten³
Tibetan Proverb

A decade of fierce resistance and rebellion on the Tibetan plateau against the Chinese Communist forces, personnel and ideology culminated in a huge uprising on 10 March 1959 in the Tibetan capital Lhasa.⁴ Seasoned Chinese soldiers brought the uprising to a swift end leaving carnage and destruction in its wake. Avoiding death and capture the Dalai Lama managed to escape to India along with around 80,000 Tibetans, thus giving rise to the now global Tibetan exilic presence. This bloody

¹ This essay is dedicated to my late beloved friend and colleague Tsering Dhundup Gonkatsang (1951-2018), a passionate lover and teacher of Tibetan language and poetry.

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³ *sdug rnying rgyu yod ra brjed rgyu med.*

⁴ For a detailed account of the Tibetan national uprising of March 10th 1959 visit the March 10th Memorial website launched by Jamyang Norbu: <http://m10memorial.org>.

suppression consolidated Chinese power and sealed the fate of Tibet under "the red flag" (*dar dma*) of the Chinese Communist Party. More than any other date the 10th of March has come to define the modern Tibetan nation. It marks the complete occupation of Tibet and has come to symbolise a national tragedy, but it also stands for national unity, resistance and survival. Since 1960, March 10th has been unfailingly observed as the Tibetan National Uprising Day in Tibetan exile communities around the world. State security measures and the threat of serious reprisals from the Chinese authorities make such commemorations impossible inside Tibet, but March 10th looms large in both political action and poetic language. Even though Tibetans are forbidden to undertake open public commemorations of this date inside Tibet, many observe it both privately and collectively. Groups of people, both large and small, actively remember it by carrying out audacious protests coinciding with the month of March. The large-scale protests of the 1980s and 2008 are obvious illustrations of such commemorative acts.⁵ Privately, Tibetans observe the anniversary through a variety of acts, such as lighting butter-lamps, making *bsang* offerings (the popular Tibetan ritual of purification involving fire, incense and foodstuff), visiting holy mountains, sponsoring special prayers and rituals in monasteries or at sacred sites, reciting what could be called their national mantra - *Om maṅi padme hūṃ*, composing and performing songs, and writing poetry.

Obvious references to this highly sensitive date are mostly confined to underground politico-poetic literature. However, more and more there are bold mentions of it in contemporary Tibetan poetry published online and on social media. In this paper, I will present a critically acclaimed and widely circulated commemorative poem by Sangdhor (Seng rdor), a celebrated contemporary Tibetan poet. The poem is known by two titles.

⁵ On these protests see Schwartz, Ronald D. 1994 and Smith, Warren W. 2010.

When it first appeared on Sangdhor's private literary website, now closed down, it was entitled "The Anniversary and the Melody" (*dus dran dang rol dbyangs*). As it began to circulate via social media it has acquired the more forthright title "March 10th and the Melody" (*gsum pa'i tshes bcu dang rol dbyangs*). Composed in 2010 to mark the 51st anniversary of the Lhasa Uprising, the poem stands out not only because of its daring subject matter but also its style, cadence, image construction, technical excellence and layers of allusion. Through an analysis of these qualities I will show how traditional metric forms, recurrent motifs in classical Tibetan literature and oral traditions, formulaic figurative expressions and religious concepts are used in novel ways in order to convey contemporary political ideas and aspirations. The paper will also offer a brief reflection on the popular reception of the poem in the age of social media. The attraction power of the emotive content embedded within the fine arrangement of words is circulated through both conventional and modern communication technologies, the extent of its reach owing to the rise of the Tibetan language social media. Such internet enabled computer mediated means of communication helps to undermine political authoritarianism as well as orthodox literary views.

The Melody of March 10th

"The Anniversary and the Melody" is a long poem. In order for it to speak to the reader directly, without being diluted by interpretation and contextualisation, I present it here in its entirety at the outset. Having said this, the very medium of translation entails interpretation and inevitably alters the aesthetic and semantic qualities of the text. Shelley goes as far to speak of "the vanity of translation" when he posits: "It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its col-

our and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no fruit—and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.”⁶ While taking heed of this notion of the untranslatability of poetry, it is also a simple fact that without the labour of translation there cannot be much poetic communication across cultures divided by languages—let alone any possibility of overcoming the perennial linguistic confusion captured by the Tower of Babel story. Indeed, Tibetan scholars acknowledge the illuminating role of translation in opening one’s eyes to a foreign world when they (following Indian classical scholars) reverentially address the accomplished translator as Lotsāwa (*lo tsaA ba*), “the eyes of the world” (*’jig rten mig*). It might be impossible to transport “a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound”⁷ within a specific poem in a specific language over into another language. However, it is still possible to communicate some of its sense, tone, imagery, subtleties and general meaning. With this in mind, I suggest that the reader first appreciates the poem on its own, albeit mediated through my translation. The Tibetan text is provided in Appendix One for those who read Tibetan—even with only a rudimentary level one should be able to get a sense of the poem’s sheer lyrical beauty, plaintive yet assertive cadence and unique Tibetan sound patterns.

The Anniversary and the Melody⁸

Tonight is the Tenth of March,
Right now, Wednesday past midnight.

⁶ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. [1821] 1968: 107-108.

⁷ *Ibid.* 107.

⁸ The poem is subtitled: “My first representative poem of the Iron Tiger Year”. For the Tibetan original see Appendix One. This specific version was downloaded from a highly popular Tibetan WeChat literary forum on 29 April 2015. The name of this forum is left anonymous so as to avoid unwelcome attention.

This year how many living things will die?
How many living things of this mountainside will die?

The story of that time, that place and that month;
The cause of that day, that family and that year.
Roll them into a song of stringed peas scattering,
Roll them into a dance of pulsing minds boiling.

"All the people who come are people who must go;
This perishable world has many a high and a low."
Sing the tune of *Khache Phalu* far into the distance,
From the horizon something bounces back as an echo.

Each and every single goose that solitary flies,
Each and every lone grouse that solitary cries.
Let them be heard in the inner space of our minds,
Let them permeate the utter depth of our minds.

If snow and blizzards swirl and rage, let it be;
If seasonal winds blow and blast, let it be.
Let's meditate upon the boulder of conquering peace,
Upon the thunderbolt boulder of conquering peace.

A band of mist breaks away and journeys to the south,
A band of cloud breaks away and journeys to the north.
That is the offensive attack by the south,
That is the violent suppression by the north.

Something of the mind convulses to the innermost core,
Something of the psyche shakes with myriad motions.
To be beaten in the east and driven to the west is our
karma,
To be beaten in the west and driven to the east is our fate.

On the other side of this mountain of a distant land
 And on this side of this mountain of a great wilderness,
 There is a sacred vow kept with fervent holy tears;
 There is a solemn promise kept within choked throats.

“From here over towards the regions where the sun sets,”
 Thus is it written in a passage of an early *dharmic* text.
 Despair is the circling of vultures with wings flapping,
 Defeat is the spreading of *muthak* with tassels flipping.⁹

From somewhere a song surges out with gentle pace,
 Gradually it demolishes cells of silence and isolation.
 That is the ideal that we can behold;
 That is our own great renaissance.

Beneath a thousand layered sheath of flesh and skin
 Laughs an innate, natural tune with deep resonance.
 Deep within a hundred thousand encased bones and veins
 Sobs and sobs a masterful, primordial melody.

What is to be done with these cheekbone tears?
 What is to be done with these heated liquids?
 Let’s reveal them by turning them into sounds!
 Let’s sing them by changing them into a melody!

That melody is the way that sand flows;

⁹ *Muthak (rmu thag)* is a long cord of loosely spun predominantly white wool with tassels running along the entire length of it. *Muthak* has great mythic and symbolic significance and it is believed that it bridges death and afterlife as well as the earth and the sky. Indeed, old Tibetan historical texts often state that some of the earliest Tibetan kings used *muthak* to travel to the heavens after their death thus leaving no corporeal remains. To this day such ropes are stretched out on the ground when performing sky burials for the dead.

It is the way that sand and dust flow.
 The year when the wisdom wings of mountain peaks beat
 The torrential flow of sand is the command.

That melody is how one breaks into a gallop;
 It is how one leaps and breaks into a gallop.
 The year when the *tummo* of mountain peaks burns
 Breaking into a wild gallop is the sacred helmet.

That melody is the crunching sound of smashing stones;
 It is the crunching sound of smashing plastic and stones.
 The year when the manes of mountain peaks stand on end
 The crunching smashing of the stones is the strategy.

Now let's practise within the melody,
 Let's practise within the measure of the melody.
 Let's strike every string of the mind with great force
 And strum each note of the psyche with great power.

Now let's train the mind within the melody,
 Let's train the mind within the cadence of the melody.
 Let's press every spring of the senses with great strength
 And turn each screw of the intellect with great might.

Now let's seek respite within the melody,
 Let's seek respite within the harmony of the melody.
 Let's wipe clean all the parts and joints of the soul
 And wash well each component of the life force.

Now let's write *repa* within the melody,
 Let's write thought-provoking *repa*.
 Each *repa* is a billion interrogations,
 Please strum the guitar and play the flute!

Now let's draw dreams within the melody,
Let's draw dreams swarming with illusions.
Each dream is a billion pistols,
Please strum the guitar and play the flute!

Now let's draw steeds within the melody,
Let's draw cantering steeds with beating hooves.
Each steed is a billion prisoners,
Please strum the guitar and play the flute!

Now let's be immersed within the stream of the melody;
Let's reflect upon each fusion of tunes
Like the process of water flowing into water,
Please strum the guitar and play the flute!

Sometimes bend the upper string and release,
Sometimes loosen the lower string and tighten.
Each and every musical note is anguish,
Each and every vocal tone is sadness.

Recognise every pause of the melody within the mind,
Reveal each activity of the mind through the melody.
Let's call out "mum and dad" from the back of the throat,
Let's weep "kith and kin" from the depths of the vocal
cords.

Place your ear against the mat of the melody,
Place it with precision and without wavering.
Ever so gently close the eyelids and slow down,
The seal of our tribe will appear from the flank of the liver.

Rest your head against the ground of the melody,

Rest it with precision and without dreading,
Place your hands on the chest and slow down,
The sword of our tribe will emerge from the side of the
bowels.

Seat your body within the depths of the melody,
Seat it with precision and without fretting.
Breathe out at a measured pace and slow down,
The edict of our tribe will come rolling off the lungs.

Thus, having realised the deep imprints of the melody
And having dissolved all obscurations of the tune,
The mango of the bones has gradually ripened.¹⁰
So, let's sing the distance of fifty years with voice!

Thus, having perfected the liberation paths of the melody
And having extinguished all illusions of the tune,
The knotted rope of the throat has gradually unravelled.
So, let's measure the stretch of fifty years with sound!

Thus, having roamed through the *bardo* of the melody
And having been conceived through the union of the
tune,

¹⁰ In Tibetan dialectics mango (*A mra*) is used as an image for representing four contrasting conditions of a thing or four logical possibilities known as *mu bzhi*. In Sang-dhor's poem the gradually ripened mango stands for a state of perfect maturation. For instance, (1) a mango could be ripe in the inside but unripe on the outside, or (2) unripe on the inside but ripe on the outside, or (3) unripe both inside and outside, or (4) ripe both inside and outside. Here the case is the fourth. Bone (*rus*) is highly significant for the formation of Tibetan identity in that one's descent is traced to the bone of an ancestor or ancestors. As such Tibetan terms for family or tribal lineage often feature the word *rus* as in bone: For instance, *rus* (family lineage, clan) *rus pa* (family lineage) *rus rgyud* (ancestry, lineage), *bod kyi rus chen bzhi* (The Four Great Tribes of Tibet). Bone is also a main tester of the strength of a person's character as in *mi ru pa can*—"one who has the bones"—meaning someone who possesses backbone, courage, integrity and loyalty.

The joints of the mind have gradually dovetailed,
So, let's utter the reach of fifty years through speech!

A Tibetan proverb tells us that "suffering ages, but can never be forgotten". This gives distilled utterance to the lasting suffering inflicted by the loss of life. It is specifically referring to grief that changes over time in its sense of immediacy and felt intensity but never goes away. When suffering is collective, within the durability of suffering encapsulated by the Tibetan proverb lies a potent cohesive force. In his influential lecture *What is a Nation?*, Ernest Renan is acutely aware of this force and states that "suffering in common unifies more than joy does." He goes on to stress: "Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort."¹¹ The present poem is informed by this unifying potency of collective pain and defeat. It captures, amongst other things, that aspect of nationalism Isaiah Berlin calls the "bent twig" phenomenon, a reaction to wounds or a strong sense of collective humiliation brought on by forms of injustice, oppression and military conquest.¹² The poem bears out this observation, but it also shows that such unifying collective emotions and their remembrance are redoubled and mediated by other cohesive dynamics such as age-old cultural and historical memories, established forms of poetic expression and the present socio-political situation.

The Goose and the Grouse in Mourning

In the famous 1800 preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth declares: "For all good poetry is the spontane-

¹¹ Renan, Ernest. [1882] 1990: 19.

¹² Berlin, Isaiah. 1972: 11-30.

ous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply."¹³ For Wordsworth the writing of poetry entails both an extempore dimension and a prolonged conscious meditation. Later on, in the same preface he describes this creative process as "emotion recollected in tranquillity."¹⁴ The fluidity, directness and raw emotive energy of "The Anniversary and the Melody" make it come across as a product of spontaneous inspiration. At the outset, the poem declares: "Tonight is the Tenth of March/ Right now, Wednesday past midnight". During one of our many conversations on Tibetan literature, Sangdhor confirmed that: he had indeed written the poem in one sitting in the small hours of Wednesday morning, 10 March 2010.¹⁵ Such extemporaneity underscores the poet's natural flair and exceptional "organic sensibility".

However, the poem's technical brilliance, verbal intensity, nuanced historical consciousness and heightened political awareness also indicate deliberate contemplation. The poet "thought long and deeply" while processing the initial feelings aroused by the long memory of March 10th for the finished poem.¹⁶ This date of defeat and suffering lodged deep within the Tibetan psyche had haunted the poet over a long period of time—leading right up to the midnight moment when it triggered the actual composition of the poem. Although the physical act of writing was

¹³ Wordsworth [1800] 1968: 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 22.

¹⁵ Skype conversation, 17 April 2015.

¹⁶ One of the numerous constituents of this long memory is the annual March 10 Statements delivered by the Dalai Lama between 1961 and 2011. These statements and the speeches that accompanied them on the day were staple material for the politically conscious Tibetans both inside and outside Tibet. For English translations of these statements see The Dalai Lama 2016.

spontaneous the powerful feelings, memories and thoughts that fuelled the poetic outburst had long, deep roots in the past. The use of vivid language, imagery, rhythm, cadence and overall musicality add to the pull of patriotism inherent within the poem and widens its appeal to the contemporary Tibetan reader. In spite of this popular appeal and seeming accessibility it is not an easy poem. As it is a poem wrought of passion and reflection one needs to read it several times in order to appreciate its emotional depth, niceties of imagery and its many oral and textual allusions. Each reading seems to peel away one layer of meaning to reveal yet another. There are too many layers and nuances to explore in a single essay but allow me to focus on at least three principal features of the poem.

First and foremost, as I have already pointed out, "The Anniversary and the Melody" is a poem that commemorates a particular historic day of the Lhasa Uprising. The 10th of March has come to be regarded as a singular historic moment, but it is important to be aware of the long-term forces and complex events that gave rise to it. Moreover, history did not stand still but has continued to complicate the Tibetan life ever since that momentous occurrence. This popular revolt was the culmination of armed insurgencies that had greeted the Chinese communist forces and personnel as soon as they set foot on Tibetan soil in the eastern Tibetan regions of Kham and Amdo. The Lhasa uprising met the same brutal fate as the eastern Tibetan rebellions against what Tibetans call "the gun-toting uninvited guests" (*me mda' thogs pa'i ma bos mgron po*)¹⁷ and their sweeping communist reforms that sought to upend traditional Tibetan society

¹⁷ For instance, the Dalai Lama (i.e. unpublished speeches delivered on 24 December 2002, 7 March 2014) often traces the root of the current Tibetan plight to the arrival of uninvited new guests (*gdan zhu gang yang med pa'i sku mgron gsar pa zhig*) wielding guns (*me mda' khyer nas yong*). Also see Jangbu's subtle poem on this gun-wielding uninvited guest (Ljang bu 2001: 32-33). Heather Stoddard's English translation of this poem can be found in Jangbu 2010: 18.

and long-established worldviews. For many Tibetans, the military suppression of the Lhasa Uprising marks the complete establishment of Chinese rule over Tibet and thus March 10th symbolises the unprecedented social trauma and political persecution that had preceded it as well as that which followed in its long wake stretching to the present day. Sangdhor is tapping into this historical significance and the distilled symbolism of the day when he begins the poem announcing the specific time of writing:

Tonight is the Tenth of March,
Right now, Wednesday past midnight.
This year how many living things will die?
How many living things of this mountainside will die?

No attempt is made to conceal such a politically sensitive date in the coded language or metaphorical garb that many Tibetan writers usually employ to fend off Chinese state censorship and serious reprisals. The pregnant significance of the date and precarious moribund existence of the present link the recent past and the here and now in an instant of recollection and contemplation. Conscious observation of the historic date and reflection upon the current situation of Tibet present the Tibetan collective experience under the Chinese rule as a continuum of repression, death and tragedy. From the present moment of the small hours of Wednesday 10 March 2010 the poem jumps back over five decades to recall: "The story of that time, that place and that month; / The cause of that day, that family and that year." These are obvious references to the tragedy that befell the "family" of Tibet on 10 March 1959. Tibetans inside Tibet and China are forbidden to mention this source of many sufferings, including their ongoing plight, let alone relate its story and reflect upon its causes. While many dare not even hint at it, the poet resolves to sing it, and celebrate it. Thus, at the very outset the poem seethes

with death, destruction, angst, an active remembrance, and paints a modern Tibetan nation in unending pain.

What also becomes apparent right from the start is that the poem is not merely preoccupied with remembering a single significant date—10 March 1959—and its unaccounted and unmourned casualties. It is a subtle yet fluid narrative poem that channels accounts of historical happenings and the current political situation into its overall torrential flow whilst also communicating the awakening of a new political consciousness. It comingles and simultaneously commemorates the sufferings inflicted upon the Tibetan people over fifty years of colonial rule. The poem was composed two years after the suppression of the 2008 pan-Tibetan uprising that resulted in arrests, political re-education, increased militarisation and heightened surveillance across the Tibetan plateau.¹⁸ For many Tibetans, this nationwide Tibetan rebellion was reminiscent of the 1950s resistance to CCP rule in terms of its sheer intensity, geographical reach and participant diversity, as well as violent reprisals, which included thousands of arrests, and the detention and political re-education and relocation of thousands of monks. Accordingly, Sangdhor's poem records this uprising with allusions to the raw "stone-smashing" protest scenes, interrogations, imprisonments, deaths and the ongoing repercussions in the form of acts of self-immolation.

One historical event segues into another forming a seemingly unbroken chain of tragic happenings. With the referencing of the fiery self-immolations through the appropriation of a profound

¹⁸ For reports on the crackdown of the 2008 protests see the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) 2009; Human Rights Watch 2009, 2010; Smith 2010. For audacious contemporary Tibetan accounts of the 2008 protests and their suppression see Shokdung 2016 and the banned 2008 issue of *Shar dung ri (The Eastern Snow Mountain)*, an acclaimed Tibetan language journal of social and literary criticism (sGrol ma et al. eds. 2008. English translations of excerpts from this journal can be found in the International Campaign for Tibet 2009: 71-105.

spiritual practice as a metaphor the poem brings the reader face to face with the grim present. While recalling a past historical event it brings to prominence the living legacy of this particular event by directly linking it to the here and now. As a consequence, for the poet, recent Tibetan history is characterised by unceasing suffering and incessant deaths. This realisation is uttered by a note of anxious foresight in the first stanza of the poem in which the evocative date of March 10th conflates the past and the present and points to a dark future. Macabre historical patterns assure the poet-singer of one thing—that there will be more deaths and destruction to come. It is this certitude born of actual experience and a feeling of resignation to suffering that we can hear in the questions: “This year how many living things will die? / How many living things of this mountainside will die?” “Living things” is the English rendering of the Tibetan term *skye dngos* in its broader sense. It literally means things that grow or regenerate and in its common usage it covers both animals and plants. Here the term carries a broader connotation to subsume under it all things graced with regenerative vigour and life force, including human beings, that grow on or inhabit “this mountainside”, that is Tibet. The questions are rooted within the tacit understanding shared by the poet and the reader that many animals, plants and humans have died every single year since 10 March 1959 as a direct outcome of what befell Tibet on that specific day. The emphatic identification of the date is immediately followed by a sombre reflection upon how many “living things” will once again disappear this very year as history repeats itself.

This elegiac poem thus recalls a date of immense historical significance and symbolic power and laments the loss of Tibetan lives and the sufferings inflicted since the 1950s. It does this by taking advantage of Tibet’s literary and oral traditions. For instance, it borrows the memorable metre, cadence and wisdom of

a famous 18th century text formally entitled *Khache Phalu's Advice on the Observance of Secular Karmic Laws* (*kha che pha lu'i jig rten las 'bras rtsi lugs kyi bslab bya*). Although little is known concerning its authorship, this text is attributed to a certain Khache Phalu. Hence, among both the literati and the general public the work is simply known as *Khache Phalu*.¹⁹ It belongs to the highly popular category of Tibetan literature called *bslab bya*, advice. The advice genre is generally characterised by an astute observation of life in its spiritual and temporal complexities and communication of wise words and counsel with clarity, concision and persuasive poetic force.²⁰ Apart from the short opening remarks in prose, *Khache Phalu* is written in verse using a very accessible vernacular idiom. It is a lyrical and captivating aphoristic work addressed to the young and old alike. In arresting sound patterns of rhyme and rhythm, it dispenses practical advice on leading a fair, just, contented and thoughtful life without ever having the need to fear the vicissitudes of fortune and impermanence of life. For the Tibetan reader, this borrowing endows "The Anniversary and the Melody" with a familiar lyricism and rhythmic feel and a tone of intimate concern. Sangdhor acknowledges

¹⁹ Mig dmar (ed.) 1992: *Kha che pha lu*. A very useful edition that takes into account variations between three different versions of the text can be found in Thub bstan sbyin pa AND Blo bzang rdo rje rab gling (eds.) 2006: 371-386; 440-450. In the 1980s the text was further popularised in Eastern Tibet by the famed bard Kalsang Dekpa's (sKal bzang grags pa) recitation of it on radio and cassette tapes. The authorship of the text is not known for sure. Some scholars attribute it to a great Islamic scholar. For instance, following the accounts given by some Tibetan Muslims, Dawa Norbu speculates that the author's second name corresponds to a certain Farzur-alla in the preface to his English translation of *Kha che pha lu* (1987: xii). On the other hand, Horkhang Sonam Palbar attributes it to 'Brong rtse mkhas pa chen po, a famed teacher of the Seventh Panchen Lama (Hor khang bsod nams dpal 'bar 1999: 503-505). For an English translation of the entire text see Dawa Norbu 1987.

²⁰ See Thub bstan sbyin pa AND Blo bzang rdo rje rab gling (eds.) 2006 for an anthology of such advice texts and an informative introduction to the genre.

his debt to *Khache Phalu* by citing lines from it verbatim very early on:

“All the people who come are people who must go;
This perishable world has many a high and a low.”
Sing the tune of *Khache Phalu* far into the distance,
From the horizon something bounces back as an echo.

The two lines in quotation marks are extracted from separate sections of *Khache Phalu*. The first line comes out of the ruminations about the impermanent nature of life. Indifferent to social stratification, death the great leveller makes everyone who ventures into this world depart it:

The beggar might be sad but scrapes through life,
The king might be happy but must die in the end.
One cannot tell how many have gone already,
And who can surmise how many are yet to go?
People come and go, and come and go.
In essence, all the people who come are people who must go,
Of this saṃsāric world not a single thing is permanent.²¹

The second quotation is taken from a passage reflecting upon inequality, karmic destiny and contentment. Suffering and happiness are impermanent and unpredictable in nature and diverse in form. They come in incalculable shapes and sizes. Each indi-

²¹ Mig dmar (ed.) 1992: 6. *sprang po sdug kyang mi tshes 'khyol 'gro lo/ rgyal po skyid kyang tha ma shi 'gro lo/ de snga song pa'i grang ka mi shes 'dug/ da dung 'gro rgyu'i gdeng tshod su yis shes/ yong gin yong gin 'gro gin 'gro gin 'dug/ don du yong mi tshang ma 'gro mi red/ 'khor ba 'di la rtag pa gcig kyang med/.*

vidual experiences joy and woe differently in terms of their intensity and endurance. It is advised that one should brace oneself for what life throws at one with the means of contentment:

This perishable world has many a high and a low,
 Joy and woe incalculable in their range and depth.
 As can clearly be seen no single person is like another,
 It's far better for oneself to be contented with this.²²

These quotations appear to have at least two overall significances. Firstly, they indicate that the poet accepts and underlines *Khache Phalu's* conclusion that death and suffering are part and parcel of this world and one must embrace them with stoicism. However, the stanzas that immediately precede and follow the quotes make it abundantly clear that we are not dealing with ordinary loss of life and anguish. Nor are they the consequences of inevitable natural causes. When one ponders over the cause and nature of Tibetan suffering it brings something echoing back from the horizon. Deep consideration and recall make one realise that the tragic experience of Tibetans cannot be accepted with the usual wise resignation or be consigned to oblivion. Secondly, the quoted lines draw attention to the stylistic features of the poem itself. They emphatically confirm the conscious absorbance of *Khache Phalu's* nine syllabic metric pattern, high propensity for wordplay, alliteration, internal rhyme and a relentlessly forward propelling cadence. Thus "the tune of *Khache Phalu*" is used to discover, fathom and augment a deep melody with which it mingles. *Khache Phalu* serves as the prelude to and the tuneful carrier of that melody bursting forth from the depths of Tibetan

²² Ibid: 16. 'jig rten 'di ru sgang gshong mang zhig 'dug/ skyid sdug ring thung sbom phra grang med red/ 'dra 'dra gcig kyang med pa mthong gsal red/ 'di la chog shes rang gis byas pa dga'.

history and culture and from the long-running agony of contemporary Tibetans. Communicating the heavy burden of human suffering and a new assertive political spirit, the form and content of the poem become inseparably fused into an integrated whole.

"The Anniversary and the Melody" also mines Tibetan oral traditions to capture the enormity and intensity of human suffering that immediately ensued from 10 March 1959 and ongoing political repression. For example, it makes use of well-known avian motifs of Tibetan folk culture when invoking extreme anguish and lamentation. From the horizon of memory and forgetfulness "something" bounces back as a response to the awakening "tune of *Khache Phalu*". Within it we witness the lonely flight of widowed birds and hear their piercing, solitary cries. The Tibetan reader is beseeched to immerse their consciousness within this sight and sound of deep sorrow:

Each and every single goose that solitary flies,
 Each and every lone grouse that solitary cries.
 Let them be heard in the inner space of our minds,
 Let them permeate the utter depth of our minds.

The symbolic power of the "single goose" and "lone grouse" lies in the popular Tibetan belief that these birds are eternally loyal to their mates. Like the swan in European folklore, they are celebrated for fidelity and constancy. It is believed that these birds mate for life and if one is killed the other will remain single and mourn till death. The grouse laments daily by letting out loud heart-rending calls on the mountaintop that reverberate throughout the adjacent valleys. The poem is urging Tibetans, as the bereaved, to emulate the legendary loyalty of these birds and perpetually remember the origins of their lasting collective suffering - the violent suppression of the March 10th Uprising - that widowed and orphaned many a Tibetan.

Gradual Maturation and Political Awakening

This constant remembrance brings to the fore a second prominent feature of the poem: A seemingly inevitable new political awakening. For the poet-singer the Tibetan colonial experience that followed from the 10 March Uprising is characterised by an accumulation of suffering and misrule over half a century (calculated from the date of composition). The shock and pain engendered by the bloody takeover of Tibet in the 1950s were made even worse by the socio-cultural trauma of the 1960s and the 1970s that was brought about by the destructive policies of the Cultural Revolution. The period of relative cultural freedom in the early 1980s was short-lived. Since the late 1980s, many aspects of Tibetan cultural revival and reassertion of national identity have yet again been subjected to draconian political restrictions. Relentless state control, surveillance and persecution—encapsulated in the poem by the images of “pistols”, “interrogations” and “prisoners”—afflict today’s Tibet. The absence of basic civil and political rights and the fact that Tibetans have little or no say in the day to day running of their homeland aggravate an already deplorable situation.

“The Anniversary and the Melody” intimates that this colonial experience has an awakening impact upon the Tibetan psyche that leads to political action and realisation. This idea is something very similar to that put forward by the highly acclaimed Tibetan intellectual Shokdung in his vociferous book on the 2008 Tibetan uprising entitled *Separating the Sky and the Earth: On the Peaceful Revolution of the Earth-Mouse Year (gnam sa go 'byed/ sa byi zhi ba'i gsar brje la bris pa)*.²³ In this renowned volume published in 2009—that put him in detention and earned

²³ Zhogs dung 2009. See Shokdung 2016 for an English translation of the book by Matthew Akester who translates the title as *The Division of Heaven and Earth*.

him many admirers including our poet Sangdhor²⁴—Shokdung asserts that years of repression and terror finally gave way to the 2008 Tibet-wide peaceful rebellion. He construes this rebellion itself as the manifestation of a revolutionary political awakening that harkens back to the heroic courage and national consciousness of the Tibetan Empire, as well as feeding on current Tibetan aspirations for freedom, human rights and democracy.²⁵ In Sangdhor's poem, we learn that although decades of Chinese communist rule, disinformation and indoctrination have made inroads into the Tibetan consciousness, these state endeavours have not managed to produce the desired effect. Despite the material resources and coercive apparatuses at its disposal, the Chinese state has failed to instil total submission, historical amnesia and unthinking conformism among Tibetans.²⁶ As a result, out of the long colonial subjugation a song surges out, a song propelled by a profound melody:

From somewhere a song surges out with gentle pace,

²⁴ For Sangdhor's show of admiration see his effusive verse review of Shokdung's book and his poem celebrating Shokdung's prison lease. Both of these poems were first published online on Sangdhor's now closed down literary website on 5 February 2010 and 15 October 2010 respectively. They can be found in printed form in *Seng rdor* 2011: 103-112, 117-126.

²⁵ *Zhogs dung* 2009: 12-30.

²⁶ Many contemporary Tibetan poetic statements similarly touch on the inability of the Chinese state to bend Tibetans to its will. For example, a very famous Tibetan hip hop song resists the power of Chinese state and repels the light of its "civilising mission" as follows when they speak for a new generation of Tibetans who came of age under its colonial rule:

We're the sharp intellect
Not content with your advice and edicts
We're the soft darkness
Not repelled by your light and power
We're the uproar and retaliation to embitter you
We're the terror and plague of your life

See Lama Jabb (2018: 101-105) for a commentary on and a translation of the lyrics in its entirety.

Gradually it demolishes cells of silence and isolation.
That is the ideal that we can behold;
That is our own great renaissance.

Beneath a thousand layered sheath of flesh and skin
Laughs an innate, natural tune with deep resonance.
Deep within a hundred thousand encased bones and veins
Sobs and sobs a masterful, primordial melody.

I believe this song is a reference to the protests that rippled across the Tibetan plateau in 2008 calling for justice, freedom, independence, human rights and the return of the Dalai Lama.²⁷ Hundreds of monks carried out two separate protests on 10 March 2008 in Lhasa to commemorate the 49th anniversary of the 10 March 1959 Uprising and to express dissent against the Chinese rule. Suppression of these and other protests on subsequent days unleashed a wave of large-scale public demonstrations all over Tibet, the likes of which had not been seen since the armed resistances of the 1950s. The uprising met a violent end resulting in mass deaths, torture, imprisonments, displacements and various repressive campaigns. Its magnitude and intensity were only matched by the sheer violence of the Chinese state and the multitude of its draconian measures. Nevertheless, with its audacious expression of deep discontent and its show of resurgent political awareness and agency the 2008 uprising leaves an enduring and unfathomable legacy. It functions like an awakened and awakening song that breaks the state enforced silence and ends the isolation induced both by state repression and citizens' political inaction.

In the poem under review, a profound primordial melody informs and carries this new song and then absorbs it into its long

²⁷ For an account and analysis of the 2008 Tibetan uprising and its repercussions see Smith, Warren W (2010) and Tsering Topgyal (2016a: 149-174).

and seemingly infinite sequence. After incorporating the song into its perpetual flow the melody surges on and beyond gathering other distinct notes into its currents on a permeating and enlightening course through the hearts and minds of contemporary Tibetans. Through the employment of specific terms, concepts and images the poem indicates that this suffusive melody is born of Tibetan territory and history, and that it is deepened by Tibetan spiritual traditions, artistic heritage and current socio-political experiences. Suggestive phrases like "living things of this mountainside" (*ri sul 'di yi skye dngos*), "this mountain of a great wilderness" (*bas mtha'i la mo 'di*), and "the mane of mountain peaks" (*ri rtse'i rngog ma*) portray the mountain-enshrined existence of Tibet. "The sacred vow", "command", "sacred helmet" and "the royal seal", "sword", and "edict", (*dbu mna', bka' bda', dbu rmog, rang sde'i rtags tham, dpa' dam, bka' gtsigs*) recall a glorious period of Tibetan history. These are some of the evocative terms associated with the Tibetan imperial power, which extended from India to China and spread across Central Asia during the Eighth and Ninth Centuries.²⁸ Through the appropriation of such loaded terms the poem is underlining the unifying resonance and the inspirational energy of some of the forces that enabled the Tibetan imperial expansion, i.e., Tibetan solidarity and allegiance (sacred vow or covenant), administrative power (royal seal and edicts) and military might on horseback ("Breaking into a wild gallop is the sacred helmet").²⁹

²⁸ On the Tibetan empire and Tibetan military excursions into the Indian Sub-continent, Central Asia and China see van Schaik 2011: 1-50, Kapstein 2006: 51-83. For Tibetan imperial expansions across Inner and Central Asia see Beckwith 2013: 133-41, and 1993.

²⁹ For another powerful poem of Sangdhor entitled "The Bushy Yaktail" (*rnga rtsid l/heb po*) that blends Tibetan imperial imagery and the 2008 uprising see Seng rdor 2011a: 127. On the significant role of oath during the Tibetan empire see Schaeffer, Kurtis R, Matthew T. Kapstein and Gray Tuttle (eds.) 2013: 9, 21-24; Walter, Michael L 2009: 10-13, 49-50, 174-186. For the Tibetan imperial administration see Uebach, Helga 2009: 57-69, 2003: 21-27, Takeuchi, Tsuguhito 2003: 43-54. For a collection

Complex concepts and practices such as karma, unceasing conceptual activities of the mind, primordial mastery, meditation, *tummo*, *bardo* and the perfection of liberation paths and stages (*las dbang*, *sems kyi 'phro 'du*, *gnyug ma rtsad grub*, *sgom*, *gtum mo*, *bar do*, *sa lam rdzogs pa*) deepen the melody with their allusions to Tibetan religious traditions. These terms, although spiritual in their origin, are consciously invested with secular significance to reference contemporary ideological change and actual political developments on the ground. As already observed, Tibetan artistic heritage courses through and channels the flow of the melody, as exemplified by, *inter alia*, the tune of *Khache Phalu* and the composition of the sublime Tibetan performing art *repa*.³⁰ Indeed, it is guitar and flute (*pi Wang*, *gling bu*), ubiquitous traditional instruments, that Tibetans are beseeched to play in order to sing out their contemporary existence. This contemporary existence, which also feeds the melody, is characterised by interrogations, pistols and prisoners (*tsha 'dri*, *dkrum mda'*, *btson pa*) as well as ideological awakening and political agency. It is within such a complex melody the contemporary Tibetan people find wisdom against and escape from Chinese imperialist power and indoctrination:

Now let's practise within the melody,
Let's practise within the measure of the melody.

of texts on royal edicts see Schaeffer, Kurtis R, Matthew T. Kapstein and Gray Tuttle (eds.) 2013: 57-86. In Sangdhor's poem "the sacred helmet" (*dbu rmog*) is an image for the Tibetan imperial military power and Tibetan martial spirit. It might also carry that symbolic significance attributed to it by Giuseppe Tucci (1955: 200) – "the magic power of the king".

³⁰ *Repa* (*ras pa*) is a type of Tibetan performing arts that features song, dance, storytelling, gymnastic display and recitation of poetry. Its origins are traced back to Milarepa (1052-1135) and is usually performed by a single itinerant artist or a troupe of artists, who are also known as *repa*. A variant spelling of it is *ralpa* (*ral pa*). For an introduction to this once ubiquitous but now declining art see Mgon po rgyal mtshan 1998.

Let's strike every string of the mind with great force
 And strum each note of the psyche with great power.

Now let's train the mind within the melody,
 Let's train the mind within the cadence of the melody.
 Let's press every spring of the senses with great strength
 And turn each screw of the intellect with great might.

Now let's seek respite within the melody,
 Let's seek respite within the harmony of the melody.
 Let's wipe clean all the parts and joints of the soul
 And wash well each component of the life force.

Such spring-cleaning stands for a necessary deprogramming process that rids Tibetans of the imprints of Chinese state indoctrination effected through the medium of state-run education, mass media and political campaigns. The act of deprogramming is combined with meditative absorption within the melody, thereby deepening the political awakening announced by the song of the 2008 uprising. This new political consciousness is made known through the novel use of Buddhist concepts and meditation practices. Familiar theological terms are secularised - thus defamiliarising them—for the purpose of conveying the awakening of a revolutionary consciousness. The poem brings into relief its extended metaphor of meditation cum enlightenment as it makes emphatic references to "spiritual practice", "mind training", "the perfection of liberation paths and stages", "the dissolution of all obscurations", and "the extinguishing of all illusions" (*nyams len, blo sbyong, sa lam rdzogs, sgrib ba ma lus byang, 'khrul ba thams cad zad*). In Tibetan Buddhism, these are conventional technical terms for specific meditation practices and the resultant spiritual experiences that pave the way to the final enlightenment. Great Tibetan meditation treatises such as

Stages of Meditation (sgom pa'i rim pa) tell us how one needs to constantly immerse oneself in deep contemplation enabled by diligence, patience, discipline and a compassionate mind embracing all sentient beings.³¹ It is stressed again and again that one must incessantly engage in rigorous meditation and overcome uncritical conventional thinking obscured by ignorance (*ma rig pas sgrib ba*) and worldly illusions. It is believed that this in turn will help the practitioner cultivate the awakening mind of bodhichitta (*byang sems*) rooted in universal compassion that will eventually secure the ultimate goal: the omniscient state of enlightenment. Sangdhor applies this religious idiom for communicating an entirely different experience - an experience that is considered to be equally novel and transformational.

Buddhist enlightenment serves as a metaphor for political emancipation. The highly taxing and time-consuming process of deep meditation that results in the attainment of Buddhahood (more often than not requiring the endeavour of many a lifetime) is likened to the long, arduous and reflective journey that ends with an awakened mind thirsting for political freedom. Although this realisation may not entail the actual materialisation of political freedom, it at least gives rise to a galvanising awareness that Tibet has been under occupation, which in turn generates an impulse for emancipatory action. The poem instructs the reader to take a particular meditation posture, and be seated and immersed within the melody. It advocates supreme calm by encouraging us to slow down our physical activities and breathing to a measured pace. The long reflection on Tibetan history and Tibet's

³¹ *Stages of Meditation (sgom pa'i rim pa)* is said to have been composed by the great ninth century Indian scholar Kamalaśīla in Tibet. The Dalai Lama teaches this text frequently, and see his *Stages of Meditation* (2001) for an authoritative commentary on this illuminating text in English. Another lucid exposition of Tibetan meditation practices can be found in *Treasury of Knowledge* by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé 2008.

current situation—assisted by composure, precision and patience (prerequisites for single-pointed concentration, *ting nge 'dzin*)—leads to the visceral rediscovery of “the seal”, “the sword” and “the edict of our tribe”. Here the intimate term “our tribe” (*rang sde*) denotes Tibet.³² It recalls Gedun Choepel’s stirring verse that brings to an abrupt end his unfinished yet highly influential history of Tibet called *White Annals (theb ther dkar po)*.³³ This was the first Tibetan history book that made use of the ancient Dunhuang manuscripts for shedding light upon the workings and the legacy of the Tibetan empire.³⁴ Gedun Choepel describes his incomplete historical project with patriotic sentiment:

With the white brilliance of love for the people of our tribe
That resides within the centre of my natural born heart,
To the king and country of our land of snowy Tibet
I have offered a little service to the best of my ability.³⁵

“The seal”, “the sword” and “the edict” of Sangdhor’s poem belong to that very tribe with an impressive imperial history celebrated with such passion and poetic eloquence in *White Annals*. As they meditate within the melody, these great symbols of the Tibetan imperial power issue forth from the vital organs of living

³² Depending on the context *rang sde* can be translated as my tribe (community, village and settlement) or one’s tribe or our tribe. Reflecting the tone, mood and overall patriotic feel of the poem I have chosen the last of these three options.

³³ Dge 'dun chos 'phel 1994 Vol III: 205-300. For Samten Norboo’s English translation of *The White Annals* see Gedun Chophel 1978.

³⁴ Dunhuang manuscripts are a large cache of ancient documents discovered at a cave complex in Dunhuang, the Chinese province of Gansu in the early 20th century. They are predominantly in Chinese and Tibetan and are an invaluable source for studying early Tibetan history, religion and society. The International Dunhuang Project provides digital images and catalogues of these manuscripts on its website: <http://idp.bl.uk>

³⁵ dGe 'dun chos 'phel 1994 Vol III: 299. *rang sde'i rigs la zhen pa dkar po'i mdangs// rang byung snying gi dbus na gnas pa 'dis// rang yul kha pa can gyi rje 'bangs la// rang gis nus pa'i sri zhu cung zad sgrub//.*

Tibetans who are experiencing the Chinese colonial rule here and now. This sequence of graphic images is the heightening of a powerful bodily imagery that permeates the poem, which even locates the original source of the great melody itself within the “layered sheath of flesh and skin” and “encased bones and veins.” The salient embodied imagery underscores that intricate connection between the bodily senses and human understanding specifically lauded by William Hazlitt and emulated by his prose style. Hazlitt prizes writers whose style displayed “strong, vivid, bodily perception” and whose “body thought.”³⁶ Tom Paulin explains that the presence of the body is prominent in Hazlitt’s writing because “he wishes to unite sense experience and, importantly, expressive physical movement with imagination and understanding.”³⁷ In a similar way, Sangdhor’s poem observes and expresses the connection between bodily experience and human understanding. After rigorous meditation-like absorption within the melody, the items that emerge from the liver, lungs and bowels—organs associated with love, life, happiness and deep inward feelings—link the imperial past with the present Tibetan body experiencing the pangs of colonial rule and an awakening political mind.³⁸

The past and the present mingle within the mind and the body of contemporary Tibetans culminating in a patriotic conscious-

³⁶ Hazlitt cited in Paulin, Tom 1998: 56. The phrase “body thought” alludes to John Donne’s poem “Of the Progress of the Soul: The Second Anniversary” (Donne 1955: 221):

her pure, and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinctly wrought,
That one might almost say, her body thought;

³⁷ Paulin 1998: 56.

³⁸ Sangdhor’s “Those Heroes Might’ve Thought Thus (*dpa’ rgod de tshos ‘di ltar dgongs yod nges*) is another poem that employs graphic bodily imagery and senses for portraying contemporary Tibetan political protests and patriotism see Seng rdor 2011b: 107-109.

ness for guiding individual and collective action. "The Anniversary and the Melody" thus displays an element of what D. H. Lawrence calls "the poetry of the present" that incorporates both the past and the future while being neither. For Lawrence, it is in the immediate present that the "living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither."³⁹ Within this fluid and dynamic poem under review, the immediate present moment of Tibet breathes in and out both the past and the future. As we have already seen the poem is mostly preoccupied with the present and recent Tibetan history, yet in terms of both form and content it is woven of Tibet's rich literary and oral traditions and the distant past. This quality furnishes the poem and its imagery with intellectual and emotional depth while always ensuring that it is deeply rooted within the living, evolving and vibrating present. The political awakening that the poem detects and celebrates is the part of a living present felt by the contemporary Tibetan body or by what Lawrence would call the "*pulsating, carnal self*".⁴⁰ Thus Sangdhor's poem teems with poetic images that are visual representations of bodily senses and intellectual experiences that possess a force of sudden revelation concerning today's Tibet born of the past and the present.

The Power of the Visible

In another fresh and pregnant metaphor Sangdhor secularises a famous spiritual practice to give expression to a tragic yet powerful contemporary Tibetan political action, which might be seen as yet another aspect of the new political awakening the poem records. The torrential flow of the melody gathers its momentum in the "year when *tummo* of mountain peaks burns":

³⁹ Lawrence, D. H. [1919] 1990: 48.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 49. Italic original.

That melody is how one breaks into a gallop;
 It is how one leaps and breaks into a gallop.
 The year when the *tummo* of mountain peaks burns
 Breaking into a wild gallop is the sacred helmet.

Tummo (*gtum mo*, inner heat or inner fire)—the great yogic practice of internal heat generation—is converted into a new poetic image to capture a state forbidden aspect of contemporary Tibet. This is the act of self-immolation carried out by Tapey, a young monk from Kirti Monastery in Eastern Tibet, in protest against Chinese rule in 2009, which set off a chain reaction of similar acts in the years that followed calling for Tibetan freedom, the return of the Dalai Lama, and language equality and protection.⁴¹ The secular appropriation of *tummo* gives vivid presence to something that is either silenced or (when mentioned) distorted to the point of invisibility in the official narrative of the Chinese state concerning contemporary Tibet. In this innovative poetic image, we can observe, to borrow from Marianne Moore, that the “power of the visible is the invisible”. In a poem on the ostrich called “He “Digesteth Hard Yron”, Moore opines:

The power of the visible

⁴¹ Since Tapey’s self-immolation on 27 February 2009, a further 154 Tibetans have carried out acts of self-immolation inside Tibet to date (14 December 2018). There have been at least three self-immolation protests in 2018 alone. Out of the 155 recorded self-immolators 123 are known to have passed away. Little is known about the wellbeing and whereabouts of the survivors. Summary details of Tibetan self-immolations and an informative 2012 report (*Storm in the Grasslands: Self-immolations in Tibet and Chinese policy*) on the lives and last testaments of some of the self-immolators can be found on the website of International Campaign for Tibet: <https://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/>. For further information on and media coverage of Tibetan Self-immolations see Buchung D. Sonam (ed.) 2013. For scholarly interpretations of self-immolations see Tsering Topgyal 2016b: 166-187; McGranahan and Litzinger (eds.) 2012, and Buffetrille and Robin (eds.) 2012.

is the invisible; as even where
 no tree of freedom grows,
 so-called brute courage knows.
 Heroism is exhausting, yet
 it contradicts a greed that did not wisely spare
 the harmless solitaire⁴²

In her poem, Moore celebrates the obstinate survival of the ostrich while many similar exotic birds became extinct. She might also be referring to the power of the image, the known and the living that enables it to shine light upon the unimagined, the unknown and the dead. The invisible or the unknown has an uncanny ability to reveal itself through the visible. In her ostrich poem Moore is specifically noting the power of the visible presence of the living—that is the ostrich—to reveal those erstwhile living things first deprived of their freedom and then driven to extinction by sheer human rapacity and power lust. If one extrapolates this notion to Sangdhor's employment of *tummo* as a poetic image one might be able to perceive that it makes something unspeakable visible to the "inward eye" of the Tibetan reader. It sears a vivid image of the acts of self-immolation on the Tibetan mind—acts made unmentionable and not objectively discussed by the Chinese state and its media.

The spiritual and historical dimensions of the term *tummo* and its enduring popularity deepen its symbolic significance and make it more profound and accessible as a poetic image. *Tummo*, inner fire meditation, is an ancient yogic practice that constitutes a vital part of the famous Six Yogas of Nāropa (*nā ro chos drug*).⁴³ Tibetans have been practising it since at least the

⁴² Moore, Marianne 1968: 100.

⁴³ For an insightful book on the Six Yogas of Naropa revolving around *tummo* see Glenn H. Mullin's (2005) translation of and introduction to Tsongkhapa's famous commentary on these yogic practices called *The Three Convictions (yid ches gsum ldan)*. According to the current Dalai Lama this "work is regarded by Tibetans as

11th Century when the great translator and master Marpa Lotsāwa (1012-1097) imported it from India and popularised it in Tibet. Through diligent and disciplined meditation practices the *tummo* practitioner harnesses inner heat and channels it for generating the subtlest level of consciousness so as to attain the highest form of wisdom. That is to say that the blissful heat of *tummo* (*gtum mo'i bde drod*) is utilized for gaining enlightenment. Therefore, *tummo* is highly sought after for its liberating "fire-heat" (*gtum mo me drod*). The most famous practitioner and teacher of *tummo* is the great yogi-poet Milarepa (1052-1135), a principal disciple of Marpa Lotsāwa.⁴⁴ The thin cotton clad Milarepa is admired, amongst other things, for his courage and sheer obstinacy to bear many hardships in order to perfect *tummo* amidst the snowy mountains of Tibet (*gangs ri'i khrod*). To this day, many a Tibetan practitioner has followed in his footsteps. In short, *tummo* is the product of centuries of Tibetan Buddhist teaching and practice shaping bodily and mental experiences. Sangdhor appropriates this consciousness forging yogic practice and makes it burn on the mountain peaks of contemporary Tibet, just as the heat of *tummo* burnt inside Milarepa so many years ago on so many summits.⁴⁵ The inner heat that has blazed inside the bodies of great yogis and numerous lesser practitioners on the Tibetan mountaintops, sharpening their senses for spiritual emancipation, is transformed into the sacrifi-

tummo gyi gyalpo [gtum mo gi rgyal po], the king of treatments on the inner heat yoga" (Quoted in Mullin 2005: 44).

⁴⁴ On Milarepa, his relationship with his master Marpa Lotsawa and diligent spiritual practice see Andrew Quintman's fine translation of *The Life of Milarepa* by Tsangnyön Heruka 2010. For Milarepa's vital role in the transmission of the Six Yogas of Naropa see Mullin 2005.

⁴⁵ See Seng rdor (2006: 125-128; 2008: 33-36) for two contrasting yet equally brilliant poems on Milarepa. Sangdhor's free verse poem "To Mourn" (*mya ngan zhu ba*) that first appeared on his now closed down literary website on 11 October 2011 is a more explicit reflection on Tibetan self-immolations (Seng rdor 2011c).

cial fire of self-immolations uttering political discontent, aspiration and agency in such ineffable ways and with such tragic consequences. Thus, within the poetic image of *tummo*—visible in the mind's eye—rages the invisible fire of the self-immolations for political liberation, invisible in the Chinese state controlled media and state censored Tibetan communications. *Tummo* is also part of the salient bodily imagery of Sangdhor's poem that captures what is experienced and expressed by the contemporary Tibetan body. Thus, matters of the mind and body are employed as poetic images for communicating new political awakening and actions of the contemporary Tibetan nation.

Tibet within the Fabric of the Poetic Text

The third prominent feature of "The Anniversary and the Melody", indivisibly intermeshed with the other two highlighted aspects, concerns the presence of the Tibetan nation within the very fabric of the poetic text itself. As the poem weaves itself into the written form out of the warp and weft of Tibetan oral and literary sources it beseeches the Tibetan reader to use the newly gained consciousness or political Buddhahood for narrating the recent history of Tibet. Like many who fought against Western imperialism in the 20th century, many Tibetans see "an unbroken continuity" of resistance⁴⁶ that can be traced back to the first native fighters' insurrection against foreign intrusion. Just as there is an unbroken line of active Tibetan opposition that leads, to borrow Basil Davidson's words, to a period of "primary resistance,"⁴⁷ so there is an uninterrupted chain of repression that

⁴⁶ Edward W. Said 1997: 238 – 239 notes the tendency of many anti-imperial movements to locate their legitimacy and cultural primacy in this "unbroken continuity" of resistance, which is usually played down by the European imperial powers in their historical accounts.

⁴⁷ Cited in Said 1994: 252.

stretches from the initial encounter between Tibet and Communist China to the present day. It is this history that Sangdhor's poem narrates with frequent allusions to Tibet's past imperial grandeur and by taking full advantage of the communicative efficacy, cultural embeddedness, arresting cadence and unique sound patterns of the Tibetan language. It is this history that the poem urges Tibetans to sing "with voice", measure "with sound" and utter "through speech". This vocal narration of Tibetan history forms part of that long-running resistance because it struggles against imposed historical amnesia.⁴⁸ Remembering forbidden historical events generates counter-memory that helps to offset the Chinese state's efforts to erase and rewrite Tibetan history.

As alluded in the first section of the essay, by providing an alternative Tibetan historical narrative, this poem is itself a form of national remembrance on a grand scale encompassing Tibetan territory, history, art and culture. It not only explicitly recalls the highly significant historical date of the March 10th, but also evokes the rich Tibetan artistic heritage in its textual body. As we have seen, it is woven of historical allusions, religious references, poetic language and imagery derived from Tibet's oral and literary traditions. As I have demonstrated, it employs the captivating tune and wisdom of *Khache Phalu* to tease out and carry on the great melody that bursts forth. This immensely popular traditional text that reflects upon the unpredictable, suffering and death-ridden nature of the human condition is itself informed by Tibetan oral poetry. As the poem closely associates the new Tibetan awakening with images of galloping horses, "the sacred helmet", "the seal", "the sword" and "the edict" memories of the

⁴⁸ This is not to claim that the poet sets out consciously to undertake political resistance. In a way he is simply exercising an inherent human faculty, be it mediated by one's socio-cultural experience. Memory is an essential part of an individual's existence and identity and a Tibetan's free use of it happens to clash with the Chinese imperial power.

Tibetan imperial power begin to course through it. The poem also calls to mind Tibetan avian folklore as it makes use of it to express immense human suffering and instil eternal loyalty in Tibetans. The secular application of Tibetan religious practice and thought permeates the poem and it culminates in the "birth" of a new political consciousness that evokes the Buddhist enlightenment.⁴⁹ At the core of all these recalls lie the resourceful expressiveness and elasticity of the Tibetan language. Moreover, they show Sangdhor's innovative use of the Tibetan language which enables him to "sing" the Tibetan nation without being silenced by the Chinese colonial power.

"The Anniversary and the Melody" helps to demonstrate how some contemporary Tibetan poems are able to counter the distorting and dominant language of the imperial power by consciously exploring the full potential of the marginalised Tibetan language. Around the same time when the tragic event commemorated in Sangdhor's poem was unfolding on the Tibetan plateau, George Steiner, echoing George Orwell, exposed the terrifying relationship between language and political lying entailing political inhumanity. In his famed essays "The Hollow Miracle" and "A Note on Günter Grass", Steiner argues that the language of the Nazi regime "polluted" and "poisoned" the German language beyond recognition.⁵⁰ He believes that this pollution was so intense that it turned the post-WWII German tongue into an effective tool for causing oblivion concerning the recent horrors of the Holocaust. Likewise, the vocabulary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese state has a polluting impact

⁴⁹ Intermeshed with the extended meditation cum enlightenment metaphor is the image of the conception, gestation and birth of a new Tibetan consciousness. As can be discerned in the concluding stanza of the poem this very much resembles the rebirth of a being after a long journey through the realm of *Bardo*. Here it is the *Bardo* of the Tibetan colonial experience.

⁵⁰ Steiner, George [1959] 1967: 117-132 "The Hollow Miracle"; [1964] 1967: 133-140 "A Note on Günter Grass".

upon Tibetan language that either glosses over or totally erases the bloody encounter between Communist China and Tibet in the 1950s and its ongoing repercussions. The perverting effects of the imperial idiom of the CCP run deep in the contemporary use of the Tibetan language and they are blatantly obvious in frequently repeated official statements that paint traditional Tibetan society as “dark” and “medieval” and cast colonial intrusion as “peaceful liberation”. Official Chinese state publications tell Tibetans and the world that “the peaceful liberation of Tibet” is “a milestone marking the commencement of Tibet's progress from a dark and backward society to a bright and advanced future.”⁵¹ They endlessly reiterate: “The Society of old Tibet under feudal serfdom was even more dark and backward than Europe in the Middle Ages.”⁵² Due to both official pressure and unthinking conformism many Tibetans embrace this imperial idiom and portray Tibet of yesteryears as being “extremely cruel, extremely backward and extremely dark”,⁵³ and continue to believe that their society and culture are still lagging behind advanced peoples and are in need of progress.

The political vocabulary of the CCP as an effective carrier of an imperial hegemony has seriously infected Tibetan language to the extent that it continues to affect the narration of Tibetan history as well as the perception and expression of Tibetan identity.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China July 11, 2011.

⁵² Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China 2001: 3.

⁵³ For instance, a recent Tibetan news report (Snying lcags 2017) on “the 58th Anniversary of Serfs' Emancipation Day” typifies the imposition as well as adoption of the Chinese imperial idiom when it states that Tibetans “sang songs of praise to the wise and glorious deeds of the Communist Party with deep love while remembering the extremely cruel, the extremely backward and the extremely dark history of the Old Tibet” (*bod rnying pa'i ches gdug rtsub dang/ ches rjes lus/ ches mun nag gi lo rgyus la phyir dran dang/ gung khran tang gi mkhas mdzang ldan pa dang rlabs chen gyi mdzad rjes la brtse sems zab mos bstod glu blangs pa*).

⁵⁴ The renaming of Tibetan places, rivers and mountains in Chinese for official record and administrative purposes is a typical colonial practice of erasing the presence

Reflecting upon the enduring power of injurious words, Emily Dickinson once noted that “the infection in the sentence breeds”.⁵⁵ Such an infection goes on breeding in the Tibetan sentence, but as shown by the likes of Sangdhor’s poem all is not lost. The deep oral and literary roots of such contemporary poetry prevent the infection reaching to the marrow of the Tibetan language. “The Anniversary and the Melody” is effective in fighting the infection and avoiding historical forgetfulness because it plumbs what Sangdhor terms “the depths of the Tibetan language” (*bod skad kyi gting*) for poetic communication. This specific poem belongs to what Sangdhor and others classify as “the new verse poetry” (*bcad gsar snyan ngag*) that has given a renewed energy and creative impetus to the neglected formal Tibetan verse poetry.⁵⁶ Since the flourishing of free verse form in the 1980s, triggered by the pioneering poems of Dhondup Gyal, many Tibetan writers have attacked metrical composition for its perceived inflexible, archaic and inadaptably uniform form and uniformity of content. This prevalent anti-verse sentiment led to a sharp decline in the practice of versification especially in the 1980s. As a result, the fate of the formal Tibetan verse poetry became a source of great anxiety for an older generation of Tibetan scholars during the 1980s and the early 1990s.⁵⁷ “The new verse” (*bcad gsar*) is the product of a conscious collective endeavour to revitalise the Tibetan verse poetry by exploring “the depths of the

of the colonised. Deliberate sinicisation of Tibetan proper names erases historical, cultural and psychological identities embedded within them.

⁵⁵ Dickinson, Emily [1947]: 553. “A Word dropped careless on a Page”.

⁵⁶ Commentaries on this new type of Tibetan verse see Seng rdor 2014; 2010: 56-66. Also see Sgo yon 2011.

⁵⁷ For instance, some of the most passionate and reasoned writings of the Lama scholar poet Alak Dorshi bear this anxiety. See his 1980s critical as well as pedagogic essays on Tibetan literature especially focusing on regular verse poetry, Dor zhi gdong drug snyems blo 2004a: 179-191, 192-220, 221-256, 281-310 and 2004b: 12-118, 206-230.

Tibetan language” that can only be fully appreciated by a true Tibetan ear or a Tibetan language forged sensibility.⁵⁸

According to Sangdhor’s exposition, “the new verse” approximates to what Gedun Choepel calls “the ancestral diction” (*pha mes lugs kyi tshig sbyor*) or “the diction according to the natural freedom of the Tibetan language” (*bod skad rang dbang ba’i sgrig tshu*), which advances a notion of the flexible Tibetan poetic diction naturally inherent within the Tibetan language (*bod skad rang gi gshis la yod pa*) that is unrestricted by the artificial style of the Indian *kāvya* influenced Tibetan literature.⁵⁹ Thus, “the new verse” creatively exploits different types of Tibetan metrical composition found in both oral and written literatures, whilst always prioritising terminology, diction, grammatical rules and rhetoric devices considered distinctively Tibetan.⁶⁰ “The new verse”—as a new poetical voice of the present—observes rules concerning grammar, syntax and spelling but avoids the strict dictates of literary Tibetan and adopts the freedom and flexibility of the spoken word when it comes to such conventions. Sangdhor distinguishes “the new verse” from the regular verses of Tibetan *kāvya* and oral poetry but stresses that these and other categories of Tibetan versification are indispensable for its birth and development.⁶¹ In fact, when he calls it “the flow of a literary form” he is emphatically recognising “the new verse” as the perpetuation of an ancient Tibetan literary practice.⁶² For Sangdhor

⁵⁸ Seng rdor 2014.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Here Sangdhor is drawing on a fine essay by Gedun Choepel called “On the Grammar of the Written Tibetan Language” (*Bod yig gi sgra sbyor skor*), Dge ’dun chos ’phel 1994 Vol1: 281-283. An English translation of this essay by Thupten Jinpa and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (who render the title into English as “On the Linguistic Rules of the Tibetan Language”) is available in Gendun Chopel 2014: 209-220.

⁶⁰ Seng rdor 2014; Sgo yon 2011.

⁶¹ For insightful discussions of Sangdhor’s poetry and the influence of Tibetan literary and oral traditions on it see Hor gtsang ’jigs med (Hortsang Jigme) 2018 and Dge ’dun rab gsal (Gedun Rabsal) 2018.

⁶² Seng rdor 2014.

the flow of "the new verse" is fed by, amongst other artistic tributaries, "the ritual recitals of the Bon tradition, poem-songs (*mgur*), elegant sayings (*legs bshad*), advice, and the poetry of *Kāvya-darśa* (*me long ma*)."⁶³ Thus, the very text of "The Anniversary and the Melody" is also forged by a long and diverse Tibetan literary history which in turn augments its overall resistance against state-enforced oblivion.

Although Sangdhor is considered a radical poet because of his well-publicised anticlerical attitude, his "new verse" reveals that his originality lies in his respect for the old as much as his ability to communicate the new. In an essay called "On Being Modern-Minded" Bertrand Russell finds a specific type of mind shaped by the fashion of the present and desire for the new.⁶⁴ According to Russell, such a mind has no propensity to think differently or independently other than to follow current opinions that reject the old and embrace the new. Individuality is drowned in the uniformity of the fashionable. This tendency has also influenced the minds of many contemporary Tibetan writers. As a result, they do not value much the earlier and more traditional forms of Tibetan literature. Sangdhor does not appear to escape the fetishism for the new in terms of some of his views on Tibetan Buddhism,⁶⁵ but with regards to his poetic style he prefers the everlasting of the old to the ephemeral of the new. It seems he achieves originality through the observation of literary conventions deemed old-

⁶³ Ibid. *Kāvya-darśa* (*snyan ngag me long* OR *me long ma*), *Mirror of Poetics* is a highly influential treatment of *kāvya* by Daṇḍin (7th–8th c.) which had dominated classical Tibetan literary production till the late 20th century.

⁶⁴ Russell, Bertrand [1950] 2009: 63–68.

⁶⁵ See Sangdhor's controversial book *Audacity* (*rtul phod*) in which he attacks the transmission and some central beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism (Seng rdor 2008). One particular poem entitled "Eighty-Four Thousand Heaps of Lies" (*shob kyi phung po brgyad khri bzhi stong*) dismisses the complete teachings of Lord Buddha as the product of centuries old imaginative fabrication and intellectual mendacity (Ibid: 11–16). See also Lama Jabb 2015: 15–16.

fashioned in the contemporary Tibetan literary climate. In his essay "Johnson as Critic and Poet" T. S. Eliot notes that Samuel Johnson's "originality" results from his rigorous upholding of the standards of a common style in English poetry. As a result, Eliot concludes: "To be original within definite limits of propriety may require greater talent and labour, than when every man may write as he pleases, and when the first thing expected of him is to be different."⁶⁶ Indeed, through the adherence to common standards and rules of both written and oral compositions whilst not being in thrall to the fleeting new, Sangdhor produces original poetry capable of communicating the contemporary Tibetan national experience. The CCP has implanted ideological words, phrases and images deep within the Tibetan language. However, as shown by "The Anniversary and the Melody" Sangdhor's poetry erodes such implants through the reinvigoration of Tibetan verse poetry, reemploying older or enduring Tibetan terminology, cadence and meter, and injecting them with fresh senses and blending them with common speech. This decontamination process is assisted by the technology of the internet and social media that has spread Sangdhor's poem far and wide.

⁶⁶ Eliot, T. S. 1957: 188.

The Paperless Sky: Popular Reception of the Poem

Data saturation brought on by a chaotic diversity of internet-based electronic modes of communication affects Tibetans as much as it impacts other peoples. However, this chaotic scene is conducive to the generation of a multiplicity of literary voices. The production, distribution and exchange of user-generated content via social media challenges the traditional notion of the literary canon—understood as a body of works deemed the highest quality by established scholars, writers, critics and anthologists. The mind-boggling plethora of internet-enabled communicative modes offers a certain degree of freedom to the contemporary Tibetan poet whose theme and style can no longer be totally controlled by the dictums of the powerful, be they literary or political. Dhatsenpo, a former leading member of the Third Generation of Tibetan Poets, is among the first to celebrate this newly acquired sense of freedom. In his provocatively entitled poem “Even If You Don’t Like It, So What? I Write Like This” Dhatsenpo writes poetry onto a “paperless sky” (*shog bu med pa’i nam mkha*):

This is perhaps the noon
In terms of both age and sequence

I long ago erased
A rusted line of words

What remained was a paperless sky
Onto which I’ve written a poem
That is the light of semen dripping from the penis
And the supple softness of the unfolded vagina
In no way is it the twinned ancient sun and moon

The person who illumines the blade of intellect
 Always dies without the time to wash the filth of
 certitude⁶⁷

With characteristic defiance and provocation, Dhatsenpo is defending graphic erotic poetry and attacking the authority of Tibetan critics' whose literary tastes have been shaped by the classical *kāvya* poetics derived from India.⁶⁸ Alongside the promotion of strict metrical rules, poetic diction, aesthetic principles and Indian mythology, *kāvya* imposes set themes such as the eulogy of the sun and the moon. What Dhatsenpo also emphasises is the "paperless sky"—the internet that provides the Tibetan poet with an infinite space of relative freedom. This space is not bound by the finiteness of the book in terms of its materiality and cannot be policed by the established literary authorities. To a noticeable degree it enables one to avoid financial pressures and socio-political restrictions associated with the production of literary books and journals printed on paper. Dhatsenpo's erotic poetry forced itself onto the Tibetan literary scene in the mid 2000s due partly to his and the Tibetan reader's use of the Web. His is a literary voice not drowned out by conservative critics nor the sheer volume of internet-generated literary data.

Sangdhor's "The Anniversary and the Melody" is an even more audacious poem etched on to the "paperless sky". It takes advantage of this expansive and relatively freer space to broach a politically forbidden theme and to broaden its reach beyond the limited circulation of the printed word. As observed already, Sangdhor composed the poem on 10 March 2010 coinciding with the 51st Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day of

⁶⁷ Mda' btsan po 2008.

⁶⁸ For an analysis of contemporary Tibetan erotic poetry including the cited Dhatsenpo's poem see Lama Jabb 2015: 183-230.

the 1959. He first published it online on his own website on 29 March 2010 to a rapturous reception. By 13 December 2011 Sangdhor's writings featuring this poem received 106,557 hits on his website alone.⁶⁹ It has appeared on many websites, blogs, public forums, in private chat-rooms and on other discursive platforms facilitated by online social networking services. It has been trending on Tibetan social media for some time now and is usually shared frantically during the month of March. Although the poem is mostly circulated via the internet it also appears in surreptitious publications such as privately produced pamphlets, journals and books both inside and outside Tibet. It is worth mentioning here that Sangdhor's books, including those featuring "The Anniversary and the Melody", go through several reprints and sell in their tens of thousands. In fact, this state of affairs has made him a bestselling Tibetan language writer who is almost singular in his capacity to make a living out of the profits accrued from the sales of his books.⁷⁰ "The Anniversary and the Melody" constitutes only a tiny – be it a powerful - fragment of Sangdhor's bestselling oeuvre. It first came out in print in 2011 in an acclaimed collection of some of Sangdhor's contentious poems and prose that had initially appeared online.

Taking advantage of his own website and its editorial board Sangdhor published this volume himself and it is aptly entitled *Wild Writings Dragging a Lasso (Rtsom rgod thag drud ma)*.⁷¹ The internet facilitates self-publication through enabling personal

⁶⁹ This number only represents those who viewed it on Sangdhor's private website as noted by Arik Gethong in 2011. It does not take into account others who would have come across the poem via online and printed publications.

⁷⁰ In a conversation about the popular reception of his poetry Sangdhor (15 December 2017) intimated unprompted that the main source of his income is accrued from the sale of his books. He categorically affirmed that this income not only enables him to make a living but also covers all expenses when he dines out, the purchase of electronic equipment including computer and phone and travel expenses for both business and pleasure.

⁷¹ Seng rdor: 2011.

production and management of online content as well as making it possible to use this content and the information gleaned from it for producing printed material. Therefore, even before the actual publication of the volume, the popular and lucrative response to it was a fait accompli as it had been predetermined by the existing rapturous online reception of the items to be included in it. The title of the book appropriates the Tibetan pastoralist term *thag drud*, which translates as “the one dragging a lasso”. It is a reference to unruly horses and yaks that are released with a long rope around their necks so that they could be easily caught whenever and wherever necessary. This word is also a slang for prisoners released on parole who need to be constantly vigilant against the authorities. Therefore, a less literal translation of the title might be *Wild Writings on Parole*. The volume was published without official Chinese state permission with a print run of 5,000 copies. It ran out of print as soon as it came out but the author has never reprinted it inside Tibet due to the risks and challenges entailed.⁷² In 2012, Virginia-based Tashi Choeling Buddhist Centre published this volume in downloadable digital book format and made it widely available.⁷³ “The Anniversary and the Melody” also features in another self-published book called *The Depths of the Tibetan Language: The Best Poems of Sangdhor (bod skad kyi gting/ sengs rdor gyi snyan ngag rtse gra phyogs bsdus)*. It is quietly buried deep within this volume which contains some of Sangdhor’s most representative “new verse poems” and finest prose pieces. This highly sought-after book was first published in 2013 with an initial print run of 4,500 (6,000) copies. Affirming the existing popularity of Sangdhor’s work, once again the book sold out as soon as it appeared on the market. In an

⁷² This does not take into account many unauthorized reprints of the book available on the Tibetan book market.

⁷³ This particular digitised form can be downloaded at http://www.rigzod.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=112%3A2011-12-22-17-40-41&catid=1%3A2011-09-01-18-24-37&Itemid=108&limitstart=3

effort to meet the unprecedented rising demands for the book it has been reprinted 12 times totalling over 40,000 copies.⁷⁴

The rise of social media technology has given further saliency to the existing online and printed presence of "The Anniversary and the Melody". Many Tibetans repost and repeatedly share this poem via internet-facilitated instant-messaging applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat and Weibo. It is impossible to ascertain how many people have read and re-read the poem and how many times it has been disseminated via multi-purpose social media apps. However, my own many encounters with this poem through a diversity of print and digital media over the last eight years tells me that it is indeed one of the most reproduced contemporary Tibetan poems. To cite just a single year as an example, Sangdhor republished it for only a brief period in January and again in March 2015 on his online literary forum and social media sites to a virtual community formed of nearly 10,000 individuals and groups. For reasons of directness and online searchability he revised the title of the poem to "March 10th and the Melody". Before he was pressured to remove the poem from his microblogging sites it had received over 30,000 views. Many of the individuals who follow Sangdhor's every post displayed the poem on their private blogging sites or on collective forums and distributed it amongst their online contacts. Around the same time (March 2015) many online social networking groups both inside and outside Tibet started sharing the poem while showering it with praises. These include two particularly popularly Tibetan language social media forums inside Tibet with a combined following of over 100,000 individuals where Sangdhor's poem was viewed and shared more than most items.⁷⁵ By

⁷⁴ This number only reflects conservative estimations offered by the author himself and some of the distributors of the book. It does not include many copies produced by private booksellers without the author's permission or knowledge.

⁷⁵ The names of and links to these microblogging sites and virtual communities are kept anonymous so as to avoid unwelcome attention.

2015, a digitised volume of a selection of Sangdhor's poems featuring "The Anniversary and the Melody" (that had first come out in 2013 inside Tibet) became one of the most downloaded contemporary Tibetan literature e-books.⁷⁶ In online discussions many readers have lauded the poem and some have even suggested that it along with another poem by Sangdhor that eulogises the current Dalai Lama should be used as anthems for opening Tibetan public ceremonies and functions.⁷⁷ This rapturous reception shows that the popular reach of Sangdhor's poem is due to the fine quality of the poem itself, its daring subject matter and the technology of the internet.

The endless electronic reproduction of "The Anniversary and the Melody" reveals that our need to repeat things in order to remember persists in the age of social media and data saturation. Although online technology facilitates repeated communication, ironically it also bears an inherent ability to send any work, artistic or otherwise, into oblivion. There is no solid physical presence of the favourite book that can be manually browsed, visibly shelved and frequently revisited. This poem could have been buried deep under a mountain of invisible electronic data thus consigning it to forgetfulness like numerous other poems. However, the tendency to republish it over and over in mostly digitised format rescues it from this forgetfulness and makes people read it repeatedly.⁷⁸ The constant rereading of a text is not only a feature

⁷⁶ This digital book of Sangdhor's selected poems was the most downloaded work out of several poetry books released as part of a Tibetan poetry e-book series still available online. The publisher and online links are left unidentified for fear of unwelcome attention.

⁷⁷ This brilliant and unconventional praise verse called "The Yellow Cloth" (*ras ser po*) was first published on Sangdhor's website in 2008 before its appearance in print (Seng rdor 2011: 115-17, 2013: 10-11). It is subtitled "Praising a Person" (*mi zhig la bsnags pa*).

⁷⁸ The poem has a solid physical as well as a virtual presence. However, significantly it reaches to a wider audience thanks to the flexible digital reproducibility of it in a wide virtual world.

of fine literature⁷⁹ but is also an effective form of remembrance. In the case of Sangdhor's poem re-reading entails the aesthetic appreciation of the poem itself as well as recalling its commemorative subject matter which remembers the silenced tragic history of modern Tibet. In short, countless reproductions mean deliverance from the oblivion of data saturation and also from the state imposed historical amnesia. The creative and subversive potential of the infinite "paperless sky", generates a double-edged centrifugal force. It is a force that counters the totalitarian propensity to monopolise meaning-making and to control the means of representation. It also pulls away from individual or collective authoritarian tendencies to define literature within a narrow theoretical framework. The "paperless sky" creates the communicative technological condition for the existence of a multiplicity of literary voices. Of these Sangdhor's is a single limpid poetic voice—a voice informed by the Tibetan literary tradition, oral poetry and a serious concern with Tibet's current situation. In the Tibetan poetic struggle against forgetting in the age of social media two communicative technologies stand out. The technology of the internet and that of the written word. As evident in the case of "The Anniversary and the Melody" the immortalising power of the written word—so often celebrated by Shakespeare⁸⁰—is still essential for inscribing poetry onto the "paperless sky".

Conclusion: A Poem Brimful of Suffering

"The Anniversary and the Melody" monumentalizes an already immortal date of Tibetan history. The poem brims with profound

⁷⁹ Many literary critics view the need to reread a particular book for many generations as a mark of fine writing. For instance, echoing this opinion Jonathan Bate (2010: 2) states: "The books that are read again and again become *literature*".

⁸⁰ For instance, see Shakespeare's sonnets 15, 17, 18 and 55 (Jones. ed. 1997: 141, 145, 147, 221).

sadness as it remembers and reflects upon 10 March 1959, a date that has come to symbolise all the irreversible changes brought on by CCP rule. By recalling the tragic loss of lives, sacrifices made, environmental degradation and waves of colonial repression over the years, the poem taps into the unifying force of shared suffering. As it gives utterance to the ongoing Tibetan plight, it also underscores the galvanising quality of human suffering resulting from an unbroken line of state repression. Tibetan defiance and political agency are captured by the intimations of the 2008 protests and the acts of self-immolation and the detection of a revolutionary awakening and impulse. In fact, "The Anniversary and the Melody" detects in the 2008 protests something not very dissimilar to W. B. Yeats' celebrated interpretation of the 1916 Easter Rising: "All changed, changed utterly:/ A terrible beauty is born".⁸¹ However, while Yeats displays ambivalence and uncertainty about that history defining Irish rebellion in his poem "Easter 1916", Sangdhor is unambiguous in his celebration of the 2008 Tibetan uprising as a transformative moment. He makes out and celebrates its revolutionary energy with absolute certitude whilst not forgetting that it is also an active commemoration of 10 March 1959.

While Sangdhor's poem explicitly commemorates the historic date and utters the ensuing Tibetan colonial experience with such poetic force, its very textual body, composed as it is in the style of "the new verse", mirrors Tibet by recalling the diverse Tibetan literary and oral traditions with nuance and brio. What T. S. Eliot calls "the historical sense" or "the consciousness of the past" in his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent"⁸² (the deep engagement with past literary luminaries that has

⁸¹ Yeats, W. B. 2001: 85-87. For a postcolonial reading of Yeats' "Easter 1916" touching on his uncertainties about the Easter Rising see Marjorie Howe: 216-17.

⁸² Eliot [1927] 1932: 13-22.

shaped great European poetry) also informs contemporary Tibetan poetry. As shown by “The Anniversary and the Melody”, in the case of Tibet, the historical sense involves more than a serious appreciation of its literary tradition. It also entails deep immersion in Tibet’s long history, mountainous territory, religious traditions and oral literature. Extending its reach through the infinite space of “the paperless sky” Sangdhor’s poem employs all these elements and beseeches the Tibetan people to let their hearts and minds beat to a new music.

Most of all, “The Anniversary and the Melody” is an extraordinarily eloquent poem of remembrance teeming with vivid and powerful imagery. Just like the short verse “Feelings on the Day of the March 10th” penned by the now incarcerated monk Hortsang Tamdrin, Sangdhor’s poem audaciously recalls a historically significant date evocative of immense loss, suffering and grievance:

Today is the anniversary date of the March Tenth;
I remember the disease lodged within the heart,
Remember the wounds lacerated across the flesh,
Remember the grief for the siblings that died,
Remember the sound of the red wind that blew,
And remember the feud that’s festered for years.⁸³

Appendix One

⁸³ *de ring gsum bcu'i dus tshigs yin//snying la zug pa'i nad cig dran//sha la gshar ba'i rma zhig dran//spun rdza shi ba'i sdug cig dran//rlung dmar spur ba'i sgra zhig dran//lo la bsnyal ba'i gyod cig dran//*. This poem and a brief account of Hortsang Tamdrin can be found in a news report posted by A rig 'gyur med AND Tshang dbyangs rgya mtsho on 22 November 2013. Hortsang Tamdrin was arrested on 24 April 2013 and later sentenced to four years and six months in prison for allegedly “instigating separatism” and “propagating the idea of Tibetan Independence”.

དུས་དྲན་དང་རིལ་དབྱངས།

དོ་རུབ་སྦྱི་ཟླ་གསུམ་པའི་ཚེས་བཅུ་རེད། །
ད་ཉི་མའི་གཟའ་ལྷག་པའི་མཚན་རྒྱབ་རེད། །
བགྲང་བྱ་འདི་ལ་སྦྱི་དངོས་ག་ཚོད་འཆི། །
རི་སྐལ་འདི་ཡི་སྦྱི་དངོས་ག་ཚོད་འཆི། །

སྐབས་དེའི་ཡུལ་དེའི་ཟླ་དེའི་བྱང་རིམ་ནི། །
ཉིན་དེའི་ཁྱིམ་དེའི་ལོ་དེའི་འབྱུང་རྒྱུན་ནི། །
སྐབ་མའི་ལག་རྒྱུ་ཐོར་པའི་སྐུ་ལ་བསྐྱེལ། །
སེམས་ཅུང་ག་ཉུ་ཁོལ་བའི་བོ་ལ་བསྐྱེལ། །

ཡོང་མི་ཚང་མ་འགོ་མི་རེད་དོ་ལོ། །
འཇིག་རྟེན་འདི་ན་སྐང་ག་ཤོང་མང་དོ་ལོ། །
ཁ་ཚེའི་པ་ལུའི་ངག་རྟེན་རྒྱུང་ལ་འཐེན། །
གནམ་སའི་མཚམས་ནས་ཅི་ཞིག་བྲག་ཅར་འཁོར། །

ངང་པ་གཅིག་རེ་གཅིག་རེ་འཕྱར་བ་ཀམ། །
གོང་མོ་ཡ་རེ་ཡ་རེ་རུ་བ་ཀམ། །
ང་ཚོའི་སེམས་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས་གོ་བར་ཤོག། །
ང་ཚོའི་སེམས་ཀྱི་མཐེལ་ལ་ཁྱུབ་པར་ཤོག། །

ཁ་བ་བྱ་ཡུག་འཚུབ་ན་འཚུབ་ཤོག་དང་། །
དུས་རྒྱུང་བསེར་མ་ལྡང་ན་ལྡང་ཤོག་དང་། །
ང་ཚོས་ཞི་འདུལ་པ་བོང་བསྐྱོམ་པར་བྱ། །
ཞི་འདུལ་གནམ་ལྷགས་པ་བོང་བསྐྱོམ་པར་བྱ། །

ལྷོག་པ་དུམ་གཅིག་ཆད་ནས་སྟོ་ལ་ཐལ།
 ལྷོན་པ་དུམ་གཅིག་ཆད་ནས་བྱང་ལ་ཐལ།
 དེ་ནི་སྟོ་ཡི་དབུང་འཇུག་ཡིན་པ་རེད།
 དེ་ནི་བྱང་གི་དྲག་འདུལ་ཡིན་པ་རེད།

སེམས་ཀྱི་ཅི་ཞིག་རིམ་པ་དགུ་ཅུ་འདར།
 ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཅི་ཞིག་རྣམ་པ་དྲུག་ཏུ་གཡོས།
 ཤར་དེག་ལུབ་འདེད་ང་ཚོའི་ལས་དབང་རེད།
 ལུབ་དེག་ཤར་འདེད་འུ་ཚོའི་བསྐྱོས་ཐང་རེད།

ཐ་གུའི་ལ་མོ་འདི་ཡི་ཤར་རྒྱབ་ཏུ།
 བས་མཐའི་ལ་མོ་འདི་ཡི་རྒྱར་ལོགས་སུ།
 ལྷོན་ཆབ་དྲག་ཏུ་བསེལ་བའི་དབུ་མནའ་ཡོད།
 མགོན་པ་ཡུས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱུངས་པའི་ཁ་དན་ཡོད།

འདི་ནས་ཉི་མ་ལུབ་ཀྱི་ཕྱོགས་རོལ་ཟེར།
 ལྷར་གྱི་ཚོས་ཚན་གཅིག་ན་དེ་རྒྱད་བྲིས།
 བྱ་ཚོད་སྟབ་སྟེབ་འཁོར་བ་རེ་ཆད་རེད།
 ལྷ་ཐག་ལྷ་ལྷེར་འཐེན་པ་ཕམ་ཉེས་རེད།

ག་ཤེད་ཅིག་ནས་སྤྱི་ཞིག་བགས་ཀྱིས་མཆེད།
 ག་ལེ་ག་ལེར་ཐུན་ཁང་ག་ཞིག་པར་བྱེད།
 དེ་ནི་ང་ཚོས་མཐོང་བའི་ཕྱགས་བསམ་ཡིན།
 དེ་ནི་ང་ཚོའི་རྣམས་ཚན་བསྐྱར་དར་ཡིན།

ཤ་བགས་ཐུམ་པོ་སྟོང་གི་མར་ཞབས་ན།
 འབྱུང་བ་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་གདངས་ཤིག་སིག་སིག་དགོད།
 ཅ་ཅུས་སྐྱོགས་པོ་འབྱུང་གི་གཏོང་མཐེལ་ན།

གཞུག་མ་ཅད་ཀྱི་བ་དབྱངས་ཤིག་འཇུག་མ་འཇུག་ལྟ་།།

མཉམ་མགོའི་མཆི་མ་འདི་དག་ག་རེ་བྱེད། །
གཤེར་ཁུ་ཚ་བོ་འདི་དག་ག་རེ་བྱེད། །
སྐྱ་ཡི་ནུ་མ་པར་བརྒྱབ་ཏེ་སྦྲོན་པར་བྱ། །
དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོར་བསྐྱར་ཏེ་ལེན་པར་བྱ། །

དབྱངས་དེ་བྱེ་མ་བཟུང་བའི་ངང་ཚུལ་ཡིན། །
རྒྱལ་དང་བྱེ་མ་བཟུང་བའི་ངང་ཚུལ་ཡིན། །
རི་རྩེའི་སློ་གཤོག་གཤོབ་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་ལ། །
བྱེ་མ་ཤག་ཤག་བཟུང་བ་བཀའ་བཅད་ཡིན། །

དབྱངས་དེ་རྒྱལ་ཤར་སློད་པའི་ཕྱོགས་ཆ་ཡིན། །
ཕྱིང་དང་རྒྱལ་ཤར་སློད་པའི་ཕྱོགས་ཆ་ཡིན། །
རི་རྩེའི་གཏུ་མ་མོ་འབར་བའི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་ལ། །
རྒྱལ་ཤར་ཚབ་ཚུབ་སློད་པ་དབྱུ་ཚོག་ཡིན། །

དབྱངས་དེ་རྩོད་པ་གཅོག་པའི་ཉུག་སྐྱ་ཡིན། །
འགྲིག་དང་རྩོད་པ་གཅོག་པའི་ཉུག་སྐྱ་ཡིན། །
རི་རྩེའི་རྩོག་མ་གཟེངས་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་ལ། །
རྩོད་པ་ཉུག་ཉུག་གཅོག་པ་ཐེ་རྩུས་ཡིན། །

ད་ནི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ཁྲོད་ནས་ཉམས་ལེན་བྱེད། །
དབྱངས་ཀྱི་འདེགས་འཛོག་ཁྲོད་ནས་ཉམས་ལེན་བྱེད། །
མཉམས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་སྐྱུང་རེ་རེར་དག་ཏུ་བསྐྱུན། །
ཡིད་ཀྱི་སྐྱ་ཉུགས་སོ་སོར་ཤེད་ཀྱིས་བདུང་། །

ད་ནི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ཁོད་དུ་སྒོ་སྦྱོང་བ་གྱི།
 དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ལེན་འགྲུགས་ཁོད་དུ་སྒོ་སྦྱོང་བ་གྱི།
 དབང་བོའི་འཕར་ཆས་རེ་རེ་རྩལ་གྱིས་བརྟེན།
 ཤེས་པའི་གཙུག་སྒོ་སོ་སོ་སྟོབས་གྱིས་བསྐྱོར།

ད་ནི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ཁོད་ནས་ངལ་གསོ་བསྟེན།
 དབྱངས་ཀྱི་གིམ་སྟོད་ཁོད་ནས་ངལ་གསོ་བསྟེན།
 ལྷ་ཡི་རྩུ་ལག་ཡོངས་རྒྱུགས་གཙང་མར་དབྱི།
 རྩོག་གི་མ་ལག་ཆ་ཚང་དག་པར་བཀྲ།

ད་ནི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ཁོད་དུ་རས་པ་འབྲི།
 བསམ་སྒོ་རྩར་རྩར་གཏོང་བའི་རས་པ་འབྲི།
 རས་པ་རེ་རེ་ཚ་འདྲི་དུང་ལྷུར་ཡིན།
 བི་མང་བདུངས་ཏེ་སྒྲིང་བུ་འབྱུང་རོགས་དང་།

ད་ནི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ཁོད་དུ་མི་ལམ་འབྲི།
 འབྲུལ་སྒྲིང་སོག་སོག་འགྲུལ་བའི་མི་ལམ་འབྲི།
 མི་ལམ་རེ་རེ་དགྲུམ་མདའ་དུང་ལྷུར་ཡིན།
 བི་མང་བདུངས་ཏེ་སྒྲིང་བུ་འབྱུང་རོགས་དང་།

ད་ནི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ཁོད་དུ་རྟ་པོ་འབྲི།
 ལུག་མིག་ཐག་ཐག་བརྒྱགས་པའི་རྟ་པོ་འབྲི།
 རྟ་པོ་རེ་རེ་བཙོན་པ་དུང་ལྷུར་ཡིན།
 བི་མང་བདུངས་ཏེ་སྒྲིང་བུ་འབྱུང་རོགས་དང་།

ད་ནི་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུན་ལ་ཉིང་ངེར་འཇུག།
 གདངས་ཀྱི་བསྐྱོལ་མཚམས་རེ་ལ་རྩར་རེ་བསམ།
 རྩུ་ལ་རྩུ་བུར་བཞིན་གྱི་གོ་རིམ་ཁོད།

པི་མང་བདུངས་ཏེ་སྤྱིང་བྱ་འབྱུང་རོགས་དང་།།

རེས་ཚམ་ཡས་ཀྱི་ཚྭ་སྐྱུང་འཐེན་ནས་གཏོང་།།
རེས་ཚམ་མས་ཀྱི་ཉག་སྐྱུང་སྤོང་ནས་བསྐྱིམ།།
སྐྱ་ཡི་ཡེར་མོ་རེ་རེ་སྤྱིང་བ་ཡིན།།
སྐད་ཀྱི་ལྷག་ཤད་སོ་སོ་སྐྱོ་བ་ཡིན།།

དབྱངས་ཀྱི་སྤོང་མཚམས་གཅིག་གཅིག་སེམས་ཀྱིས་ངེས།།
སེམས་ཀྱི་འཕྲོ་འདུ་ཁག་ཁག་དབྱངས་ཀྱིས་སྟོན།།
མགྲིན་པའི་བྱག་ནས་པ་མ་ཟེར་ཞིང་འབོད།།
གྲེ་བའི་ལོག་ནས་ལུ་ལུ་ཟེར་ཞིང་ཅ།།

རྩ་མཚོག་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་སྐྱོན་ལ་གཞག་པར་བྱ།།
ཉག་ཉག་ཡོ་བ་མེད་པར་གཞག་པར་བྱ།།
མིག་ལྗེབས་སྤོང་ཀྱིས་ཚུམས་ལ་ག་ལེར་གྱིས།།
རང་སྤྱིའི་རྟགས་ཐམ་མཚིན་པའི་ལོགས་ནས་མངོན།།

མགོ་བོ་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ས་ལ་བསྐྱེས་པར་བྱ།།
ཉག་ཉག་ཉམ་ང་མེད་པར་བསྐྱེས་པར་བྱ།།
ལག་བྱུང་དང་གར་ཞོག་ལ་ག་ལེར་གྱིས།།
རང་སྤྱིའི་དཔའ་དམ་ལོང་གའི་བྱར་ནས་འབྱུང།།

གཟུགས་པོ་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་གསེབ་ཏུ་བཙོག་པར་བྱ།།
ཉག་ཉག་བག་ཚ་མེད་པར་བཙོག་པར་བྱ།།
ཁ་རྒྱངས་རིམ་གྱིས་ཐོང་ལ་ག་ལེར་གྱིས།།
རང་སྤྱིའི་བཀའ་གཅིགས་སྟོ་བའི་སྤང་ནས་འདྲིལ།།

དེ་ལྟར་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་བཀ་ཆགས་སང་གྱུར་ཏེ། །
 གདངས་ཀྱི་སྐྱིབ་པ་མ་ལུས་བྱང་གྱུར་ཏེ། །
 ཅུས་པའི་ཨ་ཟླ་ག་ལེར་སློན་པ་ཡིས། །
 བགང་བྱ་ལྡ་བཅུའི་ལེ་དབར་རྐང་གྱིས་ལེན། །

དེ་ལྟར་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་ས་ལམ་རྫོགས་པ་དང་། །
 གདངས་ཀྱི་འཁྲུལ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཟད་པ་དང་། །
 མིང་པའི་ཐག་མདུད་ག་ལེར་གྲོལ་བ་ཡིས། །
 བགང་བྱ་ལྡ་བཅུའི་དཔག་ཚད་སྐྱ་ཡིས་འཇལ། །

དེ་ལྟར་དབྱངས་ཀྱི་བར་དོ་ཉུལ་བྱས་ཏེ། །
 གདངས་ཀྱི་ཉིང་མཚམས་དངོས་སུ་སྐྱུར་བྱས་ཏེ། །
 ཡིད་ཀྱི་འཕལ་ཁ་ག་ལེར་འཕྲོད་པ་ཡིས། །
 བགང་བྱ་ལྡ་བཅུའི་རྒྱང་གྲགས་ངག་གིས་བརྗོད། །

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