

# Tibetan Studies and the Art of Dialogue\*

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*What follows is the author's keynote address spoken on June 19, 2016 to the International Association of Tibetan Studies Meeting in Bergen, Norway. The address begins with general reflections on dialogue, moves into an analysis of dialogue in the specific Tibetan context of the writings of the early twentieth Tibetan visionary Sera Khandro Dewé Dorjé (Se ra mkha' 'gro bde ba'i rdo rje), and concludes with a set of questions for reflecting on the value of dialogue for Tibetologists gathering at conferences such as the International Association of Tibetan Studies.*

## 1. On Dialogue

“Dialogue” is an old word in English, in use by the thirteenth century to mean a conversation carried on between two or more people, or a literary work in which such conversation takes place.<sup>1</sup> It derives from even older words in Latin (*dialogus*) and Greek (*διάλογος*), with broad resonances and applications ranging from ancient literary genres for philosophical exploration to modern strategies for peace building and business success. Perhaps the most famous author of dialogue in the Western world was Plato, who was, in the words of his ancient Greek biographer Diogenes Laertius “the writer of dialogues.”<sup>2</sup> Millennia after this, the early moderns also sometimes used dialogue as a literary genre for presenting scientific explorations, such as Galileo Galilei’s seventeenth-century *Dialogue Concerning the*

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<sup>1</sup> OED entry for dialogue, n. See <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/51915?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=j6MZIW&> accessed Sept. 20, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Dmitri Nikulin, *On dialogue* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 5.

*Two Chief World Systems*, in which he defended the Copernican theory that the earth revolved around the sun.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond the many European works written *in* dialogue genres, in the past century there has also been an explosion of analysis *about* dialogue, particularly in the context of literary studies. One cannot think very long about dialogue without encountering the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). Bakhtin's central interest was in the novel, a prose form he heralded for its "dialogic" nature. A great novelist, exemplified for Bakhtin by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), is one who interweaves his narration with the languages of his protagonists, producing a polyphonic or multivoiced text. Bakhtin contrasted this to other literary forms such as lyrical poetry, which he presented as "monologic," or tending toward a single, authoritative voice. By "dialogic" Bakhtin did not refer only to actual instances of dialogue in the novel, but to a quality of the word itself, which according to him is "entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents."<sup>4</sup> Slavic literary scholar Michael Holquist explains that for Bakhtin "a dialogue is composed of an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two. It is the relation that is most important of the three, for without it the other two would have no meaning."<sup>5</sup> This relation of an utterance and its reply is what situates language and its individual users in a broader social field. The language that we use does not belong to us as individuals, but comes to our tongues already flavored with the tastes ascribed to it by previous users. As such, according to Bakhtin:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, for Bakhtin, the self is inconceivable as an independent entity, but rather only comes into being as an active participant in social dialogue.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, this didn't work out as well for Galileo as dialogue had for Plato, given that he was tried by the Inquisition, convicted of heresy, and forced to spend the rest of his life under house arrest.

<sup>4</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 276.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 293.

Bakhtin's writings on the dialogic nature of language demonstrate considerable influence from another prominent twentieth-century thinker, the Austrian-born Israeli philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965). In his most influential work *I and Thou* (1923), Buber contrasts the direct, mutual, present, open, and dialogical relationship between oneself and another, the "I and Thou," with the indirect, nonmutual, instrumental, and monological relationship between "I and It," or subject and object. For Buber, human life finds its meaningfulness in relation to others; we understand ourselves "in the making present of another self and in the knowledge that one is made present in his own self by the other."<sup>7</sup> Dialogue is crucial to the encounter between "I" and "Thou," but not all that passes for dialogue is genuine dialogue. In his 1929 essay on "Dialogue" Buber distinguishes between three kinds of dialogue: the first is "genuine dialogue" in which "each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them." The second is "technical dialogue," a feature of "modern existence" according to Buber that is "prompted solely by the need of objective understanding." The third type of dialogue is monologue disguised as dialogue. There are many varieties of this specter of dialogue—debate intended to strike another sharply without, in Buber's words, "the men that are spoken to being regarded in any way present as persons;" or conversations "characterized by the need neither to communicate something, nor to learn something, nor to influence someone, nor to come into connection with someone, but solely by the desire to have one's own self-reliance confirmed..."<sup>8</sup> Dialogue for Buber isn't just an open-hearted conversation between two people; by dialogue he refers to a broader relationality between persons and phenomena in the world, extending the "Thou" of the "I and Thou" relationship beyond the human. My favorite quotation from Buber expresses this beautifully:

To all unprejudiced reflection it is clear that all *art* is from its origin essentially of the nature of dialogue. All music calls to an ear not the musician's own, all sculpture to an eye not the sculptor's, architecture in addition calls to the step as it walks in the building.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man: A Philosophy of the Interhuman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 71.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Buber, "Dialogue," in *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Buber, "Dialogue," 25.

In the 21st century, dialogue appears pervasively as a panacea for the ills of the world. Some of these instances are quite profound. For example, the Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai has said: “The best way to solve problems and to fight against war is through dialogue.”<sup>10</sup> The context for these words is finding a peaceful resolution to conflicts with the Taliban, spoken in 2013 during her first major interview since she was attacked for championing girls’ rights to education in Pakistan.

In a considerably less profound vein, dialogue is also popular corporate-speak, at least in the United States now.<sup>11</sup> Many people seem to be making a lot of money by positioning themselves as experts in training corporate managers and employees in effective dialogue techniques, therefore operationalizing dialogue as a tool for business management.<sup>12</sup> And in this era of the corporatization of mindfulness, we should not be surprised to find Buddhist-derived mindfulness practices for sale along with dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Dialogue in Tibetan and in the writings of Sera Khandro

Moving on to thinking about the Tibetan cultural world, dialogue has roots as old as those in Europe not only as a textual genre but also as a literary device and as a feature of oral language arts. In the early

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<sup>10</sup> Palash Ghosh, “Mala Yousafzai, Likely Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Wants Pakistan to Talk Peace With Taliban Militants who Shot Her,” *International Business Times*, Oct. 7, 2013, accessed Sept. 24, 2018, <https://www.ibtimes.com/malala-yousafzai-likely-nobel-peace-prize-winner-wants-pakistan-talk-peace-taliban-militants-who>

<sup>11</sup> For a few examples of this trend, see Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1999) and William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: a Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life* (New York: Currency, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> For one of many examples, see the website of Dialogos, a management consulting and leadership development firm, that describes its principle as follows: “Our principals originated many of the central techniques commonly found in successful business and consulting practices, including organizational learning, dialogue, and dialogic process consultation.” (<https://dialogos.com/about/our-heritage/>, accessed Sept. 24, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> An example is the consulting company The Art of Dialogue: Mindfulness at Work (<http://theartofdialogue.com>), whose mission is “Bringing the wisdom of mindfulness together with the power of leadership in service of personal and organizational transformation.” For insightful analysis of the corporatization of mindfulness, see Ron Purser and David Loy, “Beyond McMindfulness,” accessed Sept. 26, 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-purser/beyond-mcmindfulness\\_b\\_3519289.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-purser/beyond-mcmindfulness_b_3519289.html), and Peter Doran, “McMindfulness: Buddhism as sold to you by neoliberals,” accessed Sept. 26, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/mcmindfulness-buddhism-as-sold-to-you-by-neoliberals-88338>.

Indian Buddhist world as in classical Greece, dialogue was an important literary genre and oral technique for philosophical analysis. This is evident in the dialogic form of Buddhist sūtras; the Buddha's wisdom is not abstracted but rather spoken to another in a particular time and place. In Tibet the dialogic nature of philosophical inquiry is clearly demonstrated in the form of debate found most often in Geluk (Dge lugs) monasteries. Beyond philosophy, dialogue is a Tibetan literary genre in the form of the large body of Tibetan religious works categorized as *dris lan* (replies to questions), alternatively called *zhus lan*.<sup>14</sup> And, of course dialogue is not only a Tibetan textual category, but also has rich oral resonances in Tibetan ranging from various types of call and response songs to comedy.



Fig. 1 Sera Khandro statue on shrine at Getsé Tralek Monastery (Dge rtse bkra legs) in Kandzé (Dkar mdzes) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Photograph by Sarah Jacoby, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> *Dris lan* as a genre remains understudied in comparison to other Tibetan genres of writing; this has been noted by Jim Rheingans, "Introduction. Typologies in Tibetan Literature: Genre or Text Type? Reflections on Previous Approaches and Future Perspectives," in *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 3.

Surely there are many other oral and written Tibetan dialogical genres beyond those I've just mentioned, but now I would like to say more about dialogue in a Tibetan autobiography, that of the early twentieth-century Tibetan visionary Sera Khandro (1892-1940).<sup>15</sup> Out of all the features that render Sera Khandro's writing exceptional, the quality I find most compelling is its dialogic nature, or to use another of Bakhtin's terms, the polyphonic nature of her writing. Bakhtin describes polyphonic prose as that in which "the 'depicting' authorial language now lies on the same plane as the 'depicted' language of the hero, and may enter into dialogic relations and hybrid combinations with it."<sup>16</sup> In other words, multiple speakers hold court, at times talking louder than the narrator's own voice, serving not as mimes for her singular authorial intentions but actively intercepting the narrative flow, pushing and pulling the story of her life in their own directions. Sera Khandro's autobiography is polyphonic in the sense that it is comprised of many different voices ranging from bodhisattvas, *dākinīs*, local deities, demonic forces, animals, religious teachers, relatives, and neighbors. These voices are not entirely separate from Sera Khandro, who after all is inciting them to speak as the author of her text, nor are they identical to her—for as Bakhtin wrote, language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other."<sup>17</sup> But of course we don't have to invoke Bakhtin to think about the ways in which Sera Khandro frames a thoroughly intersubjective account of herself, in particular one that is shot through with invectives and succor from

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<sup>15</sup> By Sera Khandro's autobiography, I am referring in this essay to the long autobiography she completed circa 1934. Titled *Dbus mo bde ba'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa nges 'byung 'dren pa'i shing rta skal ldan dad pa'i mchod sdong*, this 400-plus folio work remained in unpublished manuscript form until it was first published by the same title in 2009. All quotations in this essay are drawn from this edition. It is noteworthy that Sera Khandro's long autobiography is experiencing a renaissance of popular interest in Tibet today. Since its initial 2009 publication in Tibetan, it has been published twice more in collections of Tibetan-language women's writings, including Si khron bod yig dpe rnying bsdu sgrig khang (eds), *Gangs can skyes ma'i dpe tshogs* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2015) vol. 9, and again in the new 53-volume compilation of Buddhist women's writings published by nuns from Larung Gar, Bla rung ārya tāre'i dpe tshogs rtsom sgrig khang (eds), *Mkha' 'gro'i chos mdzod chen mo* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2017), vol. 31. I am currently completing a full English translation of Sera Khandro's long autobiography. For a translation of her much shorter verse autobiography, see Sarah Jacoby, "The Excellent Path of Devotion: An Annotated Translation of Sera Khandro's Short Autobiography," in *Himalayan Passages: Tibetan and Newar Studies in Honor of Hubert Decler*, eds. Benjamin Bogin and Andrew Quintman (Boston: Wisdom, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 27-8.

<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 293.

*dākinīs*, for she draws this from her own tradition as a Tibetan Buddhist Treasure revealer (*qter ston*).

From the title of my book, *Love and Liberation*, one might have the idea that Sera Khandro's life was full of love and spiritual liberation, a happy story all around.<sup>18</sup> This is reinforced by the book colors chosen by the publisher for the first hard cover printing (without consulting the author)—under the purple, blue, and pink dust jacket the book cover is pale pink with shiny purple writing on the spine—hardly the typical color palate for a scholarly book! This pastel-toned happy story is partially accurate; there is liberation in the sense that Sera Khandro narrates her life story according to the teleological progression generic to Tibetan biography, *rnam thar*, which charts a religious devotee's journey from suffering to sanctity. And there is love as well, in the shape of what I argue is an unusually prominent narrative of love between herself and her guru and consort Drimé Özer (Dri med 'od zer, 1881-1924), one of the eight sons of Dudjom Lingpa (Bdud 'joms gling pa, 1835-1904). Since I develop this argument about love in greater detail in the fifth chapter of *Love and Liberation*, I won't elaborate here. Instead today I thought we could listen to a few examples of some considerably darker dialogues through which Sera Khandro wrote the story of her life. There are many examples to choose from. Interactions with *dākinīs* permeate her visionary life—they threaten her when she avoids accomplishing her religious destiny to be a Treasure revealer, they prophesy about who should be her consort, and they encourage her about the virtues of the female body when all she can find in it is fault. Prominent male lamas take their part in these sorts of conversations as well, though at times their prognostications about who should be her consort clash with her own. Land deities have important speaking roles as well, demanding obeisance from Sera Khandro and in return granting her rights to reveal Treasures on their territory. Sera Khandro's fellow religious community members taunt her for her intensive commitment to the Dharma and joke about her developing intimacy with Drimé Özer. But to his consort Akyongza (A skyong bza'), this was no laughing matter. Dialogues between Sera Khandro and Akyongza, as well as several other female consorts with whom she competed, were fierce. Reading all this one is left with the impression that the cacophony of conversation in Sera Khandro's autobiography is as acrimonious as it is inspirational.

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah H. Jacoby, *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

The first dialogue I want to share with you occurred in 1921 when she was 29, according to her autobiography.<sup>19</sup> At this time, her decade-long relationship with her spouse (*tshe grogs*) Gara Gyelsé (Mgar ra rgyal sras), son of Gara Terchen Pema Dündül Wangchuk Lingpa (Mgar ra gter chen pad+ma bdud 'dul dbang phyug gling pa, 1857-1910) of Benak Monastery, Golok (Ban nag, Mgo log), was deteriorating, and she would soon leave him to go live with her guru Drimé Özer in Dartsang, Serta (Gdar tshang, Gser rta):

When we were returning home, we arrived at a place called Rizap (Ri zab). That night, in my dream again the terrifying spontaneously born woman arrived and said,

Why are you going toward those with deteriorated commitment vows? It is as if you have mistaken brass for gold, water for wine. You cast away your destined bodhisattva as worthless. You turn away from upholding your profound Treasure. You are distracted, grasping onto *samsāra*. From the time you were young until now, I have given you honest advice. I have given you your paternal inheritance of profound Dharma Treasures. Although I have reared you like a mother loves her adorable child, repelling negative conditions, outer and inner obstacles, and so forth, still you are unable to be independent and you need only to be under others' power. What is the meaning of this?

I explained,

It is not that I had too many thoughts and mistook who was or was not my consort. I didn't have the power to break the commands of gods and lamas, so I turned away from my own purpose and wondered if I could uphold [Gara Terchen] Dündül Wangchuk Lingpa's profound Treasures. Since I directed my intentions toward this, until now I have not accomplished my purpose. In particular, all my consorts and Dharma holders have fallen under others' sway. Because I am one with an inferior female body, I did not have a way to meet them. Now, too, I am powerless not to go [back to Gyelsé]. That is my response.

She stated,

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<sup>19</sup> Sera Khandro recorded her age according to the Tibetan system of tabulating age from conception, which I have modified to accord with the international convention of tabulating age from birth. Hence, when Sera Khandro writes that she was 30 in 1921, I give the age as 29.



Thinking that since you were of bad ancestry, you needed to do all kinds of work without retribution, until now you have remained with the Gara family. From this year forward, you belong to us. The time for you to live with the Gara family is finished. Even so, if you are encouraged by a person with perverse aspirations, I don't know what will happen to your life, Dharma, and disciples. Like wind is to butter lamps, fire is to water, and iron is to rock, you need to be extremely careful.

As she said this, I awoke from sleep. Then we went on. The encampment base of [Gyelsé's] residence had merged into the Gar [kinsmen's] circle. I told Tupzang (Thub bzang), "There aren't any good prophecies about the encampment base joining the Gar circle this year; it isn't a good omen."

Tupzang said, "Yes, before when Gyelsé had no wealth or food, I never saw those who say they are 'the Gar kinsmen circle.' These days, when there is growing property and wealth thanks to your kindness, their identity as Gara family members is awakened and they say they need to take care of Gyelsé."

I replied, "It is not acceptable for you to speak as if you are a young person with a child's intellect who doesn't know anything. If they hear you, they will say bad things."<sup>20</sup>

From this dialogue with both human and celestial interlocutors, Sera Khandro effectively communicates the difficulty of extricating herself from Gyelsé. But she does so carefully, using language in a way that resonates with what Bakhtin aptly called "the word with a sideward glance," or words that anticipate a particular response and attempt to mitigate it in advance.<sup>21</sup> She expresses her sense that she should be with Drimé Özer and not Gyelsé through her conversation with the *dākinī*, all the while voicing this viewpoint through the *dākinī*'s words and refuting it with her own. Through quoting her close disciple Tupzang, Sera Khandro conveys the resentment that presumably she also felt toward Gyelsé and his relatives' newfound interest in him. She skillfully claims through Tupzang's statement that she played an unacknowledged role in enlarging his stature, but then scolds him for saying this in her own voice.

All this resentment and discord eventually erupts into what becomes the climax of her life narrative: she becomes deathly ill, so

<sup>20</sup> *Dbus mo bde ba'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa*, 347-49.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 196.

Gyelsé sends her off to live with Drimé Özer rather than have her blood on his hands because Drimé Özer was prophesied to be able to cure her. Not only does he nurture her back to health, but “the two, method and insight, actually merged as one taste,” and they “entered the feast assembly of the *dākinīs*,” where “there was an inconceivable celebration feast for completing the greatly secret quick path.”<sup>22</sup> But I promised to elaborate on the dark side, and mutual enlightenment sounds pretty great to me, at least as Sera Khandro describes it. So, moving forward just three years later in 1924 when Sera Khandro had been living together with Drimé Özer in Dartsang, Serta, Gyelsé and his entourage returned to press a lawsuit over child custody. Since this translation is not included in *Love and Liberation*, and also since there are not many examples of such legal proceedings from early-twentieth-century Golok, I will quote this passage, also from Sera Khandro’s autobiography, in full:

Then, when I was thirty-two, the Yeru (G.yas ru) religious encampment members had a discussion and Dorla Tenzin (Rdor bla bstan ‘dzin), Alo (A lo), Öchö (‘Od chos), and Jikchö (‘Jigs chos) came to my place. They said that if we, mother and children, went to live at the Yeru religious encampment it would be a way to end the dispute with the Gara family.

The Master [Drimé Özer] considered their mutual commitment vows and said, “It is okay if she does this for a while.”

Gara [Gyelsé] replied to him, “It would displease me if she does this. This needs to be adjudicated by both the religious court of Lama Pelyul and the legal court of Akyong Kangen.”<sup>23</sup>

It was done this way. After the proceedings, I was found to be not guilty from both viewpoints,<sup>24</sup> so I was to give my share<sup>25</sup> of twelve

<sup>22</sup> *Dbus mo bde ba’i rdo rje’i rnam par thar pa*, 358.

<sup>23</sup> *Dbus mo bde ba’i rdo rje’i rnam par thar pa*, 389: “Bla ma dpal yul sang gi chos sgo/ a skyong khang rgan sang gi khrims sgo gnyis la bzhaḡ dḡos zer.”

<sup>24</sup> “Both viewpoints” (*lugs gnyis*) are the religious viewpoint (*chos lugs*) and the secular or worldly viewpoint (*‘jigs rten pa’i lugs*). In this context, “both viewpoints” refers to the proceedings of the religious court (*chos sgo*) and legal court (*khrims sgo*), respectively.

<sup>25</sup> There are two types of marital wealth referred to by this term “share” (*skal*) in Golok nomadic contexts: dowry (*bag skal*) and bridewealth (*mag skal*). See Lobsang Gelek and Hai Miao, “Marital payments: The case of Tibetan nomads,” *Chinese Sociology & Anthropology* 34, no. 4 (2002): 84-95.

*dotsé*.<sup>26</sup> Also, even though my little son was not Gara's, for him to temporarily be considered his, the settlement (*gzu 'phang*) called for fourteen *dotsé*.

At that time I said, "I won't accept a false settlement like this."

Even so, the Master didn't give me permission and there was nothing I could do. His disciples, mainly Sotrül,<sup>27</sup> agreed to support me in accordance with their means with provisions such as horses and livestock and so forth, and with that the lawsuit was settled (*gyod 'grigs*).<sup>28</sup>

Through dialogues and narration such as this, Sera Khandro's story of love and liberation is considerably less rosy, as powerful men in her community decided her fate and that of her son, Gyurmé Dorjé ('Gyur med rdo rje), then only five years old.<sup>29</sup> Tragically, the young boy succumbed to illness and died shortly after this, followed after a few days by Drimé Özer himself.

Passages like these are fascinating for the data they provide about life on the eastern Tibetan grasslands in early twentieth-century Tibet, in some cases providing information unavailable elsewhere about social customs, Tibetan dialects, famous personages, trade relations, political organization, religious life, and in this case divorce and child custody proceedings. But even more than what these passages of Sera Khandro's writing convey about Tibetan history and culture, they communicate something about what it means to be human—they are poignant, infused with emotion, and mired in the complexities, confusions, and sorrows of ordinary life.

This brings me to my final point about the dialogic nature of Sera Khandro's writing. If meaning is generated through the relation of an utterance and its reply, or in Bakhtin's terms if all rhetorical forms "are oriented toward the listener and his answer,"<sup>30</sup> then the dialogic nature of Sera Khandro's writing does not just come into being through the interactions she choreographs between the many speak-

<sup>26</sup> One *dotsé* (*rdo tshad*) of silver is a Tibetan measure equal to fifty *sang* (*srang*) of silver according to the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* vol. 2, ed. Krang dbyi sun (Beijing: The Nationalities Publishing House, 1993), 1445.

<sup>27</sup> Sotrül is Bsod sprul sna tshogs rang grol (1869-1935), one of Drimé Özer's heart disciples. He was a member of the ruling Washül (Wa shul) family in Serta, eastern Tibet, as well as an incarnate lama at Sera Tekchen Chönkhor Ling (Se ra theg chen chos 'khor gling) Monastery in Serta.

<sup>28</sup> *Dbus mo bde ba'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa*, 389-390.

<sup>29</sup> Gyelsé and Sera Khandro also had a daughter Yangchen Drönma (Dbyangs can sgron ma, b. 1913) who would have been eleven years old at this time, but she is not mentioned in this lawsuit.

<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 280.

ing subjects in her narrative; it comes to life in relation to the reader. Reading is an active process of meaning making; we are not neutral word processors or invisible witnesses listening to the dialogues Sera Khandro unfolds. Like Buber's assertion that "music calls to an ear not the musician's own," or "sculpture to an eye not the sculptor's,"<sup>31</sup> literature calls to its readers and draws us into dialogue with it. Listening carefully to Sera Khandro's words involves us in an intersubjective relation; her writings sound inside our heads and are made audible by our voices, pushing them forward in time to be heard by new generations. In Bakhtin's words:

The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue.<sup>32</sup>

To transpose this into terms closer to Sera Khandro's worldview, the auspicious connections (*rten 'brel*) that came together (or didn't) to make things possible (or not) within the bookends of Sera Khandro's auto/biographical volumes are not contained there; they reach out to us too. It is then our call to pay greater or lesser attention, understand with greater or lesser skill, and choose how to respond.

### 3. The art of dialogue at the International Association of Tibetan Studies Meeting

Now that we've carried the theme of dialogue toward ourselves as listeners and speakers, I'd like to turn our attention to thinking about what we are doing here at the International Association of Tibetan Studies Meeting. I want to raise a series of questions about dialogue both how it relates to what we do within our international community of Tibetan Studies scholars and outside of it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Buber, "Dialogue," 25.

<sup>32</sup> Bakhtin, *Estetika*, p. 373, as quoted in Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Many thanks to Karma Ngodup, lecturer at the University of Chicago's South Asian Languages and Civilizations Department, for translating these questions into Tibetan.

ཀྱུལ་སྤྱིའི་བོད་རིག་པའི་མཐུན་ཚོགས་ནང་བཟོ་སྒྲིབ་།

a. Dialogue within the IATS community

༡ ང་ཚོས་ཚོགས་འདུ་འདི་ལྟ་བུའི་ནང་ཕན་ཚུན་སྐད་ཆ་ཤོད་པ་དང་། དེ་ཡང་མཁས་དབང་སྐུ་ཞབས་སྤྱོད་ལགས་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ “རྒྱུང་བཤད་བཟོ་སྒྲིབ་གི་རྣམ་པ་ལྟ་བུའམ་”ཡང་ན་ང་ཚོ་སོ་སོའི་ཡུལ་སྐད་དང་། དེ་བཞིན་ཉམས་ཞིབ་ཀྱི་ཐབས་ལམ། ཡང་ན་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་དང་སྲིད་དོན་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཀྱི་འགྲེལ་བརྗོད་མི་འདྲ་ནའང་ང་ཚོ་འདིར་དངོས་སུ་བཟོ་སྒྲིབ་སྤྱད་པོ་གནང་རྒྱུའི་ཚེད་ལྟན་འཛོམས་གནང་གི་ཡོད་དམ།

1. Do we come to meetings like this to talk at each other, to engage in what Buber describes as “monologue disguised as dialogue,” or to genuinely dialogue with each other though we may differ in terms of native language, research methodology, or interpretation of socio-political histories?

༢ ལྟུང་“རྒྱུང་བཤད་བཟོ་སྒྲིབ་གི་རྣམ་པ་ལྟ་བུ”ནས་དངོས་སུ་བཟོ་སྒྲིབ་སྤྱད་པོ་ཡོང་ཚེད་ཤུགས་རྒྱུན་ག་འདྲ་ཞིག་སྤྲད་དགོས་སམ།

2. What would it take to push the typical “monologue disguised as dialogue” into genuine dialogue?

འདི་ལས་ཁྲོད་པའི་དངོས་སུ་དྲི་བ་འགའ་ཞིག་ལྷུ་རྒྱུར།

To present a few more concrete questions about this,

༣ ང་ཚོས་ཀྱུལ་སྤྱིའི་བོད་རིག་པའི་ཤོས་ཚོགས་འདི་ལྟ་བུའི་ནང་བརྗོད་གཞི་གཞན་གྱི་གཏམ་བཤད་ནས་གཡོལ་བྱས། འཛོམ་སྒྲིབ་ནང་གི་མི་གཞན་རྣམས་ང་ཚོས་གང་བྱས་པ་བཞིན་བྱེད་མཁན་དང་ལྟན་དུ་བཀའ་མོལ་གནང་རྒྱུའི་ཚེད་ཡང་ཡང་འདྲ་འཛོམས་གནང་གི་ཡོད་དམ།

3. How often do we attend a meeting like IATS in order to talk with the few other people in the world who do exactly what we do, skipping sessions on other topics?

༤ ང་ཚོ་དང་སྦྲོན་ནས་ངོ་ཤེས་ཚོགས་བཅར་བ་དང་ལྟན་དུ་བཟོ་སྒྲིབ་ལ་ཐེབས་ཀྱི་ཡོད་དམ། ཡང་ན། ཚོགས་འདུ་འདི་རིགས་དང་གཞན་སོགས་སྐབས་གང་དུའང་མཇལ་འཕྲད་ཀྱི་གོ་སྐབས་མེད་པའི་མི་དང་ལྟན་དུ་བསམ་ཚུལ་བརྗོད་ལེན་གནང་གི་ཡོད་དམ། (འདི་འདྲ་ཞིག་ཡོང་ཚེད་འཛོམ་སྒྲིབ་ཀྱུལ་ཁབ་གང་སར་ནས་ཐེབས་འོས་པའི་དགོ་མཚན་ཞིག་རེད།)

4. Do we come to dialogue with the people we already know, or exchange with people we would never have a chance to meet outside of these meetings (that is what makes it worth flying across the world to do this)?

༥ ལྷན་ཚོགས་གང་དུ་རང་ཉིད་ལ་གསུང་སྐད་ཀྱི་ཐད་ནས་གོ་བདེ་པོ་མེད་པ་སྟེ་དོ་སྣང་ཆེས་ཆེར་སྤྲོད་དགོས་པ་དང་། དོན་རྟོགས་པར་དཀའ་ཆོགས་ཡོད་པའི་རིགས་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་འདུའི་གཏམ་བཤད་ནས་ཇི་ཅམ་ཡང་ནས་ཡང་དུ་གཡོལ་ཐབས་གང་ལུགས་གནང་གི་ཡོད་དམ། (འདིར་ཚོགས་བཅར་བ་ལ་ཤས་ག་དུས་ཡིན་ཡང་འདི་འདྲ་གནང་དགོས། ཡིན་ནའི་ང་ཚོ་སྟག་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་།)

5. How often do we avoid attending conference talks that are not in languages in which we are most comfortable, requiring us to listen attentively and struggle to comprehend? (*some of you have to do this all the time, but the rest of us should also...*)

༦ ཡོ་རབ་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་སྐད་མིན་པའི་མཁས་པ་སྤྱི་དང་། ཡང་སྐོས་བོད་ནས་ཕེབས་པའི་མཁས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་དབྱེན་སྐད་ཐོག་ནས་ཚོགས་འདུའི་འགྲེལ་བརྗོད་རྣམས་བདེ་ལྡན་གྱི་རྟོག་ཐུག་ལ་ཞུགས་པ་ཞིག་ཇི་སྟེ་བཟོ་དགོས་སམ།

6. How do we make our English-language conference presentations accessible to scholars who are not native speakers of European languages, and in particular to scholars coming from Tibet?

༧ ང་ཚོས་ཚོགས་འདུ་འདི་རིགས་ནས་རྒྱལ་མཚམས་རིས་མེད་དང་། སྲིད་དོན་དབྱེ་འབྱེད། དེ་བཞིན་སྐད་ཡིག་གི་འགོག་རྒྱ་བཅས་ལས་ཐར་བའི་རྒྱང་འགྲེལ་ཉམས་ཞིབ་ཀྱི་གོ་སྐབས་ཀྱི་གནས་ཚད་ཇི་ཅམ་བསྐྱེད་ཐུབ་བམ།

7. To what degree do we make use of meetings such as this to seek out opportunities for collaborative research across national borders, political divides, or language barriers?

༨ འདི་དང་གནད་དོན་གལ་ཆེ་ཞིག་ལ་ང་ཚོས་རྒྱ་མཚན་ལྷན་པ་དང་། བདེ་འཇགས་ཀྱི་སློབ་ཤེས་བོད་ཀྱི་རིག་གནས་ཐོག་བཟོ་སྲིད་གནང་ཐབས་མེད་པའམ། ཡང་ན་བརྗོད་བྱ་གང་གི་ཐོག་ང་ཚོས་བདེ་འཇགས་ངང་བཟོ་སྲིད་གནང་མི་ཐུབ་པ་བཅས་བོད་རིག་པ་ནང་གི་འབོད་སྤྲོད་དཀའ་གི་སྟེང་ལ་གཞན་ནས་དོ་སྣང་སྟེབས་ཕྱིར་ང་ཚོས་ཐབས་ལམ་གང་དང་གང་བསྟེན་དགོས་སམ།

8. And importantly, in what ways should we take note of the voices within Tibetan studies with whom we cannot reasonably or safely dialogue, and the topics about which we cannot safely dialogue?

རྒྱལ་སྤྱིའི་བོད་རིག་པའི་མཐུན་ཚོགས་ནས་ཕྱི་ལྷོ་ཚོགས་གཞན་དང་བསྐོས་སྤངས་སྐབས་གསལ་ཆེའི་དྲི་བ་  
མང་དག་ཞིག་སྤང་ཡོད་པ་གཤམ་གསལ།

**b. Dialogue with others outside of the Tibetan Studies scholarly community raises a number of other important questions**

༡ དུས་རབས་འདིའི་ནང་ང་ཚོའི་རོགས་པ་འགའ་ཞིག་དབྱིན་སྐད་ནང་“དགོས་མེད་བཟོ་བ་”དང་  
(ཨ་རིའི་མིས་དེར་ཐད་ཀར་ལས་ཀ་ནས་ཕྱིར་འབྱུང་བྱས་པ་ཟེར་ཡོང་།) ང་ཚོས་འདོད་སློབ་ཁངས་པའི་  
སློབ་པ་བོད་རིག་པའི་ཕྱི་རོལ་དུ་ཡོད་པའི་ཤེས་ཡོན་གྱི་སྡེ་ཚན་གཞན་དང་། དེ་བཞིན་རྒྱ་ཆེའི་མང་  
ཚོགས་ལ་བོད་རིག་པའི་ཤེས་ཡོན་གསལ་ཆེན་པོ་ཡིན་པའི་སློབ་པ་བཤད་ཇི་ལྟར་གནང་དགོས་སམ།

1. In this era when some of our colleagues are “being made redundant” to use British English (Americans are more direct and call it getting fired), how do we convincingly present the importance of Tibetan Studies scholarship for those outside our field, both within other academic disciplines and in public discourse more broadly?

༡༥ འགའ་ཞིག་གིས་ཤེས་ཡོན་སྡེ་ཚན་ལག་དང་། སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ཁྲོད། གཞན་ཡང་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་སོ་སོའི་ནང་  
བོད་རིག་པའི་སློབ་པ་བཤད་བྱ་རྒྱ་ལ་ཆེའི་ལས་འགན་མ་རེད་ཅེས་བརྗོད་ཀྱི་རེད། (འདིའི་རྒྱ་  
མཚན་ནི་རང་ངོས་ནས་གསལ་པོ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། ཡང་ན་ང་ཚོའི་དཀའ་ངལ་མ་རེད།) འོན་ཏེ་ང་  
ཚོའི་ལས་རོགས་རྣམས་ལས་ཀ་ཤོར་བའི་སྐབས་ང་ཚོ་ཚང་མས་བོད་རིག་པ་དང་དེ་འབྲེལ་ཤེས་  
རིག་གི་རྒྱ་ཁྲོན་དོན་སྤྲོད་འོང་བར་ཚང་མས་དོན་དང་ལྡན་པའི་བསྐོས་སྤངས་གནང་དགོས་པ་ངས་  
རེ་བསྐྱལ་ཞུ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན།

a. Some would say that it is not our responsibility to convince others in the academies and public spheres of our respective countries of the relevance of Tibetan Studies, (because this is either self-evident or not our problem), but as our colleagues continue to face “redundancy” I would suggest that it is necessary for all of us to engage in productive dialogue about Tibetan Studies with others outside of our field and outside of academia.

༢ ང་ཚོས་བསམ་སློབའི་ནང་འདི་བཟུང་བའི་སློབ་པ་བོད་རིག་པའི་སློབ་གཉེར་བ་མིན་པའི་མཁས་པ་  
རྣམས་ལ་སློབ་གཉེར་གྱི་མཐུན་ཚོགས་ཚོས་རིག་རྒྱ་ཆ་སོགས་ཇི་ཅེས་བསྐྱུན་དགོས་སམ། (ཡིག་རྒྱུར་ལས་  
ལུགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་)

2. With this in mind, to what degree do we make our scholarship accessible to non-Tibetan Studies scholars (transliteration systems, etc.)?

༣ ང་ཚོས་ཇི་ལྟར་བྱས་ཏེ་མི་རིགས་དང་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ཚན་རིག་གི་ནང་བོད་ཀྱི་སྐོར་རྒྱ་བྱབ་ཆེ་བའི་ཐོག་མཁའ་སའི་རྣམ་དཔྱོད་བརྗེ་ལེན་གནང་བུ་བཅས། དཔེར་ན་ཨུ་ཏུ་སུའི་ཚུམ་རིག་གྲགས་ཅན་གྱི་རྣམ་གཞག་བོད་རིག་པའི་མཁའ་སའ་ལུང་འདྲིན་གནང་བ་ལྟ་བུ། དེ་བཞིན་ཨུ་ཏུ་སུའི་ཚུམ་རིག་གྲགས་ཅན་གྱིས་བོད་རིག་པའི་མཁའ་སའི་གཏམ་ལུང་འདྲིན་གནང་བ་ལྟ་བུ།

3. How can we foster broader intellectual exchange about Tibet across the humanities and social sciences such that it is not only Tibetologists who cite Russian literary theorists, for example, but Russian literary theorists who cite Tibetologists?

༤ འབྲེལ་བཟོད་གཞན་ཅིག་ནས་ལུ་ན། ང་ཚོས་བོད་ཀྱི་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་དཔལ་ཡོན་ལ་ཐུན་མོང་གིས་དོ་སྣང་ཡོད་པའི་གྲོག་པ་པོ་ཚམ་མ་ཟད། བོད་ཀྱི་གཞུང་ཆེན་ཚུམ་རིག་དང་། ལྷ་ཅུལ། དེ་བཞིན་ཚན་རིག་བཅས་ལ་དོ་སྣང་ཡོད་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཆེད་དུ་འང་དཔུང་ཚོམ་ཚད་ལྡན་ཇི་ལྟར་འབྲི་བུ་བཅས།

4. In other words, how can we best write for an audience of people not only defined by a mutual interest in Tibet as a unique civilization, but for an audience interested in great literature, arts, and sciences that happen to be Tibetan?

༥ མཐའ་དོན་དུ། སློམ་སྐབ་ཉམས་ལེན་ནས་གཏེར་ཁ་བསྐྱོགས་འདོན་བར་བོད་དོན་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་གནད་དོན་ཐོག་ལ་རྒྱ་ཆའི་མང་ཚོགས་དང་བཟོ་སྐྲུན་གི་གནས་ཚད་ཇི་ཅམ་དང་རྣམ་པ་གང་གི་ཐོག་ནས་གནང་དགོས་སམ།

5. And finally, to what degree and in what forums do we dialogue with the broader public about issues relating to Tibet, ranging from meditation to mining?

དེ་འདྲ་སོང་ཅང་ངས་ད་ལན་དྲི་བ་མང་པོ་ཞིག་བཀོད་ཀྱང་ལན་འདེབས་ཉུང་ཤས་མ་གཏོགས་བྱུང་མ་སོང་། དེ་རིང་ཚོགས་འདུ་འདི་དང་མ་འོངས་པར་དྲི་བ་འདི་དག་དང་འདི་ལས་ལྷག་པར་ང་ཚོས་ལྷག་པོའི་སློམ་ནས་བཟོ་སྐྲུན་མང་པོ་གནང་བའི་རེ་བ་ལྷུ་རྒྱ་ཡིན།

So I have raised lots of questions and provided far fewer answers. At this conference and those in the future, I hope we can engage in many genuine dialogues about these questions and more!



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