

# On Translation of Names of Tibetan People

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A translator spends large amount of time in searching, selecting or translating a Tibetan's name occasionally. There are two difficulties in translation of Tibetan names from Chinese into English. One difficulty is that it's hard to know which one is the most appropriate when there are many alternative names a translator chooses from. As for the difficulty, the one which is accepted or familiar by target audiences is the best choice. The other difficulty is that no English counterpart of a Tibetan name is found in the target language. It's recommended that a translator use Latin transliteration.

*Keywords:* translation of Tibetan names, conventionism, Latin transliteration

In terms of translation of Tibetans' names from Chinese into English, it's important for a translator to spare time for searching. With a translator searching for an English name of a Tibetan in English language, there would be some situations. The perfect situation is that there is one corresponding name and it has been accepted widely in the English language by target audiences. But one situation is that there are more than one candidate name that a translator chooses from. And there is another situation: a translator cannot find any counterpart in target language. When the last two situations occur, what is a translator supposed to do?

## Searching and Selecting English Names of Tibetan People

How can a translator make the best choice when there is more than one candidate name which s/he can choose from? Why is one more appropriate than others? In terms of translation of Chinese texts to English texts, target audiences are people in English-speaking countries. A translator is supposed to select one English name of a Tibetan which is accepted in target audiences. There are many sources which are helpful for a translator to find an accepted name including some corpus and English publications relative to Tibetan literature and culture. COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American) English is an open and free corpus and may help to find an appropriate counterpart of a Tibetan name. A corpus on Tibetan culture is also another alternative set up by Prof. Huang Xin in Sichuan Normal University. If there is no widely-accepted name among these candidates, a translator selects one from dictionaries or academic publications. As a matter of fact, there are several dictionaries which will facilitate the translation of Tibetan names, like *Dictionary of Common Tibetan Personal and Place Names* by Chen Guansheng and *Chinese-English and English-Chinese Dictionary for Translation of Tibetological Terminology* by Xiang Hongjia. A translator may consult these dictionaries to find some of words s/he wants. On the other hand, in terms of selecting a Tibetan name in Tibetan literature works, a translator also

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needs to find out one which emerges in the target language and are more familiar to the target audiences. Meanwhile, a translator needs to select character names translated by one translator in the same translation work in order to avoid confusion from the target audiences. It will result in confusion from the target audiences that one translator adopts one name in one translation work and another name in another translation of the same novel. The audience may have no idea about who's who. As for translation technique, conventionism is widely used in the translation of Tibetan names. Conventionism refers to the adoption of an individual's name in the target language which is accepted and familiar to target audiences in translation. And meanwhile Latin transliteration or annotation is occasionally adopted to preserve the accuracy and cultural contents of a Tibetan name, especially for the translation of a scholar's name or other important Tibetans' names.

#### Example (1)

[ST1]: 成书于1895年的《国王修身论》，是四川甘孜德格著名藏族诗人、学者居·米庞南杰嘉措的著名格言诗。

[TT1]: The gnomic verse of On the King's Self-cultivation (How the King Cultivated His Moral Character/Moral Cultivation of Kings) in 1895 was written by Jamgön Ju Mipham or Jamgön Mipham, a poet and polymath in Derge Town in Derge County of Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

As “居·米庞南杰嘉措” is a celebrity's name in China's Tibet, it has been translated by different translators ever before. There are different English names from different sources. For example, there are 10 candidates of the same name in the target language in the Wikimedia website as follows:

#### Alternate names [\[ edit \]](#)

- Jamgon Ju Mipham Gyatso (*'Jam-mgon 'Ju Mi-pham rgya-mtsho*)
- Jamgön Mipham (*'Jam-mgon Mi-pham*)
- Ju Mipham (*'Ju Mi-pham*)
- Mipham Gyatso (*mi pham rgya mtsho*)
- Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso (*'ju mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho*)
- Mipham Namgyal Gyatso (*mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho*)
- Jamgon Mipham Gyatso (*'jam mgon mi pham rgya mtsho*)
- Mipham the Great (*mi-pham chen-po*)
- Lama Mipham (*bla-ma mi-pham*)
- Mipham Rinpoche (*mi-pham rin-po-che*)

Figure 1. Retrieved Result of “居·米庞南杰嘉措” in Wikipedia.

And there is one version from *Dictionary of Common Tibetan Personal and Place Names* and from the corpora set up by Prof. Huang Xin from Sichuan Normal University. And it's difficult for a translator to select the proper one from so many versions. And as there are so many names of the same person, it's not necessary for a translator to translate it again because that will add another version of the same person's name and it's harder for

target audiences to identify an individual. What should a translator do facing with so many candidates? What's the selection criterion? In terms of the translation of Tibetan names, the most efficient way to avoid confusion is that a translator follows the convention in the target language. That is to say, the most appropriate name is the one which is widely accepted and familiar to target audiences. Therefore, the translator takes the translation of Wikipedia website and COCA. Although in Wikipedia the message can be edited by anyone and its accuracy has been doubted ever before, it's still the one influential reference website. Therefore the translator adopts the first name and ignores others in the website. As COCA is a large corpus in America it can be used for the test of the popularity of a proper name in the target language.

Corpus of Contemporary American English		SEARCH	FREQUENCY	CONTEXT	CONTEXT +
Source information:					
Date	2016				
Publication information	; Honolulu Vol. 66, Iss. 3, (Jul 2016); 927-1000.				
Title	Précis of Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy				
Author	Thompson, Evan				
Source	ACAD: Philosophy East and West, suppl. SPECIAL ISSUE: THE WORLD CONSORTIUM FOR RESEARCH IN.				
Expanded context:					
Philosophy East and West 34 (1984): 261-272, and The Refutation of the Self in Indian Buddhism: Candrakirti on the Selflessness of Persons (London: Routledge, 2012), # 20 - See Jonardon Ganeri, The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), # 21 - "Candrakirti's Denial of the Self," p. 262, # 22 - Padmakara Translation Group, Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara with Commentary by Jamgön Mipham (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2004), p. 91, # 23 - Ibid., # 24 - Duerlinger, "Candrakirti's Denial of the Self," p. 263, # 25 - Ganeri, The Concealed Art of the Soul, # 26 - Ibid., p. 202, # 27 - Metzinger, Being No One, and Miri Albahari, Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), # 28 - Amber Carpenter, "Persons Keeping Their Karma Together					

Figure 2. Retrieved Result of “居•米庞南杰嘉措” in COCA.

As for the translation of people's names in literature works, what a translator should do is to avoid the confusion caused by names of people, guarantee the accuracy of information and select names which the target audiences are more familiar. And the translation of people's names in literature works is quite different from the above translation of Tibetan celebrities' names. As some literature works enjoy world-wide reputation, it's possible that there are several English versions internationally. A main character's name may be slightly different in different versions. The translator should adopt all the names of people from one popular version. That is to say, chances are that the adoption of the characters' names from different versions will result in the audience's confusion.

#### Example (2)

[ST2]: 他聪明、英俊、爱戴着面具跳舞最后变成最不聪明的人的哥哥，“因用舌头攻击了我们信奉了多年的宗教和满脑子都是神狂的想法”而被割掉了舌头，成为麦其家书记官的格鲁派的僧人**翁波意西**；依旧受土司供养的**济嘎活佛**，因变成英国夫人而身上散发着十分强烈的土洋混合气味回到家的姐姐，整日病态且过分敏感的大太太，噩梦连连常蜷缩在阴暗宽大的床上的二太太，身子像缎子般光亮的**塔娜**，伶俐聪明的女仆人**卓玛**，行刑人**尔依**，复仇者紫衣人，在一阵阵喧哗与噪声中，命运升降失落。

[TT2]: Smart and handsome, his elder brother is obsessed with masquerade; with whimsical and heretical ideas in his mind, **Wonpo Yeshe** is a lama from dge-lugs Sect and works

as a clerk in the castle; being cut the tongue, he attacks against Tibetan Buddhism which all Tibetan people have faith in; **living Buddha Jeeka** still supported by chieftains financially, Chieftain's wife with sick and sensitive traits all the time, Chieftain's concubine huddling in a broad and gloomy mattress all the way, **Tharna** with a perfect figure, ingenious Servant **Dolma**, Executioner **Aryi**, the killer in purple for revenge, etc. In the hustling and bustling mansion, there are shows of all figures with ups and downs.

“益西” and “卓玛” are two common Tibetan names and they usually are transliterated as Yeshe and Drolma in the *Dictionary of Common Tibetan Personal and Place Names*. However, they are transliterated as Yeshi and Dolma by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin. The magnum opus of *Chen Ai Luo Ding* by Alai has been translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin and it's renamed as *Red Poppies: a Novel of Tibet* in 2003. They are world-famous translators and therefore their English version of the Tibetan novel is exposed to the target audience. And the re-translation of the names of the main characters may cause confusion. To avoid confusion and provide the target audience convenience, the translator follows the translation of the names in the English version by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin. Furthermore, chances are that many readers focus on its referential meaning and neglect accuracy of the names. And the top priority is the consistency among names. As a consequence, the translator adopts the English names of the characters in the novel of *Red Poppies: a Novel of Tibet* by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin. The English name of “翁波意西” is Wonpo Yeshi, “济嘎活佛” Living Buddha Jeeka, “塔娜” Tharna, “卓玛” Dolma and “尔依” Aryi (Goldblatt & Lin, 2003).

A translator may spend large amount of time in searching for an English name of a Tibetan in target language. When there are more than one candidate name of the same Tibetan, S/he has to follow the convention formed in the target language. That is to say, it's recommended a translator adopt the one which is accepted or more familiar by the target audiences. Occasionally, the combination of conventionism(the method of using conventional names), transliteration and annotation can be used. And when there are several candidate names of one character in a literature work, the translator adopts the English names from the same translation work by the same translator to remain consistency among names.

### Translating Names of Tibetan People

Actually, majority of English names of a Tibetan can be found in dictionaries or other sources. But what is a translator supposed to do when an English name of a Tibetan can not be found in dictionaries or other sources? As Tibetan people in China has their own language and writing system and therefore it's unfeasible for a translator to transliterate names of Tibetan people with Chinese Pinyin. Its Chinese pronunciation of a Tibetan name has differences from the counterpart in Tibetan language. Therefore, it's recommended that a translator transliterate a Tibetan's name with the Tibetan transliterated character system. Latin transliteration is a method in which Latin letters do not represent the sounds of the original names of Tibetan people primarily but rather with representing the Tibetan characters accurately. It may reduce ambiguities caused by the 3 dialects in 3 Tibetan areas of China, namely Khampa, U-Tsang and Amdo. In the 1950s, Turrell Wylie, H. Kitamura and T. Nishida set up their transliterated systems by using Latin letters. And Turrell Wylie's system is accepted widely in the world (Jiang,

2006, pp. 45-53). And his system can deal with majority of Tibetan words except for some from Sanskrit. In 2006, Jiang Di developed his System of Tibetan Transcription to make transliteration easier as Tibetan characters derived from Sanskrit are encompassed in the system. And there are other Latin Transliteration systems. It results in different Latin versions of a Tibetan name, which may cause confusion from the target audiences. To avoid confusion and inconvenience caused by a variety of Latin Transliteration systems, a more mature system derived from the previous ones is supported and finished by Ministry of Education of PRC. On account of the diversity of Transliteration systems, a translator is suggested to use only one system in a text. A name transliterated with Latin letters in a literature work may be shortened and retain the first two characters to ease reading of target audiences when a name is too long. And the length of Tibetan names range from 2 to 22 characters. The higher the social status of a Tibetan is, the more the characters are (Ga-zla-ba-tshe-ring, 1996, pp. 21-25). However, it is not suggested to shorten the name of a Tibetan in non-literature texts.

Example (3)

[ST3]: 它的作者就是公元19世纪出生在四川甘孜石渠的著名学者巴珠·乌坚吉美却吉旺布。

[TT3]: **Bag-dro-rgyan-vgyur-med-mchog-skyid-Ophor** is a learned and prolific scholar from Shiqu County of Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

No English name of “巴珠·乌坚吉美却吉旺布” can be found in any dictionary or website, although he enjoys great reputation in Tibetan areas for his great achievements in literature. His magnum opus is *Bees Dancing in the Lianyuan Garden*, a Tibetan fable. And unlike a character's name in literature work, the translator can't fabricate the English name according to its pronunciation of his Tibetan name subjectively as he is a prestigious lama in Tibetan areas. What the translator has done is to transliterate it according to the Tibetan names transliteration system in order to provide convenience for scholars to examine and do further research. As a consequence, the counterpart name of “巴珠·乌坚吉美却吉旺布” is Bag-dro-rgyan-vgyur-med mchog-skyid-Ophor.

Example (4)

[ST4]: 一路上，风啸着，雪砸着，伊姆琼琼却无丝毫的胆怯，心中甜甜地向往着县城百货商店里五颜六色的商品和各式各样的图片与连环画。

[TT4]: **Yemu-quangquang** hungers for a variety of commodities like colourful pictures and comic strips and therefore never boggles at the wind squalling along the way and snow crashing on the cheeks.

“伊姆琼琼” is the name of a heroine and the title of a contemporary novel by Yeshe Tsering (ye-shes tshe-ring), a Tibetan writer in a Tibetan area in Sichuan Province. No Translators have ever translated the novel ever before and therefore there's no English name of it. And it's not an average name which can be looked up in current dictionaries. Therefore, the translator has transliterated it as “Yemu quangquang” with Latin letters according to its Tibetan pronunciation to maintain its Tibetan features.

Generally speaking, majority of English names of Tibetan people can found out from dictionaries or other sources. But there's the situation that no English name of a Tibetan can be searched out from any sources. It's suggested that a translator transliterates it with Latin letters and one Transliteration system.

### Conclusion

The two difficulties in Translation of Tibetan names in Chinese texts into English have been solved. When there are more than one candidates a translator may choose from, it's recommended that a translator select the one which is accepted or familiar by target audiences. As for translation of a main character's name in literature works, a translator adopts the English candidate in a popular translation work to ease target audience's reading. If no English name of a Tibetan is found in the target language, a translator is suggested to use Latin transliteration and one transliteration system within a text. And conventionism (adoption of a conventional name in the target language), transliteration and annotation are usually combined in the translation of Tibetan people's names.

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