# SHÉPA

The Tibetan Oral Tradition in Choné

Compiled and translated by Bendi Tso,
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from narrations and documents by members of
the Choné Tibetan Community





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## Preface マダンマ美石 序言 Bendi Tso ママラマ美 完代草

#### Preface

Leaning against the living room window the night before Sangye Men's wedding, I felt as if I was straddling two worlds, separated by a thin pane of glass. In the yard, Sangye Men's friends formed a circle and took it in turns to sing and dance, accompanied by a giant stereo speaker and a rotating rainbow globe light. Their playlist ranged from Tibetan ballads to Chinese songs, and from the traditional Tibetan lute (*sgra snyan*) to nightclub music. When *Arabian Night* started, a popular dance song appreciated by younger generations, the guests turned up the volume as high as it would go, swaying their bodies to the music and showing their enjoyment.

Right across the window and inside a living room, four elders were sitting on *tsatap* (*tsha thab/rdza rdo*), a raised clay platform where people eat and sleep, drinking Tibetan spirits (*bod rag*). The flickering rays of the rainbow globe danced on their faces. Occasionally looking out of the window, the elders continued intermittent conversations while singing Shépa. I wondered whether they were able to catch each other's words on account of the loud noise emanating from the speaker next door.

Watching these two worlds co-exist, in that single moment, I understood the division between the yard and the living room to be a generational difference that was as transparent as the pane of glass in the window. Later, as I honed my understanding of how Shépa—an expansive collection of Tibetan cultural wisdom rendered in song in Choné—is currently transmitted, I began to think of the division as a

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product of the socio-cultural dilemma facing all Choné people over the past several decades.

Grandfather Tusktor, one of the Shépa singers with whom I had privilege of working, always started his account with the phrase 'back in those days'. I witnessed how memories came flooding back to him in live time, how fast such an oral tradition can be lost, and how difficult it is to transmit Shépa to the next generation. 'Back in those days', he would say, 'there were no TVs or cell phones. Shépa was always the highlight of a wedding. We could sing it all night long. Everybody just stayed awake and listened to the narration. But now, each household has a television. Nobody wants to listen to Shépa, not to mention engaging in a song battle'. He laughed dismally and lamented, 'Nowadays, the night before the wedding is all about the young people. All young people are keen on modern music. In many weddings to which I have been invited in recent years, no one, *not a single young person*, has come to me and said, "*Anyé* (Tib. grandfather), can you narrate parts of Shépa?"'

Dramatic social-economic and cultural changes make the preservation of Shépa extremely difficult. Over the past several years, Choné county officials and community members have endeavoured to uplift and revitalise Shépa by registering Shépa as Intangible Cultural Heritage, selecting Shépa performers to receive government subsidies, organising Shépa learning sessions and so on. Nevertheless, for many singers like Grandfather Tusktor, Shépa is considered to be endangered due to a lack of younger learners, especially people under forty, combined with a drastic decline of the use of the Tibetan language across the community.

This book, co-authored with members of the local community, offers a partial response to the growing sense of abandonment of cultural heritage that is felt across Choné. In the following sections, we present a collection of Shépa narratives based on oral and textual sources collected in Choné. We hope that this book may serve as an entry point for the Choné Tibetan community in support of their goal of Shépa revitalisation and at the same time uplift their linguistic heritage and cultural dignity. In addition, we would be delighted if our approach to engaging with Tibetan oral traditions might in some way contribute to a wider methodological inquiry on the documentation and preservation of oral traditions across the Tibetan Plateau and beyond.

### जर्गे.नर्ह्री

प्रचिन्ध्याःचीवायःग्रीक्षाःक्षेत्रः मुंद्रः प्रज्ञाचू स्वक्ष्यः यूट्। तप्तः वार्षयान् वार्यायाः यात्रावायः यात्रावायः वार्याः वार्यायः वार्यायः विद्यायः विद्यायः विद्यायः यात्रायः विद्यायः यात्रायः विद्यायः यात्रायः विद्यायः यात्रायः विद्यायः यात्रायः विद्यायः विद्यायः यात्रायः विद्यायः यात्रायः विद्यायः व

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#### 序言

那是在桑吉曼婚礼的前一晚,我靠着客厅的窗户,觉得自己倚在被一层薄薄的玻璃隔开的两个世界之间。庭院里,伴随着音响和旋转的迪斯科彩虹球,桑吉曼的朋友们围成一圈儿载歌载舞。他们的播放列表从藏族民谣到汉族流行音乐,从扎念弹唱到夜店名曲,无所不包。当广受年轻一代喜欢的《阿拉伯之夜》响起时,他们将音响调到最大,随着音乐尽情摇曳着身姿。

一窗之隔,客厅的炕上,四位老者喝着青稞酒。彩虹球的光线透过窗户在他们褶皱的面颊上跳动。老者们唱着释巴,断断续续地交谈,偶尔望向窗外。在门外音响的巨大声浪里,我好奇他们能否捕捉到对方的言语和唱辞。

凝视着这两个共存的世界,在那一刻,我把庭院和客厅里的割裂简单地理解为代际差异。之后的日子里,当我对尚在卓尼传承的释巴——一部囊括藏族文化智慧的庞大诗集——了解与日俱增,我才开始明白,这种割裂是卓尼人在过去几十年中面临的社会文化困境造就的。

阿乃子斗是我有幸合作过的一位释巴艺人。他总以"那时候"开始他的故事。我亲见汹涌的回忆是如何淹没他,释巴如何迅速消失,以及将释巴传承给下一代是多么的困难。他说:"那时候,没有电视电话。释巴永远是婚礼上最精彩的部分。我们会通宵达旦地唱。人们整晚不睡觉来听我们唱。但现在家家户户都有电视。没人想听释巴,更别说参加对唱和斗歌了。"他惋惜又落寞地说道:"现在婚礼的前一晚是属于年轻人的。所有年轻人都对现代音乐感兴趣。在许多婚礼的前一晚我受邀去演唱,但是没有一个,没有任何一个年轻人对我说'阿乃,您能唱一点释巴吗?'"

剧烈的社会、经济与文化变迁让释巴的存续变得极为艰难。过去几年,卓尼县政府和族群成员通过让释巴成为非物质文化遗产,补贴释巴艺人,自发组织学习等方式致力于释巴的保护和复兴。但是四十岁以下的一代中缺乏学习释巴的人,族群中藏语也在迅速流失。所以对许许多多像阿乃子斗这样的艺人来说,释巴已经变得极为濒危。

这本与卓尼藏族合作的书,是对这种日渐加重的传统文化流失的一点回应。在后续的章节中,我们将展示一个薮辑于卓尼的释巴录音与文本的合集。希望这本书可以成为卓尼藏族复兴释巴的一个切入点,同时能够提振他们的语言与文化尊严。此外,如若此书研究藏族口述传统的方法能以某种形式,对整理、收集和复兴其他口述传统的探索有所助益,我们将会倍感欣慰。