

# Foreign News in Early Tibetan-Language Newspapers: Covering Adolf Hitler in the Melong

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**I**n June 1950, the Tibetan language newspaper Melong<sup>2</sup> published an article with the headline: “Hitler in a Tibetan Monastery.” The short piece states that Hitler lives in a Tibetan monastery together with many of his followers. Somebody is quoted to say that “the fight will not diminish” and “even if we die, others will come instead of us.” Indeed, “in the whole world, the wheel of rebellion is turning and one day [... we] will be absolutely victorious.”<sup>3</sup> How did such a piece of “information” reach the editorial office of the Melong, up in the Himalayas? Where does the information have its origin, how was it rendered into Tibetan? And what does it tell us about global information flows?

The original German text was published in a Nazi magazine from Frankfurt in May 1950 as an alleged interview with Martin Bormann, Hitler’s personal secretary and later head of the Nazi Party Chancellery. The original text “In der ganzen Welt gärt und revoltiert es [...]”<sup>4</sup> is rendered into Tibetan as “in the whole world, the wheel of rebellion is turning.”<sup>5</sup> The Tibetan version stresses the word “wheel” which is a prominent symbol of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and cosmology. In this way, adaptations and appropriations into local contexts take place on a small scale of single words.

Through the newspaper Melong, published from the Indian border town Kalimpong, Tibet was connected to a global network of information, which in turn was dominated by stakeholders of the

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Isrun Engelhardt and the anonymous reviewer for their useful comments. I would also like to thank Daniel Tharchin for agreeing to the reproduction of pages of the Melong.

<sup>2</sup> The full title of the newspaper is *Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*, i.e. Mirror of News of Various Regions [of the World]. It was published from 1925 until 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Melong 18-7-3: *nga tsho'i 'thab pa de ma 'chi bar du bshol gyi min gal srid nga tsho 'das kyang nga tsho'i tshab tu gzhan yong gi red/[...] 'dzam gling yongs su ngo log gi 'khor lo 'khor mus su 'dug cing nyin gcig [...]* *rnam par rgyal bar 'gyur zhes pa [...]*.

<sup>4</sup> *Tempo der Welt* 1950: 12.

<sup>5</sup> Melong 18-7-3: *'dzam gling yongs su ngo log gi 'khor lo 'khor mus su 'dug.*

British Empire. The first Tibetan-language newspapers were actually published by German Moravian missionaries (1904, Ladakh) and Chinese Imperial ambans (1907, Lhasa),<sup>6</sup> however the editors of these publications came from a background *other than* that of a Tibetan cultural sphere. They transported religious or political ideas of a specific organization by means of a newspaper.

The Melong emancipated from primarily political or proselytizing goals. Its chief editor Babu Tharchin remained in office over all its 38-year publishing history.<sup>7</sup> Born as an Indian citizen in Khunu (Kinnaur), at the border of India and Tibet, he deliberately positioned himself as *somebody part of* a Tibetan cultural sphere. More than simply transporting political or religious ideas by means of a newspaper, Tharchin saw value in the existence of a newspaper itself, for the modernization of a Tibetan (public) community.<sup>8</sup>

On a conceptual level, the article on Hitler presents the merging of two myths: the mystification of Adolf Hitler on one hand, produced by supporters of the Nazi regime in Europe, and the mystification of Tibet as an untouched paradise, high up on the “roof of the world” where ancient wisdom is said to be stored that illuminates the path to a higher spiritual realm. These myths about Tibet were mainly produced by Westerners; the article in the Melong can be seen as the result of the combination of both of these myths,<sup>9</sup> each amplifying the other. The article made it in parts into the Kolkata-based newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika*,<sup>10</sup> then the Melong. The mystification is here readapted to a Tibetan context by means of the newspaper.

The present study focuses on the latter aspect: a newspaper provided unprecedented communicative and community-building opportunities for Tibet, in many cases copying foreign formats, ideas and concepts. But news items were not simply copy-pasted. The news were selected, they were translated into Tibetan language and reinterpreted in order to meet tastes of a Tibetan-speaking readership. As we will see, the Tibetan readers of the paper feature just as prominently as the sources of many news items. This paper thus investigates how foreign news was transformed and reinvented by placing them into locally relevant contexts.

It will be discussed how the appropriation of (a predominantly European) “foreign” to a (Tibetan) “self” can be observed. Rather

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<sup>6</sup> On the history of Tibetan newspapers, see e.g. Bray 1988, Erhard 2015, Sawerthal 2011, Shakya 2004, Walravens 2010, or Zheng 2000.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed biography of Tharchin, see Fader 2004–2009.

<sup>8</sup> This is evident through editorial texts in the newspaper Melong and through letters the editor exchanged with a variety of individuals all over the world.

<sup>9</sup> For further details, see e.g. Engelhardt 2008b, or Brauen 2000.

<sup>10</sup> See Puck 1950: 4.

than studying a phenomenon within an established frame of reference along the lines of a “nation” or “one culture,” this paper sheds light on cross-boundary processes. The Melong transported and constructed division as well as convergence, and both of these can be observed on every level of textual analysis, from a sample unit as small as a word to as big as the whole product newspaper.

The foreign news section is particularly suitable for this type of analysis, even more so the presentation of Adolf Hitler, because Hitler and the events of the war are well known to the readership and justifiably remain of value to public and scholarly discussion until today. It needs to be emphasized, though, that the research interests here concern how the presentation of Hitler in a Tibetan-language newspaper speaks to us about the self-understanding of this very newspaper and its role in the process of cultural transfer.

The study is based on articles (re)presenting Adolf Hitler and the Second World War in (mainly) Europe as published between 1933 and 1950.<sup>11</sup> Before turning to the textual analysis, relevant information is provided on the production of foreign news, the makers of the newspaper, the readership of the Melong, and how to delineate foreign news in the Melong.

### *1. Production of a Global Product*

Given the nature of the editorial office and printing house of the Melong, no network of correspondents in distant places such as the US or Europe was established. The speedy flow of information from Europe to India through telegraphy, air mail, or phone was mainly controlled by the British government or British-owned companies.<sup>12</sup> A telegraphic line into Tibet was set up by the British government in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> Among the main sources for the Melong were English-language newspapers produced in India such as the *Statesman*, or the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (both Kolkata). By the time the Melong was founded, the newspaper landscape in India was diverse: On one hand there was a wide corpus of English-language newspapers loyal to the British government, on the other hand a growing anti-colonial, nationalistic press in Indic languages.<sup>14</sup> The press was handled by a policy of “control versus encouragement,” as

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<sup>11</sup> Almost a hundred articles have been read of mainly the Melong, but also other Tibetan-language newspapers. 35 articles focusing on Adolf Hitler were then chosen for detailed analysis.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Wenzlhuemer 2013, Kaul 2006.

<sup>13</sup> On the establishment of the telegraphic line to Lhasa, see e.g. King 1924.

<sup>14</sup> On the press history in India, see e.g. Kaul 2006, Schneider 2005, or Stark 2007.

Stark has called it, "in which surveillance and patronage were carefully weighed against each other."<sup>15</sup>

The *Melong* was part of this "control vs. encouragement" policies of the British government, in that the British supported the *Melong* between 1942 and 1948, i.e. a crucial time span for the study of the Second World War.<sup>16</sup> Before, the *Melong* was funded through the Scottish Mission in Kalimpong; the Tibetan government as well sent irregular donations all through the years. It is important to mention that the *Melong* operated as a successful business only when the British government provided subsidies and infrastructural support. This in turn substantially influenced the newspaper's contents: the pages of the *Melong* were filled with British war material.<sup>17</sup>

While the distribution network of the *Melong* spread all over the globe, with subscribers as far away as the US and Europe, the huge bulk of readers were located around Kalimpong and in Central Tibet (mainly Lhasa and along the trade route), i.e. often beyond the direct sphere of British control. Tibetan government officials, traders and intellectuals were subscribers, in average the *Melong* counted 500 subscribers. It can be assumed, that many more people received its contents, as it was read out aloud to, by the majority, illiterate people living in Tibet.

Babu Tharchin was the main editor of the newspaper and was skilful in negotiating between the predominantly British senders of foreign news and the predominantly Tibetan receivers. He was loyal to the British-Indian government and systematically passed on information to the British government.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand he held

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<sup>15</sup> Stark 2007: 83, 236.

<sup>16</sup> While the Scottish Mission remained in charge of paying the worker's wages (including Tharchin's), the British Government paid Tharchin monthly remuneration, as well. Importantly, they paid for ink and paper of the production of 500 issues per month, and bought them off for distribution in Tibet and Northern India. In 1947, they made it mandatory for everybody applying for a trade permit between Tibet and India to subscribe to the *Melong*. In a last deed of support, the Political Officer of Sikkim Arthur Hopkinson organized a free-of-interest-loan for a new type press, a press house and land for Tharchin in 1948. Information detailing the practicalities of British financial support of the *Melong* can be found in various documents archived within the "Tharchin Collection" of Columbia University Libraries. Some of it has been published by Fader 2002–2009 and Sawyerth 2011: 82–86. I am preparing a detailed financial history for my dissertation.

<sup>17</sup> Apart from the obvious visual effects (the *Melong* contained an abundance of war propaganda-photos Tharchin received from the Government's Information and Broadcasting Department). See here also Engelhardt 2011: 238–245 who provides further background information on British media policies effecting the production of the *Melong*.

<sup>18</sup> As early as 1928, he sold information on Tibetan affairs to Arthur Hopkinson (documented through correspondence between Tharchin and Charles Bell). From

close connections with different dignitaries of local surroundings and in Tibet. Tharchin received news from British newspapers, from traders and travellers coming from Tibet and China, as well as from his informant's network. While it is impossible to trace the individual authorship of each article, it is clear that Tharchin—as long as he was in Kalimpong—was the main driving force of the Melong from beginning to end.

## 2. *What is Foreign News in the Melong?*

In European newspapers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, different departments had been established and manifested as different sections (such as Local News, Foreign News, Entertainment, Sports, etc).<sup>19</sup> The section of foreign news was usually divided along the paradigm of nation states. The office of the Melong, however, consisted of one room in which most of the editing, type-setting, paper cutting, and printing was done. There were no single news desks separating different departments. Accordingly, there was no clear division into “local” or “foreign” news. Despite all this, there are ways to approach a possible division of contents. In an editorial note published in the summer of 1933, a rough division of content is put forth which included the following categories: 1) Market prices, 2) Trade, 3) Virtues, 4) Religion, 5) News about today's world (*deng 'dzam gling gi gsar gnas*),<sup>20</sup> 6) Technology, 7) Tales and Stories, 8) Poems, 9) Medicine, 10) Situation of commoners (*'bangs ser*), and 11) Entertainment and Sports.<sup>21</sup> Foreign news items fell into the fifth category, which encompassed various types of news and quantitatively made up the most extensive section. While the editor apparently did not feel the need for a further division, there was a (even if blurred) boundary between contents “on our country” and the content about “foreign countries.” The positioning of articles or specific headlines provides a further measurement for the distinction between different countries, but these were not used consistently.

Foreign news items sometimes appeared under the Tibetan headline *phyi rgyal*, a term equivalent to “foreign.” In the Melong, it

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1943 or 1944 on, Tharchin's British informant-number probably was ATS23, as reported by Hisao Kimura. For details, see Fader 2009: 327ff.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Esser 1998 on the division of editorial labor in Great Britain and Germany, or Bösch 2005 for Germany.

<sup>20</sup> This category was heralded in an element which existed already in the Melong's precursor, the aforementioned Ladakh Agbar, where *yul so so'i gnas tshul* (“news about various regions”) represented one category. See also Walravens 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Melong 7-7, 8-3. For details of the mentioned categories, see Sawerthal 2011.

often refers to European countries and more specifically to Great Britain. This type of usage of the term points towards the perception of the global dominance of the British Empire.<sup>22</sup> The heavy funding policies of the British government during the war years are further reflected in the content structures as well as in overt anti-German/pro-British propaganda.

### 3. Locating Deviation

A comparison of the *Melong* to another newspaper published in Tibetan language at that time, the *La dwags pho nya* ("Ladakh Messenger") which was mainly produced by a British Moravian missionary,<sup>23</sup> sheds light on what level the editors actually intervened in the production of foreign news. In both issues of November 1938, Hitler's annexation of parts of Czechoslovakia is covered. Both newspapers feature the same map, and the accompanying articles present the same content elements. Yet, there is a divergence in the moulding of respective content elements. In the *Melong*, reports on the aggression of Hitler-Germany in Czechoslovakia are given with some kind of understanding for their "cause" or at least without any direct criticism of it.<sup>24</sup> The *La dwags pho nya*, portrays Hitler entirely as a threat.<sup>25</sup> A divergence in interpretation of this news item is thus not observed on a visual but on a textual level.

The same is true for localizing mechanisms. As in every other newspaper office, foreign news was interpreted in a local context. In the report on the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games in Berlin, for example, the second half of the article stresses the fact that the next Games will be held in Tokyo.<sup>26</sup> The report on the "Anschluss" of Austria by Nazi Germany in March 1938 features a half-page illustration of Hitler in front of a map of Europe (figure 1). In contrast to the visual focus on Europe, more than half of the accompanying

<sup>22</sup> The usage of *phyi rgyal* can be compared to today's usage of the term "America," which often is used to refer to the United States but which actually denotes the whole continents of both North and South America.

<sup>23</sup> While the main editor Walter Asboe collaborated with local converts (such as Josph Gergan, Senge Namgyal, Dawa Dechen, or Zodpa), whose contributions are documented via signed articles in the newspaper's precursor *Kye lang ag bar* (also edited by Asboe), the main editing, especially of foreign news, was done by Asboe. Every issue of the *La dwags pho nya* prominently read on the cover "Edited & Published by Rev. Walter Asboe."

<sup>24</sup> *Melong* 10-3-1.

<sup>25</sup> Ladakh Phonya No. 23, November 1938.

<sup>26</sup> *Melong* 8-7-5.

text deals with Hitler's take on the "East" (*shar phyogs*).<sup>27</sup> Thus, illustrations are copied mostly unaltered from British sources while proximate places feature prominently on a textual level.



Figure 1: Melong 9-10-10, April 1938.

<sup>27</sup> Melong 9-10-10.

4. *The Need for New Words*

New developments and new realities require the coinage of new words. Sometimes English words or foreign names were simply transcribed into the Tibetan script, reflecting the influence of the British press. Examples are the words “tank” (*kreng ke*)<sup>28</sup> or “Nazi” (*nā dzi*)<sup>29</sup>. At other times we find actual translations into Tibetan: Communism is called *dmar lugs*,<sup>30</sup> which literally means the “red tradition.” The word for the Allies is *mthun phyogs rgyal khab*,<sup>31</sup> which means “harmonious nations” or “allied nations.” The “League of Nations” is the *'dzam gling lhan rgyas*,<sup>32</sup> i.e. the “world council.”

A hybrid of loan word and translation can be found, for example, in “square miles”: The word is rendered into *me lī gru bzhi*,<sup>33</sup> the first part *me lī* is the transliteration of English “miles” into Tibetan script, and *gru bzhi* is the Tibetan word for “square.” In certain cases, words existent in Tibetan were coined with a new meaning. Within Tibetan Buddhist cosmology there are celestial beings called *mkha' 'gro*. They are said to have supernatural powers such as flying through air. In the Melong, the term is used in a modern sense, namely for “pilot.”<sup>34</sup>

Such transcription or translation often happened randomly. The name Hitler is transcribed in a variety of ways throughout the whole run of the paper, and different spellings of his name can be found even within one article.<sup>35</sup> Earlier, the paper imitates the contemporary British journalistic usage, “Herr Hitler” (*har hiṭ lar*),<sup>36</sup> later on often drops “Herr” (*har*) altogether. Many times other titles drawn from Tibetan political contexts are used in connection with his name. A recurring example is *spyi khyab*, which literally means “all-pervasive” and is used for top-leaders. The Tibetan term *dpon po*<sup>37</sup> or “ruler” is also used, just as *khri pa*, literally “throne holder,” a term usually reserved for monastery abbots.<sup>38</sup>

The inconsistencies involved in these practices also reflect changing perceptions of Hitler. They changed over the course of

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<sup>28</sup> Melong 10-12-10.

<sup>29</sup> Melong 7-5-5.

<sup>30</sup> Melong 9-10-10.

<sup>31</sup> Melong 15-3-1.

<sup>32</sup> Melong 7-3-6.

<sup>33</sup> Melong 10-5-4.

<sup>34</sup> Melong 7-8-8.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Melong 13-8-9.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Melong 7-1-4. Note that also a letter written by Reting Rinpoche addressed to Adolf Hitler and given to Ernst Schäfer in March 1939 features the term *har he ti lar*, i.e. “Herr Hitler,” see Engelhardt 2008a.

<sup>37</sup> Melong 7-3-6.

<sup>38</sup> Melong 8-7-4.



time, partly reflecting British propaganda during the war years, partly in response to actual events. In 1934, Hitler is referred to as “the developer of the German nation” (*‘jar man rgyal khab yar ldan gong ‘phel byed po*),<sup>39</sup> in 1936 as “the throne holder of the general German public” (*‘jar man dmangs spyi’i khri pa*),<sup>40</sup> and in 1940 as “the murderer of the happiness of the world” (*‘dzam gling bde skyid kyi gshed ma*) and the “enemy of the Buddhist teaching” (*bstan bgra*).<sup>41</sup>

### 5. Embedding the Foreign Stylistically

Just as in the example of the “pilot” (*mkha ‘gro*), different world views and different ideas about the make-up of reality are combined. This merging happens not only on the level of individual words but also on broader levels of language usage. On a stylistic level, imagery of the Tibetan mountainous landscape or cosmology is juxtaposed with foreign news items. When Hitler was defeated and lost the war, it is reported how in the beginning of the war he took over neighbouring countries “like a summer river” (*dbyar gyi chu bo ltar*),<sup>42</sup> but after his quick rise he fell into a “low ravine” (*dma’i ba’i g.yang rong*).<sup>43</sup> Stalingrad is described as the “hot hells” (*tsha dmyal*),<sup>44</sup> one of the existential realms in the ever-recurring cycle of death and rebirth. In February 1945, the expected upcoming defeat of Nazi Germany is reported with descriptions of both the American army advancing into Germany from the West and the Russian army from the East. The Russian army swells “like a summer flood” (*dbyar gyi chu rud*), and the text concludes that the Germans are trapped within a “fire-lasso of the Allies” (*mthun phyogs me dpung zhags thag*).<sup>45</sup> This poetic usage of language certainly made the articles easier to understand for a Tibetan-speaking audience. Words were newly coined or used to embed foreign news within a Tibetan mindscape.

But much more so, whole sets of stylistic elements and genres deriving from Tibetan literature<sup>46</sup> were appropriated for the news-production. Directly following the article on the upcoming defeat of Nazi Germany in Europe in February 1945 the newspaper features a

<sup>39</sup> Melong 7-12-3.

<sup>40</sup> Melong 8-7-4.

<sup>41</sup> Melong 10-12-10.

<sup>42</sup> Melong 15-1-3.

<sup>43</sup> Melong 13-8-9.

<sup>44</sup> Melong 11-3-7.

<sup>45</sup> Melong 13-6-12.

<sup>46</sup> For an introduction to the difficulties of categorizing Tibetan literature into different “genres” and problems associated with the general definition of “Tibetan literature,” see Cabezón/Jackson 1996: 11–37.

*lung bstan*, i.e. a prophecy. The concept of prophecy is taken to frame a statement by Goebbels on the future of the world:

Future Prophecy: The German Dr. Goebbels [said]: “Even though recently the Great War is being decided, in 1948 there will be a world war again.” That is the prophecy.<sup>47</sup>

According to Mullard, *lung bstan* are highly cryptic texts and are “regarded as direct and truthful renditions of prophecy.”<sup>48</sup> The use of *lung bstan* in connection with the defeat of Germany resonates with its use in other Tibetan texts, such as those of the vast corpus of *gter ma* literature: As Gayley explains, prophecies “portray the tertön’s [i.e. the treasure revealer’s] own era as a time of dire straits and rampant corruption. [...] A profusion of bad omens is typically also given.”<sup>49</sup> The prophecy attempts to prove that the text’s contents derive from more authoritative sources.<sup>50</sup> The *lung bstan* here functions as a legitimating device of the news item and underscores its truthfulness.

Another rhetorical device used are verses of the rich body of life-advice, encompassing formats which have been described as *bslab bya* (“advice,” “what is to be taught”), *legs bshad* (“good sayings,” aphorisms), or more generally *gtam dpe* (“speech example”).<sup>51</sup> These types of “proverbs” (in its broadest sense) which often overlap with other formats of figurative speech can be found both in literary texts as well as in oral language. According to Sørensen and Erhard, *gtam dpe* are “cherished both by the illiterate person as well as by men of letters and learning, irrespective of social setting and background.”<sup>52</sup> In the Melong, these verses are used to render foreign news understandable to a wider audience.

In one article of October 1943, a verse of the famous composition *Chu shing bstan bcos* (“A Treatise on Water and Wood”)<sup>53</sup> is applied to the advance of the Allies in Germany:

Great deeds are accomplished step by step. One does not arrive at completion by proceeding impatiently. A great stream, though calm, goes far. But a wave, even if intense, does not grow large.

<sup>47</sup> Melong 13-6-12: *ma 'ong lung bstan: 'jar man sgrag krar go sbal gyis da lam gyi dmag chen thag tshod rung slar yang phyi lo 1948 pa'i nang 'dzam gling dmag 'phrug 'byung yong zhes lung bstan 'dug/*.

<sup>48</sup> Mullard 2011: 28.

<sup>49</sup> Gayley 2003: 5f.

<sup>50</sup> See Gyatso 1996: 159.

<sup>51</sup> All of the mentioned appear as free-standing content elements, as well.

<sup>52</sup> Sørensen & Erhard 2013: 282.

<sup>53</sup> This work is by Gung thang dKon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me, 1762–1823.

Likewise, the allied nations achieve [their deeds] step by step and are like a great river that calmly goes a long way. Hence, slowly and steadily, they certainly will defeat their opponents.<sup>54</sup>

In this description, the Allies are a steady stream, whereas Nazi Germany is just an ephemeral big wave that will be washed away by the stream. The usage of the verse underscores a certain instructive function of the newspaper. The close connection between written and oral genres can be observed in a variation on the aforementioned verse of November 1946. This report on the Nuremberg trials gives a summary of Nazi Germany and Hitler, providing an obvious reference to the verse of the *Chu shing bstan bcos*, but with colloquial variants: "A great deed is achieved gradually. By being diligent for a long time, a great idea is achieved."<sup>55</sup>

An example of the usage of an aphorism of Sakya Paṇḍita's famous *Sa skya legs bshad* in juxtaposition to modern forms can be observed on a cover in winter 1939, marking the end of British appeasement politics at the outbreak of World War II. While Hitler is playing with fire, a British soldier approaches Hitler with a gun. The accompanying text says: "Even the ones good by nature get angry, if you bully them all the time. Sandalwood is cool, but if you rub it, it burns ablaze!"<sup>56</sup> The British are thus equated with the valuable sandalwood, an image derived from Sanskrit literature that is widely used within Tibetan literature and folk culture. Thus, the British are presented as inherently good but willing to fight back if bullied. Both the picture and the aphorism aim to make the news item easily understood. It is the textual aphorism which is particularly familiar to the audience, not the copied image.

Also a verse by Nāgārjuna from his popular work *Shes rab sdong bu*, i.e. Tree of Wisdom, is used in the same context. In 1939, the Melong reported on the war in Ethiopia, i.e. Abyssinia, where Italian forces had invaded and forced the king of Abyssinia to flee. Reflecting widespread international critique, the article accuses the League of Nations of not even trying to make nations enforce international treaties. In order to communicate this criticism, the

<sup>54</sup> Melong 12-3-10; Verse 11 of the *Chu shing bstan bcos*: *bya ba chen po yun gyis bsgrubs / / ngang thung 'bad pas mthar mi phyin / / klung chen dal yang ring 'gro la / / rba rlabs drag kyang cher mi 'gro / / zhes pa ltar mthun phyogs rgyal khab rnam nas yun gyis bsgrubs pa dang / / chu bo chen po dal gyis ring du 'gro ba dang mtshungs gshis / dal yun dang bcas dgra sde rnam las rnam par rgyal bar 'gyur nges /*.

<sup>55</sup> Melong 15-1-3: *bya ba chen po ngang gis bsgrubs / / yun ring 'bad pas don chen bsgrubs /*.

<sup>56</sup> Melong 10-11-1: Verse 6 of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Sa skya legs bshad*: *rang bzhin bzang po rnam la yang / / rgyun du brnyas na khro bar byed / / tsan dan bsil ba yin mod kyang / / r[ɡ]tsub par gyur na 'par bar byed /*.

following verse is juxtaposed: "To a fire which burns the forest, the wind comes to help. [But] when this [wind] destroys a butter lamp, the weak [butter lamp] lacks support. [One can] also [say]: Even though a great fire is kindled by wind, this [wind] extinguishes the butter lamp."<sup>57</sup>

The critique is that strong and powerful nations (the wind) only help other strong and powerful nations (the fire). But if a weak and small nation, like a butter lamp, needs help, the powerful nations do not come to help. On the contrary, they wipe out the small nation. After providing explanation, the author ponders on the state of small nations, subtly extending his thoughts to the situation of Tibet: "Looking at this, would it not be good if also the weak nations would look for ways to become powerful? In today's times, 'powerful' means that a nation has as much army, weaponry machines and chemical weapons as possible."<sup>58</sup> Not only Ethiopia, but also Tibet is like a butter lamp in the contemporary world, small, weak, and under constant threat of extinction.

The employment of various types of stylistic means should not necessarily be conceptualized as an active act of text composition, but as a passive move for Tibetan-speaking authors. It is not necessarily the foreign news item that is to be made understood, but rather the meaning which is attributed to it by the author. In the previous example in which Tibet was equated to a butter lamp, the author admonishes the Tibetan government to wake up from their politics of isolation, their resistance to catch up technologically with the rest of the world, and to acknowledge the threats that are continuously tightening up around the Tibetan plateau. This leads us to the final level of analysis, the appropriation and usage of ideas.

### 6. Importing Ideas, Reinventing Meanings

In the 1940s, Tibet was neither a political entity formally recognized by a global community nor an entity clearly demarcated from the imagination of the people living in or ruling over Tibet.<sup>59</sup> The call for

<sup>57</sup> Melong 10-5-4: Verse 41 of *Shes rab sdong bu: nags sreg pa yi me la ni* / *rlung gis grogs su 'gyur ba yin* / *de nyid mar me 'jig byed pas* / *nyams chung ba la bshes yod min* / *yang na me chen rlung gis sbar mod kyi* / *de yis mar me chung ngu gsod* / .

<sup>58</sup> Melong 10-5-4: *der bltas rgyal khab stobs chung rnams nas kyang da lta nas stobs ldan yong ba'i thabs shes gnang na mi legs sam* / *deng gi dus su stobs ldan zhes pa ni rgyal khab su la dmag dpung dang dmag gi mkho byed 'phrul 'khor dug rdzas gang mang yod pa de la stobs ldan zhes pa'o* / .

<sup>59</sup> Much work has been done on the question of Tibet's political status and the demarcation of its borders, both historically and contemporarily. As a starting point, see McGranahan 2010: 37ff.



Directly adjacent to the article on Ethiopia in February 1939, the Melong featured an article on "Hitler as a threat to Jews"<sup>60</sup> (figure 2). This article describes how tens of thousands of Jews have lived peacefully in Germany for a very long time, but now Hitler plunders not only their possessions, it is stated, but he has now introduced new laws to expel them from the country. It quotes Hitler as stating that he expelled Jews because they hold power over the banks and the German people, and they would divulge internal secrets of Germany to outsiders. The article further mentions that the British government provides help and support to Jewish refugees.

As in many other cases, the end of the article extends this European news item to a Tibetan context:

In case the charges as claimed by Hitler are true, then he is not to be blamed. No one could stand falling prey to the wealth of others, while these exploit one's own country. For example: If the whole Tibetan trade was in the hands of the Chinese/Indians (?),<sup>61</sup> and more so, [they] had power over all the common people (*'bangs ser*), then could the Tibetan Lamas and leaders bear this in their heart?<sup>62</sup>

By naively reiterating anti-Semitic sentiments, the article addresses two points: Firstly, the article contains a subtle call for an independent Tibetan nation state ruled by ethnic Tibetans. Secondly, within the idea of this strong nation, the author shows consideration for the "common people," even under the general outline "high lamas" versus "subordinates" which reflected a traditional social hierarchy in Tibet at that time.

In an earlier issue printed in the summer 1933, this issue of social hierarchy receives even more prominent treatment. Hitler is described as an advocate of the "common people" of the German nation:

[Hitler] gives to the commoners (*'bangs ser*) and helps and supports the poor. He always thinks about how to eliminate their suffering [...]. Like this, the common German people (*'bangs ser*) should be able to make progress, and their own country should be independent, happy, and wealthy.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Melong 10-5-4.

<sup>61</sup> The word *rgya mi* could refer to either "Chinese" or "Indian," as it is used for either of them in the Melong.

<sup>62</sup> Melong 10-5-4: *gal srid hi te lār nas skyon btags pa ltar bden na khag kyang mi 'dug /rang yul du gzhan gyi bed spyod khar rgyu dngos kyis dbang yod btang na su yin rung nad theg gi ma red/ dper na: bod kyi tshong rigs tshang ma rgya mi'i laḡ tu len nas da dung 'bangs ser la dbang yod byas na bod kyi bla dpon thugs kyis bzod srid dam? /*

<sup>63</sup> Melong 7-8-8: *khong gis 'bangs ser dbul zhing 'phongs pa rnam la grogs mgon gnung ste de dag gi sdug bsngal med par bya ba'i phyir dus rgyun du thugs bsam bzhes [...]*

It is stressed that “Herr Hitler” would stand in the middle of the people, amidst farmers and normal office workers, holding speeches. The author ends this article by saying: “Likewise, the governor generals of all the nations are indeed also trying to bring happiness to the common people (*'bangs ser*).”<sup>64</sup> This is a clear message to the author’s “own” (Tibetan) government.

The exotic “other” Hitler is used to criticize “the self,” the imagined Tibetan nation with its great divide between elites and workers or farmers. A call for the establishment of a nation state and a call for modernization resonate strongly throughout these articles. In an article of June 1938, which describes warfare then and now, the author attests that while the Tibetan army is rather strong, it cannot compete with other nations. Again evoking the example of Ethiopia, the author warns of threats by both the Chinese government and the Japanese from Kham in East Tibet, stating that modern equipment is of highest importance for a Tibetan army.<sup>65</sup>

So far, foreign news items were mainly used to critique the own central Tibetan government or the own envisioned “nation.” But with 1945, at the end of the Second World War and the occasion of the demise of power of the British Empire in India, things became quite different. As is well known, by May 1945 the war in Europe was over and Hitler had committed suicide. In the Melong’s coverage of these events the end of the war and the defeat of Germany are turned into a moral lesson on karma.

The article juxtaposes Hitler and the Ethiopian case: “Even if for some time [one] is put under the power of somebody else, in the end the fruits of karma will ripen.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Hitler’s suicide is used to give a moral lesson concerning *nga rgyal* (arrogance or pride), which is one of the key obstacles to the Buddhist path to enlightenment. In this statement, Hitler is accused of possessing the arrogance of wanting to take over the whole world and thus produced a lot of suffering for others. It is therefore logical that Hitler did not win the war, because nobody can counteract one’s karma. The worldly consequences of his misbehaviour are that his own home country lost its independence.

Following the karmic explanation of events, the author then moves this analysis to a more general level. Through the case of

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*bzhin du 'jar mñan 'bangs ser yar ldan 'phel rgyas 'byung ba dang / rang yul rang btsan bde skyid stobs 'byor 'byung [...]/.*

<sup>64</sup> Melong 7-8-8: *'di mtshungs rgyal khab tshang ma'i spyi rdzong dpon khag nas kyang rang yul 'bangs ser bde la 'god thabs [g]nang gi yod shag/.*

<sup>65</sup> See Melong 10-1-14.

<sup>66</sup> Melong 13-8-9: *gnas skabs gzhan la dbang yod btang gyur kyang / phugs su las 'bras smin pa[i dpe la ltos]/.*

Hitler's defeat, it is shown how globally people should not have the arrogant desire to take over the world: "Arrogant people who want power over the world should look at the degeneration of the German Governor-General Hitler."<sup>67</sup>

This degeneration is depicted in a cartoon on the next two pages.<sup>68</sup> After a retrospect on Hitler's rise and defeat, the message "The Allies will win!" follows Hitler through his daily life, accompanied by the British victory-sign "V." Hitler does not want to accept it and runs away from it. In the end, he hangs himself on a V.<sup>69</sup> Again, while the illustrations deliver a political message that stresses the British victory the accompanying verses draw a much broader conclusion:

Look at how Hitler was defeated even though he had great success.  
 Look how the thorn bush which torments others, once established,  
 becomes [the one] tormenting yourself.  
 Even if your own nation has defeated others and started sending  
 troops, you will yourself be defeated [in the end]. Look at this  
 example!<sup>70</sup>

The political and moral criticism here concerns not only Nazi Germany, but is directed against any form of imperialism. In a subsequent report on the Nuremberg trials in November 1946, this general criticism is explicitly connected to the law of karma. "The ripening [of karma] of putting [others] under one's own power, falls on top of oneself [...]."<sup>71</sup>

While British presence was of advantage to the Melong, the rise of nationalism and the rebellion against colonial powers did not leave the editorial office unaffected. In the 1930s, an openly positive or at least a rather vague opinion can be observed with respect to Hitler in the Melong. This was utilized to suggest the Tibetan government to become a stronger nation that would take good care of its common people. But in later articles Hitler is portrayed in a solely negative light —as a reaction to actual events, further expedited through the financial backing of the British government. Hitler's negative perception later on was used to provide moral advice to readers by reframing it in the context of the theory of karma and the flaws of

<sup>67</sup> Melong 13-8-9: *'dzam gling dbang 'dod nga rgyal chen po yis/ / 'jar spyi hi te lar phung ba'i dpe ltos/*.

<sup>68</sup> A depiction of the cartoon can be found in Engelhardt 2011: 233.

<sup>69</sup> Melong 13-8-10, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Melong 13-8-10, 11: *hi te lar rgyal kha che rung 'phams la ltos/ /gzhan la zug pa'i tsher shing btsugs pa des/ /rang nyid la ni zug par gyur la ltos/ /rang rgyal gzhan 'pham dpung 'jug 'tsams byas kyang/ /rang nyid 'pham par gyur pa'i dpe la ltos/*.

<sup>71</sup> Melong 15-1-3: *gzhan la dbang yod byas pa'i rnam smin de/ /rang nyid steng du bab pa 'di la ltos/*.



arrogance.

While early reports on Hitler usually worked within the framework of “use the other to criticize the self,” by 1945 and 1946 the “self” was used to criticize the “other.” The British victory is not so much celebrated as a victory of “the British” but more generally as the victory of good over bad morals. The laws of karma work and these laws had been used in Tibet for hundreds of years. Much more, the defeat of Nazi-Germany, which wanted to take over the world, is used to draw broader conclusions against imperialism.

### *7. Conclusion*

Produced on the margins of the Tibetan cultural sphere but also on the margins of the British Empire, the Melong gave Tibetans the opportunity to absorb events which occurred in foreign countries. It connected Tibet to a global network of communications and provided a medium which—at least in theory—also crossed social boundaries. Through a close reading of articles about Adolf Hitler, it became evident how prominently the receiving agents, i.e. the Tibetan readers, feature particularly on a textual level in a product such as the newspaper, perceived on first sight as “European.”

The way in which a figure like Adolf Hitler is portrayed for a Tibetan readership sometimes resonates with a Eurocentric view, copying news contents and connected systems provided by dominant agents such as the Western categorization of the world along the lines of nation states. More often than not, though, the portrayal deviates from expectations associated with a Eurocentric worldview. The editing and printing of foreign news involved a creative process in which a variety of stakeholders were involved—a multi-dimensional process of appropriation, indeed channelled through British information flows, but nevertheless adopted for a Tibetan-speaking audience by an agent who knew well both worlds.

In summary, the editor communicated much more than foreign news items. He attempted to communicate to the readers the very meaning he himself attributed to this news. Foreign news was often presented as kinds of morality tales, beyond political meanings encoded in the events happening in Europe. For Tibetan readers they were presented as models on how to live a morally adequate life. For the Tibetan government they were presented in order to show how to modernize their “state.” The producer thus often deviated from pre-formulated forms in a variety of ways, catering to a communicative sphere at times disconnected from Eurocentric patterns of meaning.

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