

## **Translating the Translator: Identity and Revision in Trungpa Rinpoche's Buddhism(s)**

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### **Abstract**

By exploring how the literal and metaphorical aspects of the teaching/translating activities of Chögyam Trungpa overlap and feed into each other this paper analyses a highly original process of re-inventing tradition against various forms of criticism and censorship, both in the target and the source cultures. This analysis will be articulated along three axes, which correspond to the three Buddhist roles Trungpa was meant to have played: *guru* (teacher), *siddha* (accomplished practitioner) and *tertön* (treasure revealer). The three roles are all concerned with different processes of mediation and, thus, can be thought of as metaphorical translations. Looking at linguistic and cultural translation in terms of those three traditional categories can provide us with a meaningful framework for understanding how *Vajrayana* Buddhism, and particularly the Tibetan *Vajrayana* tradition, imagines and conceptualises translation.

**Keywords:** Tibetan Buddhism, Translation, Counterculture, Crazy Wisdom, Terma, Tibetan Exile

The histories of Buddhism cannot be fully understood without taking into account the notion of translation, both as a literal act of mediation between languages and as a metaphor for transformation. As a system originating in the Gangetic plains in the sixth century BC, which spread all over South, Central, East and South East Asia and, in the last fifty years, throughout Europe and America, the Buddhist teachings have, naturally, undergone countless translations. These many translations into many different target languages/cultures, along with the somewhat rhizomatic fashion in which Buddhism developed, especially after the rise of the Mahayana in the second century BC, produced the vast array of schools, ideas and practices that we call nowadays Buddhism. Thus, it is not inappropriate to refer to the many forms of Buddhism as *Buddhisms*, as sometimes applied in Buddhist studies. Moreover, it should not be assumed that each linguistic realm, for example, Tibetan, has a single form of Buddhism or, in other words, that every translation into a new language produced a single new Buddhist school. In this sense, although we might use constructs such as Tibetan or Japanese Buddhism, they should not be understood as referring to acutely defined schools, but as a number of often variegated lineages of transmission that share a common language and cultural background.

Therefore, those entrusted to express, spread and pass on the Buddhist teachings play a key role in the fluid development of the many *Buddhisms* (Williams 2009, p. 1). In this sense, teachers play a role analogous to that of translators, since they re-express ideas in a different context. Furthermore, Buddhist translators are often also teachers, a combination of roles that places such a person in a position to reformulate the tradition to which he or she belongs. For the translator to be an effective translating agent he or she needs to be first a translated subject. By this it is implied that this person will not be a mere mediator between two languages and cultures, but also someone who has actualised the meaning of the teachings that are about to be translated/re-expressed. The translator is meant to be soaked in the teachings, first by studying them thoroughly and then by practising them for a number of years. Such a process of immersion tends to happen in the source language, which the translator needs to have mastered beforehand. Later, this translated subject who has mastered not only the language of the teachings but also their ultimate meaning is expected to re-formulate them in the target language, which in most cases, though not always, corresponds to his or her mother tongue.

In this way the translator fulfils a double process of translation: a literal one between two languages and a metaphorical one in terms of his or her mastery of the teachings. This particular conception of the translatorial role, based on the inseparability of Buddhist practice and translation, is particularly relevant to the Tibetan-speaking forms of Buddhism, their history being intimately linked to the histories and stories of those teacher-translators who contributed to the creation of specifically Tibetan forms of Buddhism.

Buddhism was transmitted to Tibet in different waves of translations, through which the *lotsawas* (Tibetan for translator, though literally “eye of the world”) reformulated Indian Tantric Buddhism in a Tibetan context. Most *lotsawas* were Tibetans who went to India to study Buddhism, stayed there for many years, learnt the languages, received the teachings, gained mastery in their practice and then returned to Tibet to teach and translate them. These was the case for Vairotsana (eighth century) (Jinba, 2004) and Marpa (eleventh century) (Trungpa, 1982), possibly the most important figures in the first and second wave of translations respectively. In fact, the training of a *lotsawa* is not so different from the making of a teacher (Sanskrit, *guru*), only that in the case of the former the language and culture in which he receives the teachings and the one in which he expresses them are different. By showing the similarities between the *guru* role and the training and work of a *lotsawa* we can appreciate how the latter were not only translating agents but also translated subjects. In fact,

their condition as translated subjects, that is to say, as affected and modified by the teachings, legitimised and validated their translating agency in the way they reformulated the teachings.

In Tantric Buddhism the *guru* plays a central role, perhaps analogous to those who recorded the scriptures in the religions of the Book; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Like those figures, it is not unusual to find the *guru* being construed as an embodiment of the teachings, a living symbol of the essence of all Buddhist scriptures. As Rigdzin Shikpo points out, for a student practising at the tantric level, “[t]he teacher becomes the living embodiment of the path and the fruition. The teacher as living inspiration is more important than the teacher as instructor of practical techniques” (2005, p. 229). This particular way of understanding the teacher role places the teacher above the scripture by turning him or her into a living and dynamic text which stands for the ultimate expression of the Buddhist canon. Interestingly enough, this is not only applied to the teacher’s words but to every aspect of his or her life. However, for someone to play such a role it is not enough to be surrounded by a group of followers or students who construe his or her words and actions in the way described above. The teacher needs to undergo a process of training before he or she can claim to embody the teachings. This process includes studying and practising certain cycles of philosophical and liturgical texts, and also a need to regard his or her teacher as an embodiment of the teachings—as a model.

These two parallel processes pervade the history of Tibetan Buddhism(s), but they can be said to be particularly intense at three historical moments: the two waves of transmission mentioned above, and during Tibetan exile, generally dated as beginning in 1959 after the Lhasa Uprising.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the first two waves of transmission and translation had India as a source and Tibet as a target, the third wave reverses such a pattern: Tibet becomes the missing source and a vaguely defined “West” becomes the target. This last wave, motivated by the threat posed by the Chinese takeover to the Tibetan religious and political elites, presents us with a new process of translation, substantially different from the two previous ones. In this case the target culture did not go out looking for the Buddhist teachings in a given source culture: rather, the source culture approached the target because of a political accident. This is not to say that there was no interest in the target culture, but simply to highlight that the transmission of the Tibetan schools to the West happened in the context of Tibetans fleeing their land for reasons other than transmitting the Buddhist teachings.

The fact that many highly learned and accomplished Tibetan teachers fled Tibet and settled in Western countries further complicates seeing Tibet as the geographical embodiment of the source language and culture. As explained above, the most common pattern in Buddhist translations and transmissions is that the target culture journeys towards the source one, which is located in a somewhat stable physical abode. Even though the position of exiled Tibetan Buddhist teachers as the source language and culture in this process of transmission seems unquestionable, the various representatives of Western target cultures did not have to journey

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<sup>2</sup> Although Tibetans started fleeing their homes much earlier in the 1950s—as soon as the PLA started taking over Tibetan-speaking areas in the early 1950s—the Lhasa Uprising is generally considered a landmark since it caused the flight of the Tibetan government headed by the Dalai Lama. A detailed account and analysis of these events can be found in Shakya 1999.

to Tibet to receive the teachings, nor, often, did they even have to learn Tibetan. This unusual social context signalled by dislocation has enabled the emergence of a new kind of translator that responds to the needs of the new situation.

A good example of this new type of teacher-translator was Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987), who was instrumental to the transmission of the Tibetan Tantric tradition to the West, particularly to the English-speaking West. Trungpa was one of the first *lamas* (Tibetan for the Sanskrit *guru*) to teach directly in English, first in the United Kingdom (1965-1970) and later in the United States and Canada (1970-1987), setting a precedent that many other Tibetan teachers would follow. The aims of this paper are tripartite. It first explores how Trungpa was a translated subject and a translating agent and how those two narratives that construct him as a *guru*-text interact before moving on to consider the censorship and criticism directed at the processes of translation he developed. Finally, I show how his mediation in the transmission of Buddhism to the West led to the forging of a new religious identity. For this purpose, I shall first discuss the notions of *guru*, *siddha* and *tertön*, three roles based upon processes of translation which are very relevant to Trungpa.

One of Trungpa's main accomplishments was to re-express his Buddhist heritage in the English language. In this respect, he has been credited with having "created a Buddhist-hybrid English, an actual Dharma English" (Berholz 2004). This is no easy task, since, as Freemantle acknowledges, "[t]ranslations of Buddhist texts into English present entirely different problems than those faced by the early translators of Sanskrit into Tibetan" (2003, p. xviii). Naturally eighth-century Tibetan was not exposed to as many influences as twentieth-century English. Whereas this makes the translation process more difficult it also opens it up to a wider horizon of nuances and subtleties. It would seem natural that such a task would be taken up by a native English speaker and not by someone who learnt the language in his twenties. However, in the histories of Buddhism in Tibet we also find a figure that might be deemed to be the reverse of the *lotsawa*, the figure that Trungpa embodied. Although there is no particular name for it, we have the examples of teachers like Padmasambhava (eighth century), Atisa (eleventh) (Dhargyey 2003) and Padampa Sangye (eleventh-twelfth) (Molk 2008), who, despite being originally from India, journeyed to Tibet and taught the Dharma in Tibet's own language(s) and cultural context(s). Therefore, it is not surprising that Trungpa is often compared to Padmasambhava, whose reported appreciation of Tibetan culture (Trungpa 2001, pp. 175-178) runs somehow parallel to Trungpa's fondness for classical music (Hayward 2008, p. 172) and English poetry.

The paradigms of translation inform understanding of Trungpa's work. Trungpa was a *guru* who was also said to be a *siddha* and a *tertön*. As a *guru*, he was someone authorised and encouraged to teach by his own teachers. The roles of *siddha* and *tertön* are, however, far more slippery, since they are not related directly to factual appointment but with a somewhat fluid process of narrative construction. The role of the *guru* is not so much to transmit but to re-express the teachings in context: in other words, to, metaphorically translate them. From this perspective, Trungpa was first "translated" to the realm of the teachings during his early education in Tibet, and then empowered to be a "translator" of those same teachings, which he had mastered by means of immersion, study and practice.

Following a structurally similar path, the *siddha* also undergoes some sort of epistemic transformation. Thus, a *siddha*, a Sanskrit word that refers to someone who has attained *siddhi* (accomplishment), is a practitioner who has reached the fruition of the Buddhist path by forsaking the limits of conventionality and then returns to society in order to teach in abrupt and unconventional means. The *siddha* is thought to be an embodiment of "wisdom

gone wild” (Tibetan *yeshe cholwa*), a form of insight that, because of its depth, does not necessarily conform to societal norms and expectations.<sup>2</sup> *Siddhas* were usually prone to censorship and criticism as their shocking ways were not particularly welcomed by society. Not unlike a *guru*, the *siddha*’s function is to transmit the fruition of the Buddhist path, which is often regarded as being beyond conceptualisation, by disrupting the conceptual patterns that keep individuals in existential bondage. This might include going beyond social norms and displaying a playful and, sometimes, even irreverent attitude towards Buddhist institutions and conventions (see Dowman 1985 and Samuel 1995).

Although *siddhas* are not appointed by other *siddhas*, some highly regarded teachers might hint that a particular individual and his or her unconventionality responds to the *siddha* paradigm, as was Trungpa. Labelling Trungpa a *siddha* is a way of saying that he did not conform to societal expectations and was also regarded to have mastered the Buddhist teachings (see Ray 2005). The *siddha*’s mad way of behaving is structurally similar to the process of translation. The *siddha* is a thoroughly “translated” individual, one that has traversed the whole of the Buddhist path. In this sense, he or she has been fully modified and transformed by the teachings and, following the inspiration of the Bodhisattva, aims to bring the same transformation to all living beings. Such a wish to translate other beings manifests in the *siddha*’s activity as the continuous disruption of people’s expectations and conceptual frameworks. For this purpose, *siddhas* use words and concepts, but only as tools of deconstruction, their aim being to dismantle their students’ preconceptions, or those of whoever they encounter.

Finally, a *tertön* is literally a treasure-revealer of Buddhist texts “buried” in the *tertön*’s own mind and occasionally in some other locations as cryptic formulas. The revelation of these treasures (Tibetan, *terma*) consists of very intricate and complex procedures (Thondup 1997; Gyatso 1996). Although the texts might manifest through dream-visions or similar experiences, they are regarded as hidden in the author’s subjective sphere. As Gyatso explains at length in relation to the *tertön* Jigme Lingpa, what the discoverer discovers is neither fully part of him nor completely other (1998, pp. 145-206). There is a tension between the treasure being a gift from a *guru* of the past and the treasure being obtained through the revealer’s mastery and effort. Such tension is in fact expressed in the word choice “discoverer/revealer”. If we focused on the more active aspect of the *tertön* role, he or—less frequently but also—she would be some kind of translator, a decisive mediator who turns visionary experience into texts. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten, as Freemantle points out, that only

[o]ccasionally, full-length texts are found, but they are usually fragmentary, sometimes consisting of only a word or two, and they are encoded in symbolic script [. . .] They are simply the material supports that act as a trigger to help the *tertön* reach the subtle level of mind where the teaching has really been concealed. It is the *tertön* who actually composes and writes down the resulting text, and so may be considered its author. [. . .] Trungpa Rinpoche emphasized the importance of the *tertön*’s role. (2003, p. 17)

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<sup>2</sup> The *siddha*’s madness should not be imagined to be a mere divinisation of ordinary insanity, since in the Buddhist cultures where *siddha*-like figures exist ordinary madness is also acknowledged to exist, as Samuel points out in his discussion of the role of holy madmen in Tibetan societies (1995, p. 290-309).

Following Trungpa's emphasis, a *tertön* fulfils the role of a translator, being the person with the skill of transforming dream-visions or encoded formulas into fully articulate texts. The translation of the *tertön* is less metaphorical than that of the *guru* or the *siddha*, since the *tertön* produces, at the end of the process, a literal text. However, the *tertön* cannot be said to mediate between two different languages, but rather between two modes of communication and experience.

Trungpa's emphasis on the active aspect of the *tertön* role is relevant, since some of his writings have been considered to be *terma*. The issue of which texts are to be considered *terma* is similar to the issue of who is a valid recogniser of a *siddha*. The only way of finally ascertaining whether a liturgical text is *terma* is by testing its efficiency in terms of bringing about certain positive states of mind and its capacity to inspire its reciter. Also, a new treasure-text needs to be in accordance with previous teachings, which are meant to be reformulated in the new text but never contradicted or forsaken. As Lopez remarks,

the authenticity of a *terma* is difficult to judge, and the behaviour of the discoverer is explicitly excluded from the criteria. False discoverers may be of good conduct and have harmonious relations with their community, and true discoverers may indulge in all forms of reprehensible behaviour, thereby taking onto themselves obstructions that would ordinarily beset others, while demonstrating that all experience is ultimately of one taste (*ro gcig pa*). (1998, p. 107)

Thus *tertöns* are likely also to be considered *siddhas* since their ways rarely conform with societal expectations.

Although these three roles are generally concerned with processes of metaphorical translation that happen within a single language and culture, they can also overlap with a process of literal translation. In such a context, the *guru-siddha-tertön* would not only be translating between two modes of experience and communication, but also between two languages. This overlapping of metaphorical and literal translation is by no means exclusive to the recent context of Tibetan exile: teachers like Atisha (980-1054), Marpa (1012-1097), Padampa Sangye (d. 1117) and Longchenpa (1308-1363) (Jamyang, 2006, p. 98) could be said to stand for such a combination in variously nuanced ways. Also, although Marpa was not a *tertön* he certainly behaved in the manner of a *siddha* and was a very important *lotsawa* who translated many teachings from Indian languages (Trungpa, 1982).

The combination of roles that involve literal translation and metaphorical translation is far from new. Nonetheless, what is novel about the new kind of *guru-siddha-tertön-lotsawa* that emerges with Tibetan exile is the amount of information we have about them. This means that in the case of Trungpa and his contemporaries we can study the interplay of various forms of translation in more detail, appreciating how traditional roles map processes of cultural and linguistic translations. Not only the *guru* role plays an important part in translation, the disruptive aspect of the *siddha* and the archeological aspect of the *tertön* are also very present in Trungpa's particular translation methodology.

An example of how the *tertön* role is interwoven with translation is Trungpa's archaeological concern with language. Such concern can be appreciated in the way he excavated layers of meaning, mainly through the Oxford English Dictionary, in order to get closer to the etymological meanings of words in search for some lost nuance that he found useful. Hayward, one of his students, mentions how he was frequently seen browsing through the pages of the OED. He would also use certain words in ways that would shock even his more

articulate students, and to their “astonishment he was using the word in exactly the way it was meant in earlier times, sometimes going as far back as its original Latin or Greek meaning” (Hayward, 2008, p. 56). In a similar vein, he also used Sanskrit words, instead of Tibetan ones, when introducing Buddhist concepts to English-speaking audiences. This choice is also an archaeological return to the etymologies, privileging the first context in which these notions were shaped—in India—instead of the way they later developed through the Tibetan translations. This sets Trungpa apart from other Tibetan *lamas* who started teaching in the West in the 1960s and 1970s and who naturally used Tibetan rather than Sanskrit terms.

Another interesting aspect of Trungpa’s linguistic self-presentation was his choice of Oxonian accent when speaking English. This tendency is understandable, since he spent some of his early years in Britain as a student of Comparative Religions at Oxford University. However, the importance he gave to imitating the pronunciation of Oxonian English in his late years in America is surprising. Around 1983 he developed elocution exercises for his American students to speak with a deliberate Oxonian accent (Hayward 2008, pp. 294-296). The purpose was to develop some sort of mindfulness of speaking, rather than making everyone sound as if they were students at Oxford. The underlying irony was, of course, that the *guru* asking his students to speak in this way did not sound Oxonian at all. Although in his last talks his attempt to imitate this peculiar way of speaking can be identified, Trungpa’s accent in English might be best defined as a combination of Tibetan, Indian and American. The playful concern with accent also relates to Trungpa’s strong conviction that the English language and the culture that it had produced were perfectly suitable for expressing the Buddhist teachings. Unlike other Buddhist teachers who would recommend their students to learn an Asian language and immerse themselves in its culture, Trungpa did exactly the opposite by immersing and translating himself as a cultural and linguist subject. In this sense, he simultaneously reformulates Buddhism and Western culture as he tries to present the former in terms of the latter. Like a *tertön* he unearths ideas and customs that allegedly forgotten and re-introduces them in a fresh way.

As well as cultural adaptation and transformation Trungpa also literally translated Buddhist texts to a non-Asian context. In a sense, translation might be thought of as the axis of the whole process as Midal points out when he explains that

what [Trungpa] wanted was a change in how his students experienced language [. . .] In a context of transmitting Buddhism to the West it was necessary to open up a space so that the word could take root within language itself—so that English could start to be spoken dharmically [i.e. in a Buddhist manner].  
(2004, 97)

With the purpose of making many Tibetan Buddhist texts available in English, Trungpa set up in 1975 the Nalanda Translation Committee. The constitution of this committee resembles the group translation model chosen by Padmasambhava in the eighth century (Nyima Öser, 2004, pp. 75-97). By working with translation in a collective way, one-upmanship was avoided and a sense of negotiation was brought into the transplantation of the tradition. The translation group was made up of Buddhist practitioners who were also native English speakers, thus reproducing the model of the *lotsawa* in which a translated subject makes a good translating agent. Since some of the (especially liturgical) texts required not only to be rendered into English but also be chanted in a particular way, an applied method developed to accomplish this challenging translation. Mermelstein, one of the translators involved, describes how

[Trungpa] sometimes spent hours in the shrine room with a handful of us, experimenting with different styles of chanting, drum patterns, gong ringing, and so forth. It was a very creative and fluid process of adapting Tibetan ritual tradition to a new land and vocabulary. (2005, pp. 322-323)

Apart from the liturgies of the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages Trungpa translated life-stories like *The Life of Marpa* (1982), esoteric texts like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (2003) or the poems and songs of his spiritual predecessors, collected and published as *The Rain of Wisdom* (1999).

Parallel to all these literal processes of translation Trungpa's own transformation in terms of life and teaching style was also taking place. In fact it is this progressive path of translation that has generated more controversy, debate and censorship. Although his literal translations and overall accomplishment in transmitting the Tibetan Tantric tradition is generally praised, his behaviour is also often regarded with reservation, if not open disapproval. In academic works references to Trungpa often feature adjectives like "notorious" (McMillin, 2001, p. 184), "bizarre" (Samuel, 1995, p. 348) or "controversial" (Lopez, 1998, p. 266). Nonetheless, Trungpa's morally questionable behaviour is very relevant to this discussion on translation, since he often presented it for communicative effect. Perhaps the first event that might be regarded as a small translation in itself is Trungpa's disrobing as a monk in 1969, after a severe car accident. He saw the accident as a powerful message that expressed his "hesitation" concerning whether he was "to continue teaching by unmasking and also do away with the 'exotic' externals which were too fascinating to students in the West" (Trungpa 1966, p. 281) or to follow the more socially acceptable lifestyle of the monk. He thus abandoned his monk's robes in favour of formal English attire, including suit and tie. While this shocked many (Gimian, 2005), more outrageous was his renouncement of the monastic lifestyle. This was not only regarded as heresy but also as cultural betrayal by the Tibetan religious elite, of which Trungpa was part, at a very sensitive time, in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the preservation of old Tibet was the main concern of the Tibetan exiled establishment.

Even though Trungpa's disrobing and "madness" could well be seen as part of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of *siddhas* and *tertöns*,<sup>3</sup> his choice to give up the robes was not a very popular one at a time when the milder ideal of monasticism was identified with the recently disembodied nation. Also, shortly after disrobing, Trungpa eloped with a sixteen-year old English woman, which caused further stir in the small Tibetan community living in Britain at the time. An example of how Trungpa's actions seem to have been construed as cultural betrayal surfaces in a letter he sends to a lawyer at a time when his situation at Samye Ling, the Tibetan monastery he had co-founded with Akong Rinpoche, was precarious. The conflict between Akong's and Trungpa's approaches is evident: "He [Akong] feels that my 'becoming Western' is a 'disgrace to Tibet'" (Mukpo 2006, p. 29-30). Trungpa not only exposes the censorship to which he has been subject but also provides a passionate defence for his position, which relies more on the language of cultural translation than in that of traditional paradigms of holy madness:

my role is far deeper one than a mere cultural mission, a representative of the East in the West. I am not Tibetan but *Human* and my mission is to teach others as effectively as I can in the world in which I find myself. Therefore, I refuse to be bound by any "national" considerations

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<sup>3</sup> Some members of the establishment certainly did see Trungpa in this way, for example, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, see Khyentse, 2010.



whatsoever. And if Akong wishes to work effectively now he too must have the courage to break through his Tibetanness, to stop hiding behind our national background. (Mukpo 2006, p. 30)

When legitimising his own choices, Trungpa regards shedding national identity as an important step in transmitting Buddhism to the West. Whereas for Akong, Trungpa is both a “disgrace” to his Tibetan and Buddhist heritages, Trungpa considers them irreconcilable once Tibet has been forsaken. His choice is to transmit Buddhism to the West and to plunge into a process of cultural translation, rather than to stick to the paradigm of cultural preservation, which is still today prevalent in Tibetan exile.<sup>4</sup> Trungpa’s divergent approach, later to be followed by both Buddhist teachers and artists in the Tibetan exiled community, posed a threat to the central narrative of the Tibetan elites. Although he described in the same letter quoted above that his “very existence becomes an enormous threat to them because I am utterly without fear in this world of violent change” (Mukpo 2006, p. 26), more in the spirit of the *siddha* tradition, his project can also be seen as threatening to the cultural agenda of Tibetan exile. By disrobing, drinking heavily and having many affairs, Trungpa was debunking the stereotype of Tibetans as peaceful and abstinent monks, which was largely a Western fantasy, albeit affirmed and perpetuated by many exiled and pre-exiled Tibetan elites during the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

Such tendency to privilege the monastic over the non-monastic and certain forms of Buddhism over others was very much present in pre-1959 Tibet; however, with the Tibetan exile they acquired a new nuance, legitimated in the name of patriotism and cultural presentation. A certain image of Tibetanness was enshrined, one in which the holy madmen whose footsteps Trungpa was following were not precisely at the centre. Nonetheless Trungpa was skilful enough to gain the recognition of key figures in the Tibetan establishment. An absolutely crucial event in this process of obtaining acknowledgement was the visit of the Karmapa, the head lama of the Karma Kagyu school equal in rank to the Dalai Lama, to Trungpa’s centres in 1974. The Karmapa was both favourably impressed by Trungpa’s success in gathering and training students and somewhat reassured that his eccentricities were in line with tradition, if not with convention.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Trungpa also made great economic and organisational efforts to show the Karmapa that despite the fact that “traditional Tibetans [. . .] proclaimed that he had gone off the rails” (Hayward 2008, p. 119) he had not forgotten to show respect for and devotion to his teachers and abide by the formalities of the *Kagyu* lineage. The visit seems to have had quite an impact on Trungpa’s following, since it was one of the first occasions on which they were asked to dress formally. This was meant to show the Karmapa that Trungpa had not been dragged into hippy debauchery but instead had transformed his hippy students by introducing them to the formalities of Tibetan Buddhism.

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<sup>4</sup> A very relevant analysis of how this paradigm has become dominant in the Tibetan exile can be found in Harris 1999, p. 197. Although Harris’s analysis is applied to the artistic exilic scene, her conclusions are also very relevant to other forms of cultural expression such as the transmission of Buddhism to the West.

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting explanation of how a certain image of Tibet was maintained and confirmed by both Tibetans and non-Tibetans in film, see Hansen 2001.

<sup>6</sup> For more detail on Karmapa’s trip and its influence on Trungpa’s projects, see Mukpo 2006, pp. 177-183; Hayward 2008, pp. 110-119; Midal 2004, pp. 295-304.

Trungpa's students were dressed formally and attended an important figure in the Tibetan hierarchy with complete devotion by using Western elements, such as tuxedos instead of *chubas* and motorbikes and cars instead of horses and mules. Even the Dalai Lama visited Trungpa's centres in the USA in 1981, further confirming his work and his position in the Tibetan religious hierarchy (Midal (ed.) 2005, p. viii).

Although he eventually gained the Tibetan elites' approval, Trungpa's behaviour was not spared the disapproval of American writers and journalists. A criticism ironically resonating with that of the Tibetan elites can be found in Asher's "When Hippies Battle: The Great W. S. Merwin / Allen Ginsberg Beef of 1975" (2005), which, like Clark's *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars* or Butterfield's *The Double Mirror*, expose a lot of Trungpa's activities often silenced in the more hagiographical discussions of his life. Asher's critique resembles that of Akong's as his remark on Trungpa being "drunk on some sort of spiritual libation that probably did not come from Tibet" and his behaviour's being sarcastically deemed "all very Tibetan" instantiate. Asher's scorn hints at the fact that Trungpa's ways are far from being "Tibetan", that is, they do not conform to the stereotype of Tibetans as peaceful and abstinent monks.

Thus Asher's otherwise valid criticism falls into a problematic cultural essentialism. From this cultural perspective Trungpa could be said to be successful in disrupting stereotypes and pre-conceptions about Tibet; his behaviour certainly undermined the "pastoral" image of Tibetans,<sup>7</sup> as encouraged by Tibetan elites and as maintained in the Western imagination. Such disruption seems to express the deconstructive spirit of the *siddha*. However, unlike the historical *siddhas* whose stories were set in India or Tibet, Trungpa's unfolds in the United Kingdom and the United States. This is a context where there was no conceptual pigeonhole for the *siddha*'s madness, no set of expectations or preceding stories to help interpret Trungpa's eccentricity (Samuel 1995). Such a unique situation presents Trungpa as a doubly translated and translating subject: on one hand a *siddha* disrupting convention and on the other a Tibetan expressing his Buddhist heritage in a non-Tibetan way and context. These two parallel narratives are in a sense inseparable, since they expressed themselves at once in a single context, in the various non-Tibetan settings where Trungpa taught in unusual ways. Thus, to think that Trungpa behaved unconventionally in order to connect with the unconventional ways of the American Counterculture is to regard him as some sort of exception, ignoring the eccentric tradition in which his example is inscribed. Similarly, to construct him as an archetypical *siddha* devoid of any context is equally short-sighted, since it ignores the all-important setting that makes the *siddha*'s madness meaningful. After all, the mad *guru* is not mad *per se*; his or her madness functions as a translation device to communicate deconstructively with those who surround him or her.

To conclude, Trungpa's double journey of translation, faced with criticism at both ends of the equation, can be said both to negotiate and disrupt the two spaces it engages. Reformulating

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<sup>6</sup> I paraphrase here Alex McKay's appropriation and application of Caplan's notion of the "pastoral mode" to a Tibetan context. In McKay's words this representational mode is "a discourse in which subordinate peoples in the imperial process are represented in approving terms" (2001, 84). This is certainly true of the image of Tibetans as peaceful and well behaved monks, which was forged by British colonial agents but which is still at work today thanks, partly, to the interest of some Tibetans in maintaining such representation.

the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in a way that might be called post-Tibetan and re-interpreting Western cultural forms in order to express a Buddhist message, Trungpa's project could rightly be called hybrid. His various translations, both literal and metaphorical, can be seen as the "founding of a new culture" (Midal 2004, p. 305), inspired in certain Buddhist principles developed in Tibet but incorporating a number of cultural elements from all over the world. Midal regards England, Japan and Tibet as the three main sources of this new culture, which aims to construct "a Buddhist for the West" (2004, p. 305), although not necessarily or exclusively Western Buddhism. Thus in Trungpa's case the reformulative intent of the *tertön* who discovers or reveals old teachings in new ways becomes a cross-cultural process in which the teachings are translated into a new language and manifest through new cultural forms. Such an approach to teaching Tibetan forms of Buddhism in a non-Tibetan setting was highly innovative, since Trungpa is possibly the first—but by no means the last—*lama* to dissociate the transmission of Buddhism to the West and the politics of cultural preservation of Tibetan exile (Lopez 1998, pp. 198-199; Norbu 2001, p. 377).

Trungpa's aim did not seem to be to preserve Tibetan culture and religion by making his students Tibetan, but rather to dis-embed Buddhist ideas from a certain Tibetan context and re-embed them in a non-Tibetan context. The result of this process is the birth of a new Buddhist identity, which speaks English and expresses itself through a number of eclectic conventions. This new form of English-speaking Buddhism is nonetheless aligned with the hierarchies of Tibetan Buddhism(s), who, in turn, recognise its legitimacy as a valid outcome of some *Kagyü* and *Nyingma* lineages. Needless to say the role of translation is all-important in the forging of this new identity. In fact, Trungpa's legacy might be regarded as the combination of the metaphorical translating aspects implicit in his roles as *guru*, *siddha* and *tertön* and in his more literal translating activities concerning the English language and Western cultural forms. Both the literal and the metaphorical aspects of his translations seem to inform each other, in a constant feedback that makes Trungpa's teachings distinct and unique. Through this mutual interaction and interpenetration of Buddhist roles and translation practices, both the target and the source cultures are modified and hybridised, resulting in a new formulation that introduces innovation while negotiating alignment with tradition.

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