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**DISSENTING CRITIQUE OF KAMILA HLADÍKOVÁ'S Ph.D DISSERTATION**  
*THE EXOTIC OTHER AND NEGOCIATION OF TIBETAN SELF: A STUDY OF MODERN*  
*TIBETAN FICTION OF THE 1980s*

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The doctoral dissertation of Kamila Hladíková, “The Exotic Other and Negotiation of Tibetan Self: A Study of Modern Tibetan Fiction of the 1980s”, offers us an exposition of a domain of literary production that, with only a few exceptions, has so far remained little known in the Western academia. Kamila Hladíková has examined and documented a body of material which may be considered to be a relevant contribution to research in the field of contemporary Chinese and Tibetan literary studies. Kamila Hladíková’s dissertation counts five sections – Introduction and Conclusion included – followed by a bibliography of both secondary and primary sources and a glossary. However, the substantive scholarly contribution, in virtue of which the award of the doctorate must be considered, is primarily represented in the narrative and analytic portions of the dissertation contained in section three and four.

Kamila Hladíková explores her major theme — the phenomenon of modern Tibetan fiction of the 1980s — defining her purpose “ethnically” and not “linguistically” (p.5), that is attempting “to define the ‘Chinese image’ of Tibet in opposition to the ‘Tibetan perspective’.” (p.5) However, as it is shown in the dissertation, Kamila Hladíková’s objective seems more to be the study of ‘Tibet-related’ literature, a literature which subject matter or plot deals with Tibet, no matter the ethnicity and the language of the writers. Her purpose, rather than being ‘ethnically’ defined, seems then more to be ‘thematically’ defined, her main issue is a question of representation of Tibet, rather than being a question of agency in Tibetan literature. It would be desirable here, that the hypotheses on which Kamila Hladíková’s thesis is based on are more clearly defined since the very beginning. (p. 19 she defines her focus more clearly, but that seems to be slightly in contradiction with what she announced before at p. 5)

Methodological and conceptual orientations are set forth in the first introductory chapter. The second chapter reaches back to Tibetan literary traditions and alternatively switches from Tibetan to Chinese literary developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to Sino-Tibetan present day interactions, setting the stage for the account that follows. This chapter is essentially based on secondary sources.

If in the first two chapters Kamila Hladíková establishes the contextual background for the production of modern Tibetan literature in the PRC, chapters 3 and 4, through well-delineated case-studies and providing some interesting insights on the subject, deal with the two key questions which have driven the dissertation, that is, what is modern Tibetan literature and how does modern Tibetan literature contribute to the discursive formation of Tibetan identity. In particular, chapter 3 analyzes three possible declinations of ‘Tibetan literature’ – that is Chinese literature about Tibet, Tibetophone modern literature, and national-Tibetan literature in Chinese. A description of the biographies and literary production of few of the main writers of the 1980s is provided here. One notes however the absence of few writers who played an important role during the 1980s and after, such as Se Bo, Yang Zhen, Jangbu, Woenser, etc.

In chapter 4, after describing identity and nationalist issues in Tibet referring to secondary sources, Kamila Hladíková deals with diverse thematic representations of Tibet in literature systematically comparing Chinese and Tibetan perspectives. Although the ethnic approach adopted in this chapter often appears too essentialist, since the reality of these issues is always much more complex and nuanced than what it seems, some interesting insights are provided here. Kamila Hladíková is definitely more at ease in the textual analyses of literature rather than in the study of literary contexts. I note here the very frequent quotations of Dibyesh Anand’s book, *Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination* (2007). This book has been highly criticized by the Western academia, notably by such an accomplished scholar as Elliot Sperling (see “Book Reviews”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 68, issue 04, 2009); any reference to it should be very carefully reconsidered and checked.

A final concluding very short chapter sums up the two main issues of the dissertation. Kamila Hladíková doesn’t provide here any information about the evolutions of Tibetan literature(s) after the 1980s, how it has evolved and changed and what those writers have become. Some comparative information about the very changing literary environment in Tibet in the 1990s and in the 2000s would have strengthened Kamila Hladíková’s discourse about the 1980s.

My criticisms of the thesis are in essence of two kinds. The first bears upon questions of methodology and structure, lacunae in the bibliography should be noted here. The second concerns the need to attend to the final verification and correction of some important points of detail in the dissertation.

Following are some of the points which need to be rectified, corrected and added:

In the section ‘Methodology, Sources and Scholarship’ Kamila Hladíková situates the work within the context of *postcolonial studies*, whose relevant characteristics in the present context are summarized in the author’s words: “terminology and theories of postcolonial studies will enable me to combine literary analysis of selected works of fiction with examination of issues such as modernity, identity, hybridity, ‘translation’ of ideas between different cultures, nationalism, etc., as they are being negotiated in the literary discourse related to Tibet.” (p.14) These words in fact describe clearly the program of analysis upon

which Kamila Hladíková embarks in the chapters that follow, though it would have been necessary to more clearly define in which terms postcolonial theories are relevant to explain the present day Tibetan situation, since issues of modernity, identity, hybridity etc. do not exclusively characterize postcolonial theories. A detailed definition of what is postcoloniality and in which sense it can apply to the Sino-Tibetan environment would be necessary here.

In ‘Methodology, Sources and Scholarship’, beside the theoretical approach, the reader would expect Kamila Hladíková to explain the methodology – that is the working methods used to carry out the work – more thoroughly: how did she collect the literary sources analyzed? On which bases did she constitute the corpus of works of her investigation? On which criteria did she base the selection of magazines, pieces of literature and writers with which she has dealt? Did she work in Western libraries collecting what was available in the Western world or did she work on the fieldwork? If this is the case, where and with whom did she collaborate? For how long? Did she meet the writers she has written about? Did she interview them? When and where?, etc. All these methodological issues should be set forth in the introduction, I would argue that Kamila Hladíková explanation that “I will work with a certain corpus of works that have been discussed in Chinese and Western scholarship about ‘Modern Tibetan Literature’ or ‘Literature from Tibet’ [and] that [have already] received critical attention” (p. 15) is not an enough solid justification for a Ph.D dissertation.

As far as scholarship is concerned – and the corpus of secondary works referred to in the dissertation – Kamila Hladíková often quotes some relevant works in the field of contemporary Tibetan literature and culture. However, one notes the lack of several other fundamental works about Tibetan contemporary literature which are missing in both the introduction and the bibliography. Western secondary sources written in non-English language are never mentioned, they are however largely recognized as fundamental works in the field of study which Kamila Hladíková deals with here. Many important secondary sources in the English language are missing too. The list of translations of Tibetan literature provided in the bibliography is also largely insufficient. Just to give some examples, Heather Stoddard’s referential book on Amdo Gendun Chopel (*Le Mendiant de l’Amdo*, 1985) and her translations-cum-comments of Jangbu’s poems and novels (*The Nine-Eyed Agate*, 2010) are ignored; Donald S. Lopez translations of Gendun Chopel’s poems (*In The Forest of Faded Wisdom*, 2009) and Andrew Clark’s wonderful translations of Woese’s poems (*Tibet’s True Heart*, 2008) are also missing; Yangdon Dhondup’s and Riika Virtanen’s Ph.D dissertations (*Caught Between Margins: Culture, Identity, and the Invention of a Literary Space in Tibet*, 2004; *Tibetan Written Images: A Study of Imagery in the Writing of Dhondup Gyal*, 2011) are ignored, as well as Françoise Robin’s Master and PhD dissertations (*La poésie libre au Tibet contemporain: ses acteurs et thèmes principaux*, 1999; *La littérature de fiction d’expression tibétaine au Tibet depuis 1950: sources textuelles anciennes, courants principaux et fonctions dans la société contemporaine tibétaine*, 2003); Lara Maconi’s works – which are directly related to the object of Kamila Hladíková’s dissertation – have also been ignored: *Lhasa-Pékin: l’exemple de Yang Zhen, jeune femme écrivain tibétaine*, Master, 1998; “Une longue

marche translinguistique: présence française dans la Nouvelle littérature tibétaine : modes de médiation et d'intégration, pratiques intertextuelles, réception”, 2001; “‘Lion of the Snowy Mountains’, the Tibetan Poet Yi dam Tshe ring and his Chinese Poetry: Re-constructing Tibetan Cultural Identity in Chinese”, 2002; “Contemporary Tibetan Literature from Shangri-la: Literary Life and Activities in the Yunnan Tibetan Region (1950-2002)”, 2007; *‘Je est un Autre’: La littérature tibétaine d’expression chinoise entre questions identitaires, débats linguistiques et négociations culturelles*, Ph.D, 2 vols., 2008; “Au-delà du débat linguistique : comment définir la littérature tibétaine d’expression chinoise ? Autour des ‘spécificités nationales’ et des ‘spécificités régionales’”, 2008 & 2009; etc.

As far as Chinese language secondary sources is concerned, one notes the lack of some important works on Tibetan contemporary literature, such as Li Jiajun’s *Xizang wenyi pinglun xuan* (1985) and *Wenxue, minzu de xingxiang* (1989), and Dejicao’s *Gezhe wu hui* (2000). One notes also the total absence of secondary sources in the Tibetan language.

Regarding issues of Tibetan national identity, Tibetanness, and nationalism, one notes several approximations and errors which need to be correct. Page 22 Kamila Hladíková writes about some scholars from the 1990s (Norbu, Dreyfus and Stoddard) who have based their work on a “primordial” or “fixed” notion of identity. I don’t think that such an affirmation is very appropriate in the case of those scholars. Ernest Renan’s definition of national identity – which has inspired several works by Heather Stoddard, for instance, is all but essentialist (see online the long transcription of Ernest Renan’s speech at Sorbonne).

But what is more problematic here is the fact that Kamila Hladíková never clearly distinguishes “national/cultural identity” which brings her to confuse national identity and nationalism, the definition of a nation as the adherence to a set of values and the concept of the nation-state, to the point of affirming that “Tibetans did not feel themselves as a nation till the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 23), which is not really true, it suffices to read some excerpts from Dunhuang manuscripts to prove the opposite; that “Tibet was not a united empire ruled by an emperor” (p. 23), which is historically wrong (Tibet was an empire from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries) and conceptually confused (since Kamila Hladíková overlaps nation and nation-state), etc. The assumption that the formation of Tibetan national consciousness occurred during the 1980s because of the anti-Chinese demonstrations which happened then (pp. 21-22) is also problematic. What about the demonstrations of the 1950s and before, with the Kampa warriors?

As far as the section “The ‘Unlikely Heros’: The Role of Writer in the PRC during the 1980s” is concerned, the reader cannot really seize here the specificities of the role of the Tibetan writer within the PRC. All this section is a little problematic to me since the reader gets the impression that Tibetan literature directly and naturally inscribes itself in the filiation of Chinese literature, which is not. The argument developed here should be described in more nuanced and detailed ways to clearly put forward in which terms Tibetan writers are Tibetans within the PRC.

In chapter 2, a series of approximations regarding traditional Tibetan literature should be corrected: the affirmation, for example, that “the earliest works were translations of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit and original Tibetan Buddhist works inspired by Indian literature (such as the works of the first Buddhist teacher in Tibet, Padmasambhava)” (p. 32), is not correct. Among the earliest Tibetan works there are translations from Sanskrit, but there are also several Buddhist texts translated from Chinese, and the first Tibetan translations of Chinese classics, such as the *Shang shu*, the *Shu jing*, the *Zhangguo ce*, the *Shi jing*, etc. The influence of Chinese culture and literature in ancient Tibet was at least as important as the influence of Indian culture, if not more. Farther more, among ancient Tibetan texts there are no translations of Padmasambhava works, Padmasambhava is quoted only once in old Tibetan manuscripts and his historical existence is still put into question. Later works which have been attributed to Padmasambhava are apocrypha.

Page 34, Kamila Hladíková writes about “Tibetan domestic poetic theories, such as those of Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen”: Sakya Pandita’s theories are not “domestic” at all, they are purely Indian, translated into Tibetan (see, for example, Matthew Kapstein, “The Indian Identity in Tibetan Literature”).

Equally, page 35, Kamila Hladíková’s affirmation that “the operas are an important source of information about the everyday life of lay society in the pre-communist Tibet” is not true. Of the eight classics of Tibetan opera, just two have some references with Tibetan history (*rGya bza’ Bal bza’i rnam thar*) and popular events (*sNangs sa ‘od ‘bum gyi rnam thar*), all the others are adaptations of Indian *jātaka* and *avadana* and are of pure Indian tradition.

Kamila Hladíková’s use of certain crucial terms and notions is also problematic to me. She speaks of China’s “annexation” (p. 23 and others) of Tibet: I would rather say occupation. She writes “neither Tibet nor China have ever been colonized in a proper sense”: I don’t think it’s appropriate to put Tibetan and Chinese political configurations on the same level, the question is highly sensitive. Again, page 37, Kamila Hladíková writes about the “encounter” between China and Tibet: it is not really an encounter, but it is rather a cohabitation/confrontation.

In chapter 3, Kamila Hladíková refers to writers who reached Tibet in the late 1970s (Ma Yuan, Ma Jian, Jin Zhiguo, etc.) using the expression *lao Xizang* (veterans of Tibet). This is not correct since ‘lao Xizang’ normally refers to Chinese cultural and political actors who entered Tibet in the 1950s to establish Maoism there.

Other points which should be rectified can be submitted to Kamila Hladíková’s later on, if needed.

In conclusion, given the relevancy of the thesis, and in spite of some corrections and revisions which need to be made and the lacunae in Tibetan traditional culture and literature, I support the acceptability of the work for the degree of doctorate.

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