

# *Tibetan Women in the Prose of Tsering Yangkyi*

Riika J. Virtanen

## **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

This essay discusses the writings of Tsering Yangkyi (Tseyang, Tshe ring dbyangs skyid), a Tibetan female author. Its focus is on the female characters in her two novellas “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” (“The White Clouds of the Mountain Peaks”) and “sTon lo ser po” (“The Yellow Leaves of Autumn”). Because in both works the female protagonists take an interest in education, and both novellas depict the lives and personal growth of their main women characters, it is worth reading the two works in the light of the generic frame of female developmental stories, namely the female *Bildung*.

Before discussing the novellas, it is useful to provide some information on contemporary writing by Tibetan women authors and on the literary works of Tsering Yangkyi. I shall then discuss the genre of developmental stories and compare some of the narrative patterns in Tsering Yangkyi's two works with typical narrative patterns associated with female developmental stories in Western research. In examining “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar”, special attention will be paid to the use of the first-person narrator and how perspective affects characterization. The way in which the personal growth of the female characters is depicted is totally different in these two stories. When analysing “sTon lo ser po”, I shall pay attention to the features which appear to be contradictory to educational development and shall see how this connects to the idea of the female *Bildung*.

Tibetan works naturally reflect certain Tibetan cultural values and attitudes, which give them a different flavour than works created in the Western cultural sphere. It is therefore interesting to ask whether the novellas have certain features that are notably different from the general characteristics normally associated with the genre of the female *Bildung* as described in Western research. Does the characterization in these two Tibetan works have features that are special when compared to heroines in Western female developmental stories? I shall show that the two works under discussion can be regarded as female developmental stories, but it has to be understood at the same time that Tibetan developmental stories have their own features, too, which differ from the typical features of the Western genre. Also, when studying works of Tibetan modern literature, it has to be taken into account that the values and policies of

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Kone Foundation for support in writing this paper. I would also like to thank Prof. Heta Pyrhönen and Dr. Yangdon Dhondup for reading versions of this paper and making helpful comments, and Dr. Mark Shackleton for revising the English language of the text.

Chinese Communist rule have influenced and regulated the literary expression and range of permissible topics. Although there is not complete freedom of expression in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas nowadays in the People's Republic of China, it is possible for writers to discuss in their literary works many issues that are relevant to Tibetans and are also of interest to other readers.

### 1.1 On Tibetan contemporary women writers

There are today an increasing number of Tibetan women writers. They live in Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China, and in exile in India and other countries around the world. They write in different languages: in Tibetan, Chinese, English and also some other languages. Tsering Yangkyi is one of the best-known Tibetan women writers writing in the Tibetan language. Another well-known Tibetan female author, Oser (b. 1966, 'Od zer), writes in Chinese and has received international attention. Some years ago one of her books was banned in the PRC, which drew the attention of various organizations and groups publishing news about Tibet.<sup>2</sup> Other Tibetan women writers include Yudrug (b. 1959, g.Yu 'brug, a penname of 'Brug mo skyid), who lives in Xining, Chukye Dolma (Chu skyes sgrol ma) in northern India and Tsering Wangmo Dhompa in the United States. Yudrug's and Chukye Dolma's poetry is written in Tibetan, whereas Tsering Wangmo Dhompa's poems are in English. They have published collections of poetry<sup>3</sup> and Chukye Dolma has done research about Tibetan women and presented a paper on Tibetan exiled women writers in the IATS meeting in Königswinter.<sup>4</sup> Kelsang Lhamo (b. 1967, sKal

<sup>2</sup> For a short excerpt from Oser's poetry and some information on her, see Yangdon Dhondup 2008: 32, 57. Footnote 2 on page 57 contains several webpage addresses with information on the banning of her book. For a translation of one of her essays (Tsering Öser 2009) from Chinese into German, see the anthology of contemporary Tibetan writing titled *Flügel Schlag des Schmetterlings* edited by Alice Grünfelder. For translations of several of Oser's writings into English see "Tibet Writes: Where Tibetans Write" ([http://tibetwrites.org/?\\_Wooser\\_#pagination\\_auteurs](http://tibetwrites.org/?_Wooser_#pagination_auteurs), accessed February 16, 2012.)

<sup>3</sup> See g.Yu 'brug, *Hphi hri ri 'dabs kyi 'khreng sems* (n.d.); Chu skyes sgrol ma, *sPrin bral zla ba'i 'dzum rlabs* (1999) and Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, *Rules of the House* (Berkeley: Apogee Press, 2002) and *In the Absent Everyday* (Berkeley: Apogee Press, 2005). Some of Yudrug's poems and information about her can also be found in *bZho lung* (2005: 149–163), a collection of poetry by Tibetan women authors edited by Pelmo (dPal mo). For some information on Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, see the webpages of Apogee Press, which also contain information and excerpts from two of her works. See also Hortsang Jigme 2008: 293–294.

<sup>4</sup> The title of the paper Chukye Dolma presented in the IATS conference in Königswinter is: "bTsan byol bod kyi bud med rtsom rig skor gleng ba". The paper contains valuable information on Tibetan women writing in exile and their works. I am grateful for Chukye Dolma for kindly sending me a copy of her conference paper.

bzang lha mo or by her other name bsTan 'dzin chos 'dzin) has written a collection of stories on nun's lives with some biographical basis in the real life of nuns, which appeared in the Tibetan exile community published by AMI.<sup>5</sup> Most Tibetan women writers, whose literary medium is Tibetan, seem to be poets rather than authors of longer prose works.<sup>6</sup> In her dissertation *Caught Between Margins*, Yangdon Dhondup provides valuable information on writings by Tibetan women. She has also paid attention to non-fictional works by women such as travel writing and autobiographies (2004: 150–154). In particular, she discusses in considerable detail a novel by Medon, a Tibetan woman writer writing in Chinese, and also gives information on the works of Yangdon and Geyang (2004: 154–174). Recently, Yangzom Brauen's (b. 1980) *Eisenvogel* drew a lot of attention from Western audiences and it has been translated into Finnish as *Tiibetin tyttäret* and into English as *Across Many Mountains*. It is a work based on the real-life stories of the women of her family.<sup>7</sup>

It is a common practice for Tibetan writers to first publish their works in various literary magazines and later on publish them in book form. This applies to books which contain a collection of authors' shorter works (short stories and/or poems) and also to some longer prose works. For example, a contemporary novel *Thag ring gi sbra nag* ("A Distant Nomad Tent") by a Tibetan male author Tenpa Yargye (bsTan pa yar rgyas) first appeared as a series under a different title in *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*. Tsering Yangkyi's book *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar* ("The White Clouds of the Mountain Peaks") is a collection of her writings most of which have been published before in *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* and *sBrang char*. Contributions written by women can, for example, be found in magazines such as the two mentioned above, although contributions by male authors clearly outnumber those of women. Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani (2008: xxv) have checked the percentage of contributions by women writers in Tibetan language literary journals and found it to be about five percent. However, if we consider fictional prose works to date, Tsering Yangkyi's collection of stories, *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar* ("The White Clouds of the Mountain Peaks"), is as far as I know the first book-length collection of modern Tibetan prose by a

<sup>5</sup> The Tibetan title of her book is *Drang srong bsti gnas kyi rmi lam yun cig*. The English title, *Dreaming at the Sage's Abode: Biographical Sketches of Four Living Tibetan Nuns*, clearly points to the biographical nature of the writings, and in the beginning of her text sKal bzang lha mo also points out how her stories have their basis in real life. Some of her poems written in New York can also be found in dPal mo (ed.) 2005: 46–53.

<sup>6</sup> For information on some other Tibetan women writers, see Hortsang Jigme 2008: 290–291 and Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008: xxi, xxv.

<sup>7</sup> She also visited Helsinki in connection with the publication of the Finnish translation (2011) of her book and was interviewed in events that took place in the University of Helsinki and the Academic Bookshop.

Tibetan woman writer writing in the Tibetan language in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Thus it can be considered a remarkable achievement.

### 1.2 Tsering Yangkyi and her writings

Tsering Yangkyi (b. 1962) received her education at the Tibet University (Bod ljongs slob grwa chen mo) in Lhasa, Tibet. She works as a teacher at a Tibetan middle school in Lhasa. She is married to a well-known contemporary Tibetan writer, Tashi Palden (bKra shis dpal ldan). Her literary works include several short stories and novellas which are written in Tibetan.

Her short stories have appeared in Tibetan literary magazines, mostly in the Lhasa-published *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*. Her short story “Brag steng gi rtswa chung” (“A Small Grass on the Rock”) appeared in that journal in 1987. It tells about a young woman, Peyang (Pad dbyangs), who follows in her father’s footsteps and becomes a road worker. Engaged in the difficult and demanding work of road construction she encounters some initial difficulties but learns to take pride in her work. The theme of a woman’s development into a model worker resembles socialist realist writing.<sup>8</sup> Another of Tsering Yangkyi’s early stories is “Slob grogs kyi 'du shes” (“The Friendship of Schoolmates”), which appeared in 1990. In this story a young woman named Yangdol (dByangs sgröl) is hospitalised and has to undergo an operation. She is visited and taken care of by a former schoolmate, Lhagdor (Lhag rdor). Because of his unselfish behaviour, Yangdol realises how a person’s character is far more important than merely external appearance.

Tsering Yangkyi’s other prose works in the journal *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* are the short story “Rab rib kyi shul lam” (“The Path in Darkness”) published in 1997 and the novella “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” (“The White Clouds of the Mountain Peaks”) which appeared as a series during the years 2003–2004. “Rab rib kyi shul lam” is an interesting work about the life of a woman character Seldon (gSal sgron) and her marital relationship which ends in divorce. I will take a closer look at “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” later in this paper. In another literary magazine, *sBrang char*, Tsering Yangkyi published the short story “Las dbang” (“Fate”) in 1995, and in 1997 the award-winning short story “So nam shor ba'i ljang bu” (“The Abandoned Sprout”). “Las dbang” has a first-person narrator, Dadon (Zla sgron), who is a Tibetan woman and a teacher. The story,

---

<sup>8</sup> See Mathewson 1958/1975: 211–230 for information on the emergence and ideas connected with socialist realism in the Soviet Union in the first half of the 20th century. In general, the ideal hero of a socialist realist work appears to have been a model worker engaged in physical labour. The well-known Tibetan writer from Amdo, Dhondup Gyal (Don grub rgyal) translated into Tibetan Malchin Hüü’s short story “sNyan ngag gi rba rlabs” (“The Waves of Poetry”), which tells about a woman developing into a good tractor driver. This story also emphasises a kind of heroism attained through hard labour. The translation is found in volume 4 of Dhondup Gyal’s *Collected Works* (1997).

however, focuses more on a male character, Tenphun (bsTan phun), who has not had a chance to gain a proper education, but is very knowledgeable and manages to teach several subjects in a school in a remote area. “So nam shor ba'i ljang bu” (“The Abandoned Sprout”) has as its main character a child, a small boy called Namgyal (rNam rgyal), and it tells about the problems and lack of care that result from his parents’ divorce and the father’s addiction to gambling.

All the above prose works of Tsering Yangkyi have been collected in *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*, which is also the same title as one of its longer stories. Its short preface, titled “Sems gtam”, describes her experiences of writing as a Tibetan woman. She speaks, for instance, about the challenge of finding sufficient time for writing when balancing between one’s duties as a teacher and as a housewife. Her words throw some light on the prejudices a Tibetan woman writer meets in becoming recognized as a writer. The book also contains a previously unpublished novella, “sTon lo ser po” (“The Yellow Leaves of Autumn”), which contains a female protagonist, Peyang (Pad dbyangs), and a number of other interesting woman characters.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Tsering Yangkyi’s novellas as female developmental stories

The German word, *Bildungsroman*, usually translated as ‘developmental novel’<sup>10</sup> normally refers to a book-length work. Both Tsering Yangkyi’s stories discussed in this article are well over a hundred pages, and being the two longest works in her book they may be characterized as developmental novellas.<sup>11</sup> Below I shall discuss some features which her novellas share with features ascribed by Western critical writing to female developmental novels. However, it is not without problems to classify works coming from a Tibetan

<sup>9</sup> Tsering Yangkyi often seems to use the same names for her women characters, and Peyang and Seldon, for example, appear as the names of the heroines in more than one story.

<sup>10</sup> In the “Introduction” of a volume edited by Abel, Hirsch & Langland, *Bildungsroman* is translated as a “novel of formation”, although they use the expression “novel of female development” (1983: 4, 8) with female protagonists.

<sup>11</sup> E. M. Forster (1927/1974: 3) defined a novel as a fictitious prose work longer than 50,000 words. Tsering Yangkyi’s two novellas discussed here are approximately 38,000 syllables long. In Tibetan these two novellas are classified with the general generic classification *sgrung 'bring*, which can be translated as “novella” or literally “middle [length] story” in contrast with *sgrung thung* (“short story”) and *sgrung ring* (“novel”, literally: “long story”). In Tibetan theoretical writing *sgrung 'bring* are generally defined by their length, which is between that of a short story and a novel. According to Rinchen Tashi’s *rTsom rig gsar rtsom gyi mam bshad* (“The Commentary on Contemporary Writing”) the usual length of *sgrung 'bring* is between 20 000–100 000 syllables. He also characterizes the novella more analytically, describing it as a literary work which has a smaller number of characters, and a plot which is not highly complicated. There are fewer events than in a novel, though having said that there is not clear a distinction between these two genres of stories (*sgrung gtam*) (Rin chen bkra shis 1998: 139–140). Concerning views on the genres of contemporary Tibetan prose writing and for information on some other Tibetan novellas, see Hortsang Jigme (Hor gtsang 'jigs med) 2000: 73–74.

cultural background with a Western notion of genre, because the concept of genre seems to carry with it the idea of a group of works sharing common features and characteristics.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the length of Tsering Yangkyi's two novellas makes it possible to describe the development of a female character during the course of several years which are decisive for her education and professional career.

In *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, *Bildungsroman* is defined as follows:

A **novel** that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the **protagonist** recognizes his or her place and role in the world. (Murfin and Ray 2003: 39)

The focus is on the main character's personal growth.<sup>13</sup> Typically, rather than describing the vicissitudes of a group of people or a nationality, developmental stories focus on the depiction of the development and growth of a single individual. To be able to describe a span of development rather than a single realization in life, they are normally longer works depicting various stages in the developmental process. Female developmental novels have been studied by Esther Kleinbord Labovitz and she sees "the quest for self-development" (1988: 6) as an essential element in the genre. According to Labovitz, one of the differences between female and male *Bildungsroman* is that female developmental novels started to appear later, which she sees as connected to the actual life situations of women and the availability of education for women (1988: 6–7). The classic Western female developmental novel is, of course, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, first published in 1847.<sup>14</sup> If we think of stories of women's personal growth and education in a Tibetan context, their appearance has likely to do with the improvement of women's education and women getting the opportunity to go to school and institutes of higher learning.<sup>15</sup> This is a relatively recent development in Tibetan society and there are still many Tibetan women who are illiterate. Although the stories are fictive, their realistic

<sup>12</sup> For Western theoretical discussions of genre and its function in the context of literary studies, see Pyrhönen (2007: 109–110) and Fowler (1982/2002: 37–44).

<sup>13</sup> For information on female developmental stories and also on the general generic features that are characteristic to both female and male *Bildungsroman*, see the editors' "Introduction" in Abel, Hirsch and Langland (eds.) 1983: 11–14. Some other research works on developmental fiction include Maria Lival-Lindström's *Mot ett eget rum* (2009), which discusses female developmental novels written in Swedish in Finland and Kaisa Ilmonen's article (2009) on the developmental novel in the Caribbean cultural context.

<sup>14</sup> About *Jane Eyre*, see, for instance, Karen E. Rowe's article "Fairy-born and human-bred": *Jane Eyre's Education in Romance* in Abel et al. 1983: 69–89.

<sup>15</sup> On the connection between availability of education and women's writing, see Yangdon Dhondup 2004: 146–147. For information on women's education and professional lives in Tibet, see *Women in the Land of Snow* (1995: 9, 58) and its many photos of Tibetan women in different professions.

style of representation means they can be understood to reflect to some extent the general conditions of society and women's lives.

Of course, there are also examples of earlier Tibetan narratives in which women experience growth and development, namely the *rnam thars* of female religious practitioners. The development they experienced was aimed towards the spiritual goals of achieving liberation and enlightenment.<sup>16</sup> But I am only concerned with modern secular works of fiction in which the goals of characters are related to everyday worldly life rather than spiritual practice. There are also some memoirs by Tibetan women in exile written in English.<sup>17</sup> In these works the women tell about their own experiences of life and thus they differ from the fictional works discussed in this article. Tibetan secular fictional works sharing features with Western female developmental stories started to appear much later than in the West.

Tibetan modern literature contains some developmental stories written by Tibetan male authors. Tenpa Yargye's (bsTan pa yar rgyas) "rTswa thang gi glag phrug" ("The Young Eagle of the Grassland") is a short story which tells how a Tibetan nomad boy progresses in his education and career as a teacher in Byang thang (Northern Plain).<sup>18</sup> A novella by Tashi Palden (bKra shis dpal ldan) titled "rGyud skud steng gi nam shes" tells about the life of a Tibetan woman from her youth to old age. She gets her living by wandering around playing the lute and dancing and later attains recognition as a folk artist.

After the occupation of Tibet in 1959, Tibetan literature received literary influences from China. Socialist realism, originating from Russian literature, influenced Tibetan modern writing in its first decades. Socialist realist writing tends to glorify the achievements of ordinary people in their work. The influence of socialist realism is present, for example, in the characterization and plot of Peljor's (dPal 'byor) novel *gTsug g.yu* ("Head Turquoise") as Franz Xaver Erhard (2011: 427) points out. In typical socialist realism characters coming from ordinary backgrounds are usually represented as heroes as contrasted to the members of the upper class, who are typically depicted in a negative light.

---

<sup>16</sup> For information about female religious practitioners, see, for instance, Schaeffer 2005 and Diemberger 2007. The *rnam thar* of Nangsa Obum (sNang sa 'od 'bum), who after becoming a *'das log* practised religion, became so famous that it is used as a libretto for a Lhamo opera. *'Das log* is used to refer to a person who is believed to have experienced death but has then returned to life.

<sup>17</sup> For information on these memoirs and how they were written down by others, see Yangdon Dhondup 2004: 151–153. Among these memoirs Rinchen Dolma Taring's (Phreng ring rin chen sgröl ma) autobiography, *Bod kyi bu mo*, was translated from English into Tibetan by Tsewang Tamdrin (Tshe dbang rta mgrin) and published by LTWA in Dharamsala in 2000 (Oral history series no. 11).

<sup>18</sup> The real-life inspiration and basis for this story is given under the title. The boy eventually became the Secretary (*hru'u ci*) Nagtho (Nag tho) of the 1st Middle School of Nagchu district.

In order to gain a better understanding of the various influences which affect the depiction of characters in modern Tibetan literature, it is interesting to see whether the socialist realist style has also affected characterization in Tibetan developmental stories of the 21st century.

Both Tsering Yangkyi's novellas deal with the issue of becoming a medical doctor. The idea of a woman studying and attaining a high educational standard is, of course, empowering. However, in one of the novellas the main character becomes a doctor, but in the other novella she fails in her goal. One question I shall later discuss in this article is whether "sTon lo ser po" ("The Yellow Leaves of Autumn") can also be regarded as a developmental novella, despite the fact that the protagonist Peyang (Pad dbyangs) seems to fail to realize her dreams.

### **2.1 "Ri rtse'i sprin dkar" ("The White Clouds of the Mountain Peaks"): A Novella on the educational career of a young Tibetan woman**

Tsering Yangkyi's novella "Ri rtse'i sprin dkar" first appeared as a four-part series in the literary magazine *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*.<sup>19</sup> Later in 2007 it was published in her collection of writings *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*.<sup>20</sup> The novella has seven numbered chapters and has a total length of 111 pages in the book edition. Its contents, generic features and main characters share features with female developmental stories. This work can also be categorised as an educational story (*Erziehungsroman*) because it describes a character's educational career from childhood to the attainment of a higher educational degree.

The novella has two main women characters: Seldon (gSal sgron) and Pasang Bhuti (Pa sangs bu khrid). Seldon is a girl from a remote village in gTsang named Phunub (Phu nub), whose educational career and growth from a ten-year-old illiterate child to early adult professional life as a medical doctor is the main theme of the work. The other female character, Pasang Bhuti, is a young teacher who arrives to Phunub. The village has never had a school before and the children spend their time taking care of the village animals. The location of the village is described as being so remote that it is inaccessible to cars, and people have to ride there by donkey. The novella tells about the progress that Seldon makes in her studies from her early reading to her later working as an assistant teacher and then to higher medical studies in China, where she starts her work in a hospital. The story also recounts the challenges and obstacles she meets. The growth and progress Seldon makes forms the main "developmental

<sup>19</sup> It appeared in issues nr. 4, 5 and 6 of 2003 and nr.1 of 2004 of *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal*. The part of the work in issue 2003: 5 is illustrated by beautiful photos of the Tibetan mountain environment, houses, people and animals living there, whereas issues 2003: 4 and 2004: 1 are not illustrated (I have not been able to obtain issue 2003: 6).

<sup>20</sup> For my readings of this Tsering Yangkyi's novella, I have used its edition included in her book (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 130–241).

plot” of the story, but, at the same time, the story is also a portrait of a Tibetan woman teacher, Pasang Bhuti, who is devoted to her job of teaching Tibetan children.

### 2.1.1 The two women characters: issues of narration and perspective

These two women characters – the young Seldon and her teacher Pasang Bhuti – are depicted very differently on account of the different narrative and focalization techniques. The story is narrated by a first-person narrator, Seldon. In narratology the kind of narrator who tells about the progress of his/her own life is known as an autodiegetic narrator (see Page 2007: 197 and Neumann and Nünning 2008/2011: 93–94). Seldon tells about her own life in the style of autobiographical fiction. This gives a feeling of subjective experience to the novella, but it can be understood that the character is both a subject and an object in the narration of her more adult self. This kind of double role that narrators can take has received some attention from narratologists (see, e.g., Rimmon-Kenan 1983/1984: 94–96). First-person narrators may function on two levels: on the one hand they are narrators who tell the story and on the other hand they can also be a character in the story world. This is the case in “*Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*”, in which Seldon is both the narrator and one of the main characters. The individual self of her character (*nga*) is often extended to a collective “us” (*nga tsho*) when she tells about her experiences with a group of other children in the village.

This progression of Seldon’s character into the older Seldon who tells about what has happened to Seldon as a child becomes evident when we look at the way in which the time of the story events is indicated. Most of the narration does not occur simultaneously with the events of the story, for the narrator usually recounts what happens only later in time. This is evident when she tells about events that happened in her childhood, frequently using words which locate her story in the past. These kinds of words are, for instance, *de dus* (“that time”), *de'i skabs* or *skabs der* (“then”) or *de nyin* (“that day”).<sup>21</sup> Occasionally, she also uses words which reveal that she speaks about events that occurred earlier in her life. When speaking about her first school day and the temporary school environment within a sheep fence (*lug ra*), she comments: “Since that moment in time is still vividly clear in my mind, how could I forget it?”, and these words bring a sensation of remembrance of past events.<sup>22</sup> The past tense form of the verbs is also commonly used in her narration.

However, in some passages the narration gives the impression of being more immediate and closer to the events reported and this impression is created, for example, by the use of the progressive tense, exclamations and speech by

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Tshe rings dbyangs skyid 2007: 141, 143, 154, 155, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 154. In Tibetan: *skabs de'i tshul de da lta'ang nga'i sems pa'i nang phra lham mer gsal nas yod pas brjed ga la srid*.

characters or even the words “now” (*da lta*) and “today” (*de ring*) etc. occur sometimes.<sup>23</sup> However, the connection of the events to the past is usually indicated in the beginning of chapters which include some information on the time of the events told in it, for example, the first chapter starts with information on time: “The summer of that year when I had reached the age of ten the news that a woman teacher from another area would be coming to our place, spread in [our] area and this continued for some days”.<sup>24</sup> Some other time indications in the beginning of chapters include, for instance, “the winter of that year” (*lo de'i dgun kha*), “a spring day” (*dpyid ka'i nyin zhig*) and “summer months arrived” (*dbyar gyi nam zla shar ba*).<sup>25</sup>

To understand the basic difference in how the two woman characters are depicted in the work, it is necessary to pay attention to perspective. The two main women characters are viewed from different perspectives. This has an effect on the presentation of information about them. The concept of the focalizer comes from the narratological research tradition and is useful for understanding how the perspective(s) of literary works are constructed (see, for example, Neumann and Nünning 2008/2011: 31–32 and Jahn 2007: 94–102). Manfred Jahn describes a focalizer as a “perspectival filter”. Focalization can be of several types in literary works. One important difference is between external and internal focalization (see Rimmon-Kenan 1983/1984: 74–75). In “*Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*” events are represented from Seldon’s perspective. Because of this perspective, the other woman character, the teacher Pasang Bhuti, is throughout described from the outside, based on the way she looks, speaks and acts. However, because of Seldon’s double role as both narrator and a character, it is not easy to draw a clear line between focalization through the character of the younger and the older Seldon.

There are indicators that in a spatial sense Seldon as a character functions as an internal focalizer. For example, there are words connected with localization in space that place Seldon’s consciousness in the centre of the narration. It is through her eyes that the story world is perceived. For example, when the teacher and her pupils cross an icy river, the pronoun *tshur* indicates the side of the river where Seldon is in opposition to the word *phar khar* “to the other side of the river”.<sup>26</sup> When she departs from the village for studies in China she tells how she looked back and saw how the distance between her and the village and her familiar people became bigger and how they waved to her.<sup>27</sup> Seldon mainly tells about events and people which she is able to perceive in the same area or

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Tshe rings dbyangs skyid 2007: 132, 133, 146.

<sup>24</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 130: *nga lo bcu la son pa'i lo de'i dbyar kha go thos la nga tsho'i yul du sa cha gzhan nas yin pa'i dge rgan bu mo zhig yong gi red ces lung pa'i nang sbir grags che tsam byung nas nyin shas 'das*.

<sup>25</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 172, 178, 196.

<sup>26</sup> See Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 174–175.

<sup>27</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 215.

building, and when the other characters exit that area, the supply of “direct” information on them also stops. Seldon as the perceiving subject, gains a restricted amount of information on others’ thoughts and emotions and what happens to them when they are outside her field of observation. Although Seldon, the narrator, can be considered to know all the contents of her story already when she starts to tell it, information is generally presented in amounts that are accessible to the character Seldon at that moment of the story time when she is located in different episodes.

The use of internal visual and spatial focalization restricts the information and its presentation. Rimmon-Kenan has observed that focalization has several facets and one of them he calls the “perceptual facet”, which is related to space and time (1983/1984: 77–78). Because of this story internal perspective present in the novella, the reader can only develop an idea of the character of the teacher gradually. On many occasions the teacher’s appearance and clothing – she is usually dressed in shirt and trousers – are described in considerable detail. There are also depictions on how she teaches, speaks and sometimes departs and arrives from trips outside the village, but we do not get “first hand”, direct knowledge about her when she exits from Seldon’s view. Because Seldon’s perspective, much more information is offered on how the teacher looks on various occasions, whereas we do not learn much about Seldon’s appearance. Instead, she provides information on her own thoughts and feelings, whereas any information on the teacher’s emotions are presented as interpreted and filtered by Seldon observing her teacher. The detailed descriptions of the teacher apparently reflect the attention and admiration with which her young pupil keenly follows her. When Seldon starts her school education, she depicts her teacher as “a most beautiful young woman”.<sup>28</sup> In this work, the perspective is that of a woman who observes the world and other people, especially her woman teacher, and this narrative strategy could be considered as giving some “feminine” flavour to the work.

The spatial and visual focalization is often extended to that of the group of children to which Seldon belongs. An example of this kind of collective focalization is clear in the passage in which she tells about the teacher arriving in the village after a trip. This is underlined by the mountainous environment of the fictional world resembling in its realist style that of Tibetan mountain sceneries. Here is an excerpt in which Seldon witnesses the teacher arriving in the village from a sudden trip:

“Look! A person appeared from the mountain pass below!” “It looks like [our] teacher!” We all jumped down from the rock and ran towards that person. When we approached that person, the familiar shape became clearer in our eyes and our steps also became faster. It really is her! Her

---

<sup>28</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 155–156.

face was pale, her eyes swollen and even her always red lips had turned white and had become dry. (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 191–192)<sup>29</sup>

The children are the perceiving consciousnesses. First they see only a shape of a person whose identity is confirmed only after she gets closer to them. From this passage it is also evident how the view of the teacher is perceived from outside – it is only several years after that Seldon hears from elsewhere an explanation about the tragic events that had caused the teacher’s sad and devastated appearance at that time.

However, in addition to the internal visual focalization, some features of the narration suggest that the focalization is sometimes divided between internal and external focalization. In addition to the perceptual facet of focalization, Rimmon-Kenan mentions the psychological and ideological facets of focalization. The psychological facet can be further divided into cognitive and emotive components (1983/1984: 79–82). In the narration, Seldon’s emotions are often described, thus the emotive component is internally focalized. However, the cognitive component can have features which may be supplied either from the experiencing self or the narrating self, or sometimes from both. On some occasions the thoughts of her younger self are described, however, on some other occasions some wider kind of retrospective knowledge appears to be present. In the novella, the informative structure (how much information the reader is provided with at a certain time) is mainly regulated through the character (= how much she knows at a certain time), although the narrator at the time of telling knows her story in its entirety. However, at the level of understanding and thinking it is not easy to judge whether these belong to Seldon, the character, or Seldon, the narrator, and this remains ambiguous in many places in the text. Seldon sometimes seems to possess a wider understanding of a situation or the significance of an event than would appear possible for a child of her age, which suggests the presence of external retrospective focalization in the form of adding some cognitive information or colouring. But it is difficult to draw any definite limitation on the understanding typical to different ages because the time difference is not so vast, and Seldon is over ten when she starts her studies.

Occasionally some additional information is presented on the actions of characters or the conditions in the village, and so on. For example, Seldon tells how one morning the dogs were barking unusually loudly. The sound is

---

<sup>29</sup> In Tibetan: “*khong tsho ltos dang/ ri zur ma nas mi rkyang zhig thon song*” “*rgan lags 'dra po 'dug*” *nga tsho tshang ma brag steng nas bab ste mi rkyang de'i phyogs su rgyugs phyin/ mi rkyang de dang thag je nyer 'gro skabs rgyus mnga' yod pa'i gzugs dbyibs de mig nang je gsal du song ba dang nga tsho'i gom pa yang je mgyogs su gyur/ dngos gnas khong red 'dug khong gi bzhin ras thal ba don pa dang mig gnyis skrangs shing tha na rgyun du dmar phig phig gi mchu sgros kyang dkar por gyur te mchu dreg chags 'dug* (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 191–192).

something perceived by the character, but then she also supplies information about how the teacher had gone from door to door to gather pupils for the school and also even reports some excuses of the parents when they did not wish to send their children to school.<sup>30</sup> Thus part of the information is supplied by a retrospective narrator. The presence of comments that could be understood to be based on her later understanding add information to the narration; these comments are supplied retrospectively by the elder Seldon telling her story. In chapter three we have the following passage:

We only receive candy once a month from the teacher. Sucking the candy while eating it we are sensing not only in our mouths, but in our minds, too, its sweet flavour. Not even daring to throw away the candy wraps, we fold them and gather them in our schoolbags and later use them as bookmarks. Even when [I] think about that now, I think that those candies were the tastiest nectar in this world, even sweeter than honey. (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 172)<sup>31</sup>

In this passage the verb “to sense” or “to feel” (*tshor ba*) is marked with the particle indicating progressivity of action (*gyin*) and the focalization can be understood to be through the children enjoying the taste of candy. However, in the last sentence it is clearly indicated that the sweetness of the memory of the taste of the candies is filtered here through the consciousness of the adult narrator located at a time distant from that of enjoying the candies. Here the focalization seems to shift between that of the character(s) and that of the narrator.

It could be said that focalization in this work is divided between internal and external focalization. Internal focalization limits the information presented at the time and controls the spatial and visual perspective inside the story world. The part of external cognitive focalization retrospectively filtered through the narrator, the adult Seldon, provides some mature views and background information to the events, colouring them sometimes with characteristics of adult understanding.

### 2.1.2 Representation of characters and relation to thematic content

The style of Tsering Yangkyi’s writing is realistic. The mountain environment depicted in the story has a real-world resemblance to mountainous locations in

<sup>30</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 160–161.

<sup>31</sup> In Tibetan: *rgyun du ni zla rer rgan lags kyis nga tshor byin pa'i bye ril de rang yin/ nga tshos bye ril de 'jib 'jib yag po byas te dang dod byas te za skabs kha tsam ma zad sems nang du'ang bye ril gyi bro ba mngar mo de tshor gyin yod la/ tha na bye ril gyi pags pa yang g.yugs mi phod par ltebs brtsegs brgyab ste dpe khug nang gsog pa dang rjes su de dag deb kyi rtags la bed spyod byed kyi yod/ da lta bsam na'ang bye ril de dag 'jig rten 'di'i steng sbrang rtsi las mngar ba'i bro ba che shos kyi bdud rtsi zhig yin snyam/ (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 172).*

the Tibet Autonomous Region. The characters resemble persons one might see in such environments. The mimetic representations of the characters include information about their appearance, nature and way of behaving, talking, thinking and feeling. Chapter two of the novella helps the reader to gain some idea of Seldon's character in her childhood. Her character is described both through her self-representation and her reporting how she is viewed by others. The reader may form an opinion about her nature based on the information she provides on her behaviour, and way of acting and feeling in her childhood.

A particular thing I have is being brave. When we have been playing hide and seek and however late it has become and however dark it might be after sunset, because I am not afraid of either gods or spirits, I take [my] timid friends who are no braver than a cat to the doors of their homes, and after they have gone inside, I return whistling along the narrow paths to home. (Tsering Yangkyi 2007: 137)<sup>32</sup>

It becomes clear from here that Seldon considers herself more courageous than other children in her village. Some elder characters are depicted discussing who should remain with the teacher in the isolated commune house during her first night in the village. Because Seldon is not afraid of the dark, she offers to stay with her. However, the teacher prefers to stay alone. In connection with this the text has a long flashback to past events that preceded the story time, which function to illustrate Seldon's character in her childhood.<sup>33</sup>

In the flashback Seldon narrates how she and other children were supposed to look after the cows, but instead they were playing and the cows caused damage. This is discussed in the meeting of the commune and the narrator Seldon describes her own cleverness in making a plan about how to handle the situation. Thus she views herself as clever and resourceful. However, she is not depicted as ideal in her behaviour, and adults think her wild.

Reflecting on the purpose of including the flashback and its function, one might consider whether her bravery and wildness contribute to her ability to be successful in her studies. One wonders whether wildness and boyishness<sup>34</sup> in girls are qualities that according to traditional Tibetan views would be

---

<sup>32</sup> In Tibetan: *nga la khyad chos shig yod pa ni blo khog che ba de yin/ lha dang 'dre zer bar nga rang skrag ma myong bas mtshan mo gab res 'ub res kyi rtsed mo rtse nas phyi po ga tshod chags na'ang 'dra/ sa rub ste gnam ga tshod nag kyang ngas zhi mi'i snying las med pa'i rogs pa snying med de tsho so so'i khyim gyi sgo khar skyel ba dang khong tsho nang la 'dzul rjes nga rang gcig pu si glu len gyin srang lam gu dog po de tsho brgyud de khyim la log 'gro gi yod/* (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 137)

<sup>33</sup> See Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 138–151.

<sup>34</sup> In the dialogue in the novella, the village head Gyelpo (*tud krang rGyal po*) addresses Seldon as “you girl, who looks like a boy” (*bu mo bu'i bzo 'dra khyod la...*) (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 137–138).

considered ideal or desirable. Thus the text would seem to break with stereotypical views of suitable behaviour for young girls. It can be also thought that the flashback functions to supply information about the qualities of Seldon's character at a stage before her character becomes moulded by schooling. How the young Seldon behaves and handles a difficult situation gives the reader an idea about her courage and ability to make decisions. The courageous nature of her character can be connected to her ability to accept and make proper use of her chance to engage in higher studies. She is depicted as the first woman to leave her village to pursue modern, medical studies. Therefore, the attribute of courage functions both in a mimetic and thematic way. It contributes to the way we imagine the fictional person Seldon and also equips her with a character trait which makes it possible for her to proceed in her studies without hesitation and doubt.

Furthermore, telling about the activities of the children herding cows creates a contrast with their later situation. Earlier there was no school in the village, but after the arrival of a teacher they become pupils in the new school and learn to read. The description of children reading newspapers to the villagers from the rooftops of their houses<sup>35</sup> underlines the improvements that education can bring to people's lives.

The obstacles the teacher faces when starting her work are far harder in a remote village than in some other places where there is already an established school system. The strength of character and determination of both Pasang Bhuti and Seldon become very evident for the reader in chapter 4. It describes how the teacher and the pupils have to engage in hard physical labour to have a school. Entirely on her own initiative Pasang Bhuti starts to collect stones for the building and the children follow suit. This reflects the teacher's ability to think independently and her ability to take action. The idea of collecting stones brings to mind the hardships Milarepa had to face almost a thousand year ago when Marpa made him collect stones to build a tower.<sup>36</sup> However, the difference is that here the teacher comes up with the idea herself and the children wish to help her.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> See Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 184–185.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 2: "Ordeals" in *The Life of Milarepa*. Translated by Lobsang P. Lhalungpa (1977/1985: 47–70).

<sup>37</sup> The educational situation and conditions depicted in the novella could well resemble the situation of some village schools in quite recent times. A Western reader might be surprised at the description of the teacher and students carrying stones which will be used to build a school house. However, in his article Robert Barnett reports similar information gained from a Tibetan woman in exile, who had before been assigned to work as a teacher in a village in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Her real-life story tells about the same kind of difficulties as are described in Tsering Yangkyi's story: the difficulty of gathering pupils for the school, the difficulties related to the location and the state of the school building and the lack of proper equipment, such as furniture and a blackboard, etc. (Barnett 2005: 320–322).

In addition to the story the teacher and pupils are depicted as going to the upper slopes of the mountain to gather the wood (*dral ma*)<sup>38</sup> needed for building. This scene illustrates both the hardships the teacher and pupils encounter when building the school and shows the character of Seldon as compassionate and determined. Collecting the wood involves having to cross an icy mountain stream in cold, snowy winter weather. Because of the young age of the children, the teacher carries them to the other side of the stream. Out of concern for the teacher Seldon starts to help her. Here the narrating character herself tells about her feelings of compassion and pity when seeing blood coming from the teacher's leg, tormented by the icy water. After Seldon has helped her, the teacher tells her she is "good, intelligent and direct in character" and comments that she would be a source of pride if she could go to a school in town. Seldon narrates that she noticed silent admiration in the attitude of the other children towards her.<sup>39</sup> This scene tells a great deal about the character of the protagonists and also contributes to the theme of education, highlighting the importance of education even at the cost of facing heavy physical hardships and difficult conditions, such as having to cross icy streams for the sake of building a school.

The majority of actions of the two main characters described in the novella have to do with school and education-related activities. This focus, of course, contributes to the construction of the narrative and the theme of education. When the characters are depicted in action or tell about their experiences and views about these activities, the narration often contributes to both the mimetic representation of the main characters and the thematic development of the story.

### **2.1.3 The narrative pattern of apprenticeship in a Tibetan context – the question of role models**

The description of apprenticeship is one of the typical narrative patterns of the developmental novel (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 1983: 11), and this narrative pattern can also be found in Tsering Yangkyi's novella. Thus, after Seldon has managed to learn some basic things in school, she starts to help the teacher by working as an assistant teacher. Pasang Bhuti's role is to act as Seldon's mentor. Depicting an educational career and a person receiving guidance from a mentor are frequently-found features in developmental stories. According to Labovitz, receiving guidance from a mentor is more typical in male than in female developmental novels (1986: 24). Notably, the role of guide in Tsering Yangkyi's novella is given to another female, which is a feminist feature of the

---

<sup>38</sup> According to Melvyn C. Goldstein's *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*, *gral ma* means "beam, rafter" (1975: 204) and the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* gives *gral ma* as an alternative spelling for *dral ma* (1993: 1324). A Tibetan informant explained to me that *dral ma* is "a kind of bush".

<sup>39</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 175–177.

work: a female pupil is not guided by a man, but rather by an exemplary female figure.<sup>40</sup> The importance of the woman teacher as a mentor and a role model becomes clear when the first person-narrator tells about her initial motivation for going to school:

When I heard those talks, although I did not know whose words one could rely on, but because if I wanted to go to school I could stay with the woman teacher, I developed a strong wish that the school would start soon. (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 154)<sup>41</sup>

From these words it becomes evident that Seldon has a strong admiration for the woman teacher, which helps her take an interest in schooling. She describes her first school day as a crucial day in her life (154). Also the attitude of another woman character, her mother, is depicted as supportive: she does not have anything against her going to school (unlike many other parents of the community in the novella) (165). Seldon's admiration is also demonstrated in the way she waits outside for her teacher when she has travelled away from the village to be able to see her arriving through the mountain path (168–169). Here the author has depicted a role model for a Tibetan woman that differs from the traditional ones.

Traditionally, apart from the roles of women as wives and mothers, women could also become nuns and religious practitioners. Some Buddhist practitioners had spiritual persons as female role models. Kurtis R. Schaeffer mentions the role models for a 17th–18th century nun Ugyen Choekyi (O rgyan chos skyid) as Nangsa Obum, Machig Labdron and Gelongma Pelmo. Ugyen Choekyi also had a female mentor (2005: 92). In Tsering Yangkyi's novella the female role model is a secular person. The teacher functions as a role model for Seldon, and Seldon herself, during the course of the work, develops into a role model for potential Tibetan women readers of the work. Both Pasang Bhuti and Seldon can function as exemplary models of women who are educated and devoted to their studies and professional work.

Significantly, Tsering Yangkyi has depicted strong women characters who are deeply interested in education and women who function as role models for others. This choice of characters gives the work a feminist touch and makes it especially interesting for women readers who can easily identify with the female characters.

---

<sup>40</sup> However, in an earlier short story by Tsering Yangkyi, "Brag steng gi rtswa chung", the heroine's father acts as her role model.

<sup>41</sup> In Tibetan: *skad cha de dag nga'i rna bar go skabs khong tsho su'i skad cha la cha 'jog byed dgos min ma shes na'ang slob grwar song na a cag rgan lags dang mnyam du sdod rgyu yod pas slob grwa mgyogs tsam tshugs rgyu'i 'dun pa chen po skyes* (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 154).

The picture of the two women may appear almost too ideal to the reader. Seldon is even depicted winning a running contest, and at the end of the novella she sees Pasang Bhuti on television – on this occasion dressed in traditional Tibetan dress – receiving a prize for good teaching.<sup>42</sup> Admittedly, when having to adjust to studies in China, Seldon has some problems because of the standard of her educational background, but working hard she manages to overcome the difficulties.<sup>43</sup> This “model nature” of Seldon as a student and Pasang Bhuti as a devoted teacher leads one to reflect whether the characterization in this novella could have received some influence from the characters in socialist realist writing, which have sometimes been called “positive heroes”?<sup>44</sup>

It is usual for the heroes of socialist realist works to come from the common people. This applies to Seldon, whose family are ordinary villagers. Pasang Bhuti’s family background, however, is more obscure. Seldon tells that they only knew that she was “a girl born from a family whose origin was not clean”.<sup>45</sup> The novella does not explain what is meant by an “unclean” family background, and there could be two possible interpretations. One is connected to traditional Tibetan views that some families were considered to belong to a lower class (*rigs ngan*) because of their profession, such as blacksmiths or butchers.<sup>46</sup> The other possibility would be to understand it not as referring to ideas connected to “uncleanliness”, but as merely referring to a background that was held to be problematic in a socialist society after the occupation of Tibet. For example, people positioned higher in traditional Tibet, such as landowners with property, became a disfavoured group in the new context of a socialist society.<sup>47</sup> Although the novella happens in the time when the context would be that of a Tibetan society under Chinese Communist rule, however, the traditional interpretation could also be possible as old beliefs and conceptions are difficult to remove from people’s thinking and might continue to cause discrimination long after the abandonment of a former system and the change

---

<sup>42</sup> Tshe ring dbyang skyid 2007: 239–240.

<sup>43</sup> Tshe ring dbyang skyid 2007: 227–228.

<sup>44</sup> See Mathewson 1958/1975: 345, in which he has quoted an excerpt from a work by Andrei Sinyavsky (under the pseudonym Abram Tertz) titled *The Trial Begins, Fantasticheskii*, where he uses the expression “positive hero”, speaking about his “incomparable positiveness”.

<sup>45</sup> Tshe ring dbyang skyid 2007: 167: *gzhi khungs gtsang ma med pa'i khyim tshang nas skyes pa'i bu mo*.

<sup>46</sup> Chandra Das’s *Tibetan-English Dictionary* mentions these two groups in its explanation of the term *rigs ngan* (1902/1991: 1180). Sir Charles Bell’s *The People of Tibet* also contains information about certain groups of people whose social status was considered low in traditional Tibetan society. In the chapter in which he writes about beggars, he also tells about people called *'dre dkar*, who were performers, and then a group called *ro rgyab pa*, who took care of corpses (1928/1968: 136–138).

<sup>47</sup> For information on the class divisions that were used to classify people in Tibetan areas after the Chinese communist occupation of Tibet, see Smith 1996/1997: 401, 475.

into a new one. In the novella, the village head (*tud krang*) conjectures that her background might have meant that the teacher was sent to work in a remote area. The class backgrounds of the two women characters differ, but they are both depicted as excellent in their studies and profession. Seldon could be thought as a positive hero in a sense of being an ordinary person who attains success based on her own hard work. Although we do not know for certain about the meaning of Pasang Bhuti's background, her character is depicted as exemplary, devoting her time and energy to educational work. Therefore it can be said that the work presents the importance of women's education for all at a general level.

However, in the strive for development there are certain features which distinguish it from the Western idea of individual personal development. In her discussion of the *Bildungsroman*, Labovitz has described the quest of the protagonist with expressions such as "self-realization" and "self-discovery" conveying the idea of the search for a special inner potential of the individual (1986/1988: 88–96, 116). However, this does not exclude the interest of the protagonist toward society and serving others (101, 109, 113). After discovering her true self, the heroine can assume her task and role in society. She also mentions an association of education with the concept of freedom (98).

In Tsering Yangkyi's novella the idea of self-discovery is not mentioned, although the novella focuses on the education of an individual person. Clearly, there is the aim of personal development for which the protagonist strives with energy and determination. However, the cultural values are different in Tibetan society. In Tibetan Buddhism, the existence of an independent self is denied at the ultimate level. According to the values of a socialist society, on the other hand, the emphasis is placed on serving the society. Describing Western works of female *Bildung*, Labovitz writes: "The road from 'nothingness' to selfhood is traversed in the quest" (1986/1988: 248). Stressing the discovery of a lost self does not sound appropriate to describe development in a Tibetan context. Of course, in a Tibetan Buddhist philosophical context, too, the existence of a conventional type of self (*nga*) is accepted, but it is not ultimately held to exist.<sup>48</sup> However, the process for development is anyway there because during the course of her studies Seldon progresses through stages of education and develops an identity first as a student, then as an assistant teacher and finally as a doctor. Cultural values do not underline the construction of a unique

---

<sup>48</sup> For the 14th Dalai Lama's explanation about the Buddhist philosophical views about selflessness, see the chapter "Self and Selflessness" in a book of his speeches, *Kindness, Clarity and Insight*. In his explanation, he makes textual references to important Buddhist textual sources on emptiness, such as the Heart Sūtra (Tib. *Shes rab snying po*) and Nāgārjuna's *Fundamental Treatise on the Middle Way* (His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso 1997: 157–167).

“selfhood”, but the significance of the development of an exemplary individual who can contribute to the general development of society is given importance.<sup>49</sup>

In Tsering Yangkyi’s work the idea of benefiting others by means of one’s own education is present. This connects the idea of personal development to that of serving society and working to improve it. In the novella Seldon is depicted as open-minded and determined. When opportunities to study are given her by society, she accepts them and makes good use of them. She has a genuine interest in both her own studies and also in helping others to learn. In chapter five there is a scene in which the village head speaks to Seldon and her classmate Dorje when they have worked as assistant teachers during Pasang Bhuti’s absence. He speaks about the importance of educating people from their own village so that they could later work as teachers in their home region. Seldon tells how she understood his meaning. Later on she is depicted as dreaming of becoming a teacher (2007: 190–191, 201). Because she receives the opportunity to do medical studies, she becomes a doctor; however, the profession of a doctor is also connected to the idea of helping and working for the benefit of other people.

These ideals of serving society and working for its development also accord with the norms for the choice of topics which govern writing in a socialist society.<sup>50</sup> When thinking about the idea of development in a work which was written in a Tibetan society under the normative influence of Communist ideology, development has to be understood in some aspects differently than in the Western democratic context. Labovitz connects the development of heroines in Western works with ideas of gaining freedom. In Tsering Yangkyi’s work, the characters do not appear to seek a special kind of freedom, but do studies for the sake of learning to become literate, attaining a professional identity and for the sake of the improvement of society. But no doubt, attaining an education provides Seldon with a more personal kind of freedom, as it opens up to her the possibility of having a professional career and also widens the area of her existence in space, making possible her movement between her village located in the TAR and urban environments in mainland China. Furthermore, the idea of working non-egoistically for the benefit of others is also connected with Buddhist values.<sup>51</sup> The lack of stress on personal, unique achievement is

---

<sup>49</sup> Ilmonen (2009: 9–12) has pointed out the presence of the idea of collective *Bildung* in Caribbean developmental novels. The lack of emphasis on the individuality of *Bildung* and the presence of the notion of the collectivity of the self can be seen as a feature in developmental novels coming from non-Western cultural backgrounds.

<sup>50</sup> The idea of the need of literary works, too, to promote socialist values was presented in Mao’s *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art* (Smith 1996/1997: 557).

<sup>51</sup> An Indian Sanskrit work that has been translated into Tibetan and is cherished among Tibetan Buddhists is Shantideva’s *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*. In it is described the altruistic ideal of a bodhisattva who dedicates all his energies to benefit others. For Dalai Lama’s explanation on altruism, see His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso (1997: 32–44).

demonstrated in the words of the village head when he and Pasang Bhuti tell Seldon about the chance to study in China: he wishes to work together with the teacher, so that “later many [persons] resembling Seldon could come up from this remote area, spread wings and be able to fly”.<sup>52</sup> This conveys the idea of her as a model for others. Seldon’s development and growth cannot be seen to be focused on solely individual attainment or ideas underlining the uniqueness of the growing personality, but her personal development is connected to the general issues of collective development and improvement in the lives of Tibetan women.

#### 2.1.4 A shift in depicting the choices in women’s lives

In “*Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*” depicting education as the central focus of the lives of Seldon and Pasang Bhuti stands as a prominent feature when compared to many other works by male authors in which women are depicted as being interested in romantic feelings, finding a suitable spouse and getting married. In modern Tibetan literature there are stories that include the theme of women’s education. For example, the Amdo writer Dhondup Gyal’s (Don grub rgyal) short stories “*Brug mtsho*” and “*Pad mtsho*” (named after their heroines), but usually these stories include romance.<sup>53</sup> However, in “*Brug mtsho*” the female protagonist makes an independent decision to work as a teacher in a nomadic region, thus placing her need to serve society before romantic interests, but she is mainly depicted from the outside by a male narrator.

In Tsering Yangkyi’s “*Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*” Seldon does not show romantic interest to the opposite sex either in her thoughts or her actions. Seldon focuses entirely on her studies in which she is very successful. She gets a chance to study to become a doctor in a Chinese institute of learning far away from her home village. The movement from a village to a town may be seen as a generic feature which can also typically be found in some Western developmental stories (see Labovitz 1986/1988: 23–24). To attain learning, the protagonist has

---

<sup>52</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 204: “... *rjes ma gsal sgron 'dra ba lung khug 'di nas mang tsam thon te gshog sgro rgyas te 'phur ched ngas rgan lags khyed rang dang mnyam du dka' las rgyag 'dod yod' ces bshad pa dang...*”

<sup>53</sup> However, it should be noted that the popularity of the theme of secular love, in both writings by contemporary Tibetan men and women, is of quite recent development. Earlier traditional Tibetan literature was often characterized by religiosity, thus stories of romantic love are more characteristic of modern Tibetan literature which started to appear in the 1980s. Of course, in traditional literature the theme of love also appears sometimes, for example in folk songs and the songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama. For information on how the theme of love and marriage have been discussed by the Tibetan women writers Yangtso Kyi (g. Yang mtsho skyid) in her short story “*Diary from the Grassland*” (in Tibetan) and Medon in her novel *The Clan of the Sun* (in Chinese), see Yangdon Dhondup 2004: 174–182. Yangtso Kyi’s short story has been translated into English by Luran R. Hartley in Stewart, Batt and Shakya 2000: 19–26.

to leave her native place for studies in an urban environment. The lack of romantic interest may be related partly to the genre of the novella, in which it is not possible to describe many events on account of its length. Seldon's possible later romantic interests and building of a family simply remain outside the frames of this particular work, because the work ends at the point when she has completed her studies and has been assigned a job in a hospital.

The novella also has the motif of return to the home region. Seldon visits her parents who have moved to a town in the same region, Tsang (gTsang). She also makes a visit to her native village, before returning to the hospital in China where she has got work after completing her studies. In Phunub she goes to see her old school building, which has fallen out of use, a passage which has a nostalgic flavour. She meets the old village head Gyelpo and gets information from him about the whereabouts of her teacher Pasang Bhuti who has been transferred to another district far away. In the village there is a new bigger school building with several teachers working in it (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 230–239). The improvements in the school building, and the building of new houses and changes in the dress of the children manifest the developments taking place in the village. The narrative pattern of return to a heroine's childhood place is a motif which can also be found in Western developmental fiction.<sup>54</sup>

Sometimes developmental stories have autobiographical features (see Labovitz 1986: 74 and her discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*). Because Tsering Yangkyi is a school teacher herself, it seems natural that her experience as a teacher would one or another way reflect in the novella because of her familiarity with the lives of teachers, pupils and the conditions of schools.

There is one romantic, but highly tragic, subnarrative present in the work and it is related to the life of Pasang Bhuti. These tragic events are explained when Seldon hears about them from another Tibetan student in the Chinese medical university. Previously, there have been hints of Pasang Bhuti's unhappiness that are reported through Seldon's observations of her illness, tears and sadness when she returns from her journey. Pasang Bhuti only explains that her mother was ill. However, Seldon narrates an occasion when the name "Dhondup" escapes from Pasang Bhuti's lips after she has had some beer (*chang*) in a party and is on the verge of sleep.<sup>55</sup>

The tragic events are connected with Pasang Bhuti's platonic relationship with a man named Dhondup, which never had a chance to develop because of the repressive values of the society in the village where she had previously worked. Although Pasang Bhuti and Dhondup are said to have had feelings for each other, their closeness had been sensed by an officer in a village and

---

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Hirsch 1983: 36, 44.

<sup>55</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 192–193, 200–201.

consequently Pasang Bhuti was sent to another village to work. That is why she has arrived at Seldon's village.<sup>56</sup> Both Pasang Bhuti and Dhondup are said to be from an "unclean family background", which appears to restrict their opportunities in life and seem to have meant that they were controlled more than usual by certain officials. Pasang Bhuti had been called to visit the place of her previous posting, because Dhondup had committed suicide, holding her picture in his pocket. He had been subjected to struggle sessions<sup>57</sup> because of the words of a song he has been singing aloud.<sup>58</sup>

The values connected with love differ widely from Western ones. Firstly, the young woman and man do not dare to express their feelings, but conceal them instead. Secondly the possibility of their potential future relationship is not tolerated and is prevented by officials. This episode contains social criticism about the time in which the events of the novella were placed. The critical description of the times of Cultural Revolution became possible in literature in the PRC later on near the end of the 1970s after some leniency in policies, and a genre of works called "literature of the wounded" arose which exposed sufferings of people during the Cultural Revolution and during the struggle sessions which were held during that period.<sup>59</sup>

Although the novella does not indicate its fictional time with years, there is an indication in the words of one of its characters, a school mate of Seldon, that it takes place when Chairman Mao was still alive.<sup>60</sup> Thus at least part of the story is located in the time between the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the 1950s and before the beginning of the 1980s. Towards the end of the work Seldon also acquires information that Pasang Bhuti has been transferred to still another village and got married there.

Also, the presence of the subnarrative about the highly tragic relationship of Pasang Bhuti and Dhondup adds to the thematic content by giving it additional features so that it does not only remain concerned with education, which would oversimplify the complicated nature of love and human relationships.

Tsering Yangkyi's novella depicts women seriously interested in education and career. Depicting women as students and professionals, this novella sets an exemplary model for many Tibetan girls and young women, and they might feel encouraged to attain a higher education. In the novella becoming a doctor is

---

<sup>56</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 222–223.

<sup>57</sup> Struggle sessions were meetings that took place after the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the Cultural Revolution. During the meetings persons who were considered to hold undesirable views were publicly criticized and humiliated. The sessions often caused traumatic effects and could also lead to the suicide of those who were subjected to them (Smith 1996/1997: 402, 479, 546).

<sup>58</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 224–225.

<sup>59</sup> About the genre of the literature of the wounded in Chinese literature, see Herdan 1992: 131–132.

<sup>60</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 204.

possible for a girl who has before only been taking care of her family's cattle. It helps them to think differently, rather than identifying with romantically oriented heroines in stories written by men.<sup>61</sup> It provides them with an alternative cognitive framework and tool to reflect on women's aims of education and career and serving society through their work as educated professionals.

Tsering Yangkyi's prose is clearly worded and communicated in a straightforward manner. It has little or nothing in common with the qualities of "elusiveness" and "suggestiveness" that have sometimes been connected with Tibetan women's speech.<sup>62</sup> The feminine feature that stands out in the novella is the theme of women's education and Pasang Bhuti's selfless efforts to improve education and Seldon's striving and using her chance to attain an education.

Pam Morris in *Literature and Feminism* has written about the effect that a woman's literary work may have on its readers. She writes: "... Women's stories help us live and dream as women" (Morris 1993: 60). Morris also claims that women's writing offers a look at women's lives from "an alternative perspective" (1993: 65). The "alternative perspective" – the ideal of being a successful educated professional – in Tsering Yangkyi's novella creates a space for women reader's reflection: they can think of education and direct their thought towards educational aims.

## 2.2 "sTon lo ser po" ("The Yellow Leaves of Autumn"): a story of development or failure?

Another novella by Tsering Yangkyi that I shall discuss is "sTon lo ser po" ("The Yellow Leaves of Autumn"), which was published in 2007 in her book *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar*.<sup>63</sup> It is a longer fictional work telling about the life of a woman character Peyang (Pad dbyangs) who wishes to become a medical doctor, but cannot realize her dream because of various obstacles. Thus, this story can be viewed as the opposite to "Ri rtse'i sprin dkar". What could be Tsering Yangkyi's idea and message in depicting such contrasting achievements and failures in her female characters? Why is Seldon's path so smooth, and why does Peyang face difficulties all the time? Could both works be described as female developmental novellas or would "sTon lo ser po" ("The Yellow Leaves of Autumn") have to be regarded as an "anti-developmental" novella?

The novella has eight chapters and each have been divided into subchapters. The titles of the chapters bear some resemblance to folk songs and lyrics and

---

<sup>61</sup> An example of a romantically-oriented Tibetan woman character is Tharna, the wife of the younger son of the Maichi chieftain in Alai's novel *Red Poppies*, which has been translated from Chinese into English by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin. In the novel Tharna is depicted as a beautiful woman who is easily attracted to men.

<sup>62</sup> Gyatso and Havnevik (2005: 7) have observed that these qualities have been traditionally connected with women's speech, especially that of *dākiñis*.

<sup>63</sup> Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 257–369.

stylistically bring to mind, for example, the poetry of the Sixth Dalai Lama.<sup>64</sup> The titles illustrate in a metaphoric way the story; for example, wind on the lake and snow storm are used as images of the hard times experienced by the main character Peyang.

This novella has an external narrator. The work starts with a scene of melancholic atmosphere: Peyang is walking alone, and the autumnal environment by the River sKyid chu (in Lhasa) in the evening reminds her of the beginnings of her relationship with a man called Tenzin (bsTan 'dzin), her ex-husband. The tension between being in a relationship and trying to study immediately becomes evident: in the beginning of the relationship Peyang had expressed to Tenzin her wish to study and become a doctor before settling into married life, whereas Tenzin wanted to get married as soon as possible. Because Peyang is depicted alone reminiscing about her past relationship, it becomes evident to the reader that her relationship with this man has had an unhappy ending. After this melancholic beginning, the narrator tells the story of the relationship of Peyang and Tenzin from its beginning and their first meeting until the time Peyang is divorced and living alone with their son.

The quest for personal development typical of female developmental novel is also present in this novella. Peyang, who works as a nurse in a hospital, dreams about becoming a doctor and in order to realize her dream, she takes the university entrance exams. Although she wanted to postpone their marriage because of her studies, they end up getting married, because Tenzin gets a marriage certificate for them without first asking her, and then she consents to his wish. They take a honeymoon trip to China and she finds she is pregnant. Although she has received a letter of acceptance to study at the university, she cannot start her studies, but has to stay at home and after the birth of their son take care of him. After some years, she tries to study in order to take the entrance exams again. But she has to drop her training course, because her husband has started to spend time in gambling restaurants and she feels that she has not given enough attention to her husband and child. However, although Tenzin tries to stop gambling, he fails and develops a relation with a woman named Dolkar, the owner of a gambling restaurant. The marriage of Tenzin and Peyang ends in divorce and she finds herself alone with her child. Time passes and Peyang hopes in vain that Tenzin would return to her. Towards the end, another man called Dorje takes an interest in her and would like to marry her, but Peyang has difficulties in accepting a new relationship, although she does feel attracted to him.

Narin Hassan has recently discussed (2009) Krupabai Sathianadhan's novel *Saguna* dating from the 19th century. This novel appears to share thematic traits

---

<sup>64</sup> For information on and the English translation of The Sixth Dalai Lama's Songs, see K. Dhondup, *Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1981/1996).

with both Tsering Yangkyi's novellas. The eponymous main character of *Saguna*, an Indian woman, gets an opportunity to study and receive an education in medicine. Hassan detects tension between Indian and English cultural values in *Saguna*. (2009: 116–121). If we think of the values in Tsering Yangkyi's novellas, there are tensions between traditional values and beliefs and modern values, such as giving priority to modern secular education. *Saguna* also portrays a tension between the question of marriage and that of engaging in studies that is also a source of a tension in Tsering Yangkyi's "sTon lo ser po". However, *Saguna*'s female protagonist is more independent in her preferences for education and professional ambition than Peyang in Tsering Yangkyi's novella. *Saguna* ends in the main protagonist's marriage (121–122). Hassan refers to the novel as an autobiographical novel as its writer was an Indian woman who studied medicine. (2009: 121–123).<sup>65</sup> If we consider Tsering Yangkyi's novellas, they are structurally open-ended: the reader is left to imagine what could happen later in the lives of the protagonists.<sup>66</sup>

### 2.2.1 A generic feature of developmental fiction: realization after hardships

Could such a story, as "sTon lo ser po", about a failing marriage and non-realized wishes for study be considered a developmental novella? Clearly, the story has a protagonist who has a definite interest in personal growth and a career. Unlike in the other novella, this heroine's life is not depicted from early childhood, but only during the span of her early adult life when she starts her work as a nurse, gets married, gives birth to a child, divorces and lives alone with her son. Thus, it only depicts the stages in her life which are essential for the formation of her professional career and family life. The time span depicted is long enough to give the reader an idea of her development or how she fails in her plans and faces difficulties. Is it conducive for women's education to depict a female heroine who cannot realize her professional plans, but has to continue in her work as a nurse instead of being a doctor?

Developmental fiction can naturally include various types of stories of personal growth. Abel, Hirsch and Langland mention the narrative pattern of

---

<sup>65</sup> There is information on the life of the writer of *Saguna*, Krupabai Sathianadhan, in a two-volume anthology titled *Women Writing in India* edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (1991/1997: 275–276). It tells that Sathianadhan was the first woman to start her studies in a medical college in India, Madras Medical College. Thus, she can be regarded as having had a pioneering role in women's education in India in the late 19th century. The anthology includes an extract from *Saguna* (277–281).

<sup>66</sup> Maria Lival-Lindström has discussed the structural feature of open-endedness in connection to the female *Bildung* in her study of Swedish female developmental novels in Finland. She has used the openness of the ends as one of her selection criteria for the literary works she has examined in her research. She describes an open-end in a female developmental story to be one in which the work does not end in its heroine's marriage or death (2009: 17–18, 322).

“awakening” to describe a sudden realization illustrating the inner development of a woman character. Rosowski insightfully discerns two types of developmental novels: novels of apprenticeship and novels of awakening. She describes the protagonists in the latter type of novels which are often female *Bildung* as more passive and characterizes the process of their development as inward-looking (Rosowski 1983: 49–50). In a scene almost at the end of “sTon lo ser po” Peyang picks up a yellow leaf from the ground. She has been trying to see in vain whether Dorje turns back despite her rejection of him, and she appears to be in emotional torment. Looking at the leaf, she realizes that she has lost a valuable opportunity. She reflects in her mind on the words of a folksong,<sup>67</sup> which speak about how a person should not disturb by mistaken actions something which has been destined to happen.

The end is left open, but hints to the possibility of something positive happening – it seems to bear a promise that the heroine does not after all have to remain alone closed inside the walls of her house. The last short subchapter at the end is a single paragraph about a sudden sound of knocking on her door. The reader can only imagine that perhaps this means that Dorje has returned and she has a second chance to accept his proposal. The way Peyang develops in self-knowledge connects this novella to the genre of novels of awakening. Rosowski views the novels of awakening as typical of female development stories and sees the novel of apprenticeship as characteristic of male *Bildung* (1983: 49). However, in Tsering Yangkyi’s works in stories of female *Bildung*, the novella “Ri rtse’i sprin dkar” has the characteristics of a novel of apprenticeship, whereas the novella “sTon lo ser po” has those of a novel of awakening.

### 2.2.2 Outlining the obstacles for women’s educational development

The novella “sTon lo ser po” (“The Yellow Leaves of Autumn”) outlines the typical obstacles for women studying and developing in their career, showing the potential dangers of becoming bound too early to a marital relationship and family life. The novella shows typical situations which form into obstacles for young women’s higher education: relationships and dating, marriage and taking care of children, husband and family life. These are not, of course, “as such” considered obstacles as they are necessary and important elements of life and personal development. However, involvement in these situations might divert too much attention from study, causing difficulty in educational pursuits.

---

<sup>67</sup> The words of the folksong are quoted in the novella as follows: “ka ba la mo’i rtse nas// bskos bzhag gsal gyi yod na// bya ba ’chug pa’i las ka// nga ras ma byas chog ga”, literally, “From the peak of Kawalamo/ if it has been destined/ work with mistaken deeds/ I could leave without doing” (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 368–369).

Peyang's story invites women readers to reflect whether the heroine could have chosen otherwise. Could she have preferred her studies and entered the university instead of getting married, despite the social pressures? The work also shows that Peyang's lavish attention on her husband does not stop him from divorcing her. Although she had an admission letter to university, she did not seize her chance and did not defend her own interest, but let others influence her choices. Although the novella has an external narrator, there is a passage which gives the reader access to the character's internal world. The chapter entitled "mTsho stod ngang pa ser po" ("The Yellow Duck of the Upper Lake") starts with Peyang's long and detailed dream. She dreams of being handed the admission letter (*slob bsdu'i brda tho*) to the university. I shall quote here an extract of her dream which illustrates the state of her mind with its contradictions and shows its premonitory nature:

Suddenly, she had arrived on top of a high mountain peak, and directing her mouth towards the sky, shouting "The Jewels<sup>68</sup> fulfilled my wish!", she jumped up out of joy. "The Jewels... .. fulfilled... .. fulfilled....!" the sound of the echo of her voice resounded from high to low and moving into the distance vanished into silence. Suddenly a stormy wind arose and the black wind snatched the paper from her hand and it escaped and flew in the storm wind. When she followed it with all her powers, she slowly rose from the ground and flew (in the air) for a while, but then she was unable to fly any more and was falling into an abyss. She was terrified and was thinking when she would touch the earth. As she was thinking that when she would hit the ground her body would certainly be crushed, Tenzin arrived flying in front of her, as he had wings, and even before he had finished saying "I am coming", she softly fell into his lap... .. (Tsering Yangkyi, "The Yellow Leaves of Autumn", 285–286)<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The word translated as 'jewel' is *dkon mchog*, which is used to refer to the Buddhist objects of refuge, the Three Jewels: the Buddha, dharma and sangha.

<sup>69</sup> In Tibetan: *glo bur du mo ri mgo mthon po zhig gi steng la slebs yod pas kha gnam la gtad de "dkon mchog gis gzigs nas nga'i bsam don 'grub song" zhes dga' mchong brgyab/ "dkon... .. mchog ... .. gis... .. gzigs ...nas.....gzigs nas... .." mo'i skad kyi brag cha zhig mtho sa nas dma' sar khyab pa dang je ring nas je ring du song ste mthar ci yang thos rgyu med par gyur/ glo bur du rlung 'tshub zhig langs te mo'i lag nang gi shog byang de lhags pa nag po zhig gis hab 'phrog byas pa ltar lag pa nas shor ba dang rdul rlung gi khrod du 'dres nas 'phur bzhin yod pas mos nus shugs gang yod kyis ded pa'i tshe mo yang dal bu dal bus sa nas 'phags pa dang re zhig 'phur rjes 'phur rtsal rdzogs nas gcong rong zhig tu lhungs/ mo dngags skrag gis rab tu mnar nas dus nam zhig sa steng du lhung gi red dam snyam pa dang sa steng du lhung tshe sha 'thor rus 'thor 'gro nges red snyam pa'i skabs bstan 'dzin la gshog pa yod pa ltar mo'i mdun du 'phur yong bzhin "nga yong gi yod" ces pa'i skad sgra ma rdzogs gong mo rang dal bur kho'i pang du lhungs/... .. (Tshe ring dbyangs skyid, "sTon lo ser po", 285–286).*

This dream passage is immediately followed by Tenzin's visit with a marriage certificate, acquired without her consent. After some hesitation, she accepts the situation and their marriage is fixed.<sup>70</sup> In the imagerial expression of the passage, the obstacles to her studies are represented by storm wind, which is depicted as black and does not seem to promise anything positive. The way in which her marriage certificate is fetched without her knowledge can be understood as a motif of limitation. The theme of limitation, as it has been called by Rosowski, has been seen as connected to works characterized by awakening. Thus it can also be found in Western works. Rosowski discusses Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* quoting a passage where the protagonist is viewed by her husband as owned by him. In this connection Rosowski remarks about her passivity (1983: 52–53). This passivity is also shared by the protagonist Peyang in Tsering Yangkyi's novella. When we read how Peyang lets other people – her boyfriend, women friends and parents on both side – pressure her and allow their opinions to affect her life choices, this shows that she is not independent, but instead adjusts to the wishes of others and tries to make compromises with them. Only her daring to dream about becoming a doctor suggests autonomy of character, but she does not have enough determination to realize her wishes. On the other hand, her consideration for others' feelings also shows her personality as gentle and less egoistic, which are normally considered positive qualities.

Although Peyang does not become a doctor in the novella, this work also has several features of a developmental novella, suggesting that it could be classified as such. It does not idealize relationships and marriage, but rather clearly points to the possible obstacles for studies created by relationships with men and raising a family – they become the causes for Peyang's failure to pursue a higher educational career. When reading about her husband's behavior towards her, and her mental anguish caused by the divorce, the reader is likely to think how unfortunate it was that she did not grasp properly her opportunity for study.

The third subchapter of the chapter entitled “Sems pa'i kho thag ma chod” (“Unable to Give Up”) is located in the years after the divorce, describing how Peyang still clings to the past and behaves in an unstable, and depressive manner. The narrator describes how she spends her free time at home: she keeps looking at the photos of their honeymoon trip, tries on her old clothes in front of a mirror and looks at herself while dancing and singing alone. Sometimes she just lies on her bed.<sup>71</sup>

Although there is no educational development, Peyang grows as a person and at the end becomes mature enough to reflect on her situation with more wisdom and to accept compromise in life rather than locking herself up alone

---

<sup>70</sup> See Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007: 287–289.

<sup>71</sup> Tshe rings dbyangs skyid 2007: 352–353.

and depressed inside the gates of her house. The view of women's development is not rebellious in Tsering Yangkyi's novellas; rather she seems to emphasize in both works how essential it is for a woman to make good use of an educational opportunity when it occurs.

### 3 Summary

If we consider the question how Tsering Yangkyi's two novellas and their women differ from the heroines of Western developmental stories, it is not easy to give a clear answer. Some things are obvious, however. The main characters are of course Tibetan in her novellas and the milieus are mainly Tibetan – a mountain village in gTsang and the town of Lhasa. In addition to these Tibetan milieus the characters are depicted making a trip to China or staying some time there. The novellas realistically depict situations familiar to Tibetans, such as the educational situation that prevails in remote mountain villages or the pressures from a society that prefers women to marry and devote themselves to the family rather than pursuing an education.

The novellas are developmental stories about women – they have women characters – and they tell about women's lives and their development during a longer span of time. The interpretative framework of the female developmental novel helps us to understand the special quality in Tsering Yangkyi's works and characters – they convey ideas and models related to women's interests in their education, careers and personal growth and have the potential to inspire and encourage readers or make them reflect on the choices available in life.

Making the female protagonist Seldon a focalizer and a narrator gives “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” a perspective and subjectivity which gives the work a feminine flavour. She tells about the events, her own actions, and other people's actions and speech. The contents of the narratives and the depiction of the interests of the women characters differ from many earlier writings by men, which centre on romance and marriage as suitable options for women. She has created female characters whose interests go beyond marriage, women who take a great interest in their education and career.

As we have seen, in Tsering Yangkyi's novellas there are some narrative patterns which share characteristics with Western works of the genre. “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” has the pattern of apprenticeship and “sTon lo ser po” the pattern of awakening and the motif of limitation. In “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” there are also the motifs of movement to an urban centre and the motif of return to the home region. The works share one of the fundamental features of developmental fiction, namely the quest for development in these works is manifested as an interest in pursuing studies. Since these works have women as their main characters, they depict a development which takes place on the personal or professional level (or both), and also because they have some narrative patterns which are also found in Western stories of female development, it is therefore

well-grounded to hold these two novellas as belonging to the genre of female developmental fiction understood in a wide, international context.

However, there are also characteristics which differ from the typical characteristics of the Western genre. The developmental goal in “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” has a more collective flavour and the development of the individual is seen in the context of the developing society and as a model for others. This differs from the typical Western focus on development as the self-discovery of the inner potential of the individual. The more collective flavour of this Tibetan contemporary novella can be explained on one hand by the context of writing in a socialist society with its values emphasising benefit to society, and on the other hand from the values of traditional Tibetan culture. In traditional Tibetan culture egocentricity is discouraged, whereas altruistic values emphasising the benefit of others are encouraged. Because the stories also present differing features in their descriptions of women’s developmental processes, therefore, when speaking about them as Tibetan female developmental stories, it is important to understand that Tibetan developmental stories have also characteristics of their own which differ from Western developmental fiction.

A story such as “Ri rtse'i sprin dkar” sets an example of an ordinary Tibetan woman becoming an educated professional. It can encourage young Tibetan women readers to fulfil their wishes to study and gain a profession. The obstacles Peyang faces in “sTon lo ser po” can also help a Tibetan woman reader reflect on her preferences in life and help her make her own decisions even though she might be pressured to do otherwise. The stories may help women to reflect on the roles open to them and give them courage to make use of the opportunities which are presented to them. Finally, by publishing her book Tsering Yangkyi sets up yet another role model for Tibetan women, namely becoming a writer.

## References

- Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (eds.) 1983. *The Voyage In. Fictions of Female Development*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Alai 1998/2003. *Red Poppies: A Novel of Tibet*. Translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin. (A Mariner Book). Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Barnett, Robert 2005. “Women and Politics in Contemporary Tibet”. In Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (eds.), *Women in Tibet*, 285–366.
- Bell, Sir Charles 1928/1968. *The People of Tibet*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Brauen, Yangzom 2011. *Tiibetin tyttäret. (Eisenvogel – Drei Frauen aus Tibet. Die Geschichte meiner Familie)*. Translated into Finnish by Riitta Virkkunen. (Ajatus kirjast). Gummerus Kustannus Oy.
- Brontë, Charlotte 1847/2009. *Jane Eyre*. New York: Vintage Classics.
- bsTan pa yar rgyas 1995. “rTswa thang gi glag phrug”. In bsTan pa yar rgyas, *Byang thang gi mdzes ljongs*. Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 146–169.

- Chu skyes sgrol ma 1999. *sPrin bral zla ba'i 'dzum rlabs*. Dharamsala: Bod gzhung shes rig dpar khang.
- Chu skyes sgrol ma 2006. “bTsan byol bod kyi bud med rtsom rig skor gleng ba”. A paper presented in the 11th Conference of IATS, Königswinter, 2006.
- Diemberger, Hildegard 2007. *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- dPal mo (ed.) 2005. *bZho lung – deng rabs bod kyi bud med rtsom pa po'i snyan rtsom gces btus*. Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Erhard, Franz Xaver 2011. “Constructed Identities and Contemporary Tibetan Literature: The Fiction of the A mdo ba Skyabs chen bde grol and the Lha sa ba Dpal 'byor”. In Gray Tuttle (ed.), *Mapping the Modern in Tibet. PIATS 2006: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter 2006*. Andiaast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies GmbH, 419–434.
- Forster, E. M. 1927/1974. *Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings*. Cambridge.
- Fowler, Alastair 1982/2002. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Grünfelder, Alice (ed.) 2009. *Flügel Schlag des Schmetterlings*. Translated from Tibetan by Franz Xaver Erhard and from Chinese by Alice Grünfelder. Zürich: Unionsverlag.
- Gyatso, Janet and Hanna Havnevik (eds.) 2005. *Women in Tibet*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- g.Yu 'brug (n.d.). *Hphi hri ri 'dabs kyi 'khreng sems*. mTsho sngon mi rigs slob grwa chen mo.
- Hartley, Luran R. and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani 2008. “Introduction”. In Luran R. Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani (eds.), *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*, xiii–xxxviii.
- Hassan, Narin 2009. “Jane Eyre’s Doubles? Colonial Progress and the Tradition of New Woman Writing in India”. In Annette R. Federico (ed.), *Gilbert & Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press: 111–126.
- Herdan, Innes 1992. *The Pen and the Sword: Literature and Revolution in Modern China*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Hirsch, Marianne 1983. “Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm”. In Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (eds.), *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, 23–48.
- Hor gtsang 'jigs med 2000. *Khrag thig las skyes pa'i ljang myug – Deng rabs bod kyi rtsom rig dang de'i rgyab ljongs*. Dharamsala: Youtse Publication.
- Hortsang Jigme 2008. “Tibetan Literature in the Diaspora”. In Luran R. Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani (eds.), *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*, 281–300.
- Ilmonen, Kaisa 2009. “Miten romaanilaji sääntelee vapautta? Karibialainen kirjallisuus ja paikoiltaan siirtynyt kehitysromaanii”. *Avain* 1: 5–21.
- Jahn, Manfred 2007. “Focalization”. In David Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 94–108.
- Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord 1986/1988. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Peter Lang. (2nd edition).

- Lhalungpa, Lobsang P. (trans.) 1977/1985. *The Life of Milarepa*. Boston & London: Shambhala.
- Lival-Lindström, Maria 2009. *Mot ett eget rum: Den kvinnlige bildningsromanen i Finlands svenska litteratur*. Åbo: Åbo Akademis förlag.
- Mathewson, Rufus W., Jr. 1958/1975. *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. (2nd edition).
- Morris, Pam 1993. *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray 2003. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. (2nd edition).
- Neumann, Birgit and Ansgar Nünning 2008/2011. *An Introduction to the Study of Narrative Fiction*. Stuttgart: Klett Lernen und Wissen GmbH.
- Page, Ruth 2007. "Gender". In David Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 189–202.
- Pyrhönen, Heta 2007. "Genre". In David Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 109–123.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith 1983/1984. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London and New York: Methuen.
- Rin chen bkra shis 1998. *rTsom rig gsar rtsom gyi rnam bshad*. Xining: mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Rosowski, Susan J. 1983. "The Novel of Awakening". In Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (eds.), *The Voyage In. Fictions of Female Development*, 49–68.
- Schaeffer, Kurtis R. 2005. "The Autobiography of a Medieval Hermitess: Orgyan Chokyi (1675–1729)". In Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (eds.), *Women in Tibet*, 83–109.
- Shantideva [8th c. A.D.] 1979/1992. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. Translated by Stephen Batchelor. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives.
- Smith, Warren W. Jr. 1996/1997. *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India.
- Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama 1997. *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins. Co-edited by Elizabeth Napper. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Tsering Öser 2009. "Erinnerungen an eine mörderische Fahrt". Translated from Chinese by Alice Grünfelder. In Alice Grünfelder (ed.) *Flügel Schlag des Schmetterlings: 78–103*.
- Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 1987. "Brag steng gi rtswa chung". *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* 1987, nr. 3.
- Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 1990. "Slob grogs kyi 'du shes". *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* 1990, nr. 1.
- Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2003, 2004. "Ri rtse'i sprin dkar". *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* 2003, nrs. 4: 1–17, 5:1–18, 6 and 2004, nr. 1: 42–51.
- Tshe ring dbyangs skyid 2007. *Ri rtse'i sprin dkar – Tshe ring dbyangs skyid kyi brtsams sgrung legs sgrig*. Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang.
- Women in the Land of Snow. Gangs ljongs kyi bud med*. 1995. Beijing: Nationalities Press.

- Yangdon Dhondup 2004. *Caught Between Margins: Culture, Identity, and the Invention of a Literary Space in Tibet*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- Yangdon Dhondup 2008. "Roar of the Snow Lion: Tibetan Poetry in Chinese". In Lauran R. Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani (eds.), *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*, 32–60.
- Yangtso Kyi 2000. "Journal of the Grassland". Translated by Lauran R. Hartley. In Frank Stewart, Herbert J. Batt & Tsering Shakya (eds.), *Song of the Snow Lion*. *Mānoa* 12: 2, 19–26.