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Minority languages and translator training: What Tibetan programmes can tell us

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between minority languages and translator training programmes is a very new and under-researched area of inquiry in Translation Studies. The People's Republic of China, which has 55 different minorities within its borders, is an ideal country in which to examine this issue. This paper focuses on the Tibetan language, one of the minority languages in China for which translator training programmes are available. The paper first provides a brief overview of translator training programmes in China in general, and then examines the situation of Tibetan-Chinese training programmes in Tibet and other parts of China, linking these to the job market for translators in these regions. The paper then explores a unique parallel development outside of China of Tibetan-English translator training programmes that have been established for students of Tibetan Buddhism who wish to train as interpreters or translators. The contrast of these two widely differing sets of training programmes reveals the divergent market forces at work that spur the development of such programmes, and also highlights the role that translator programmes may play in the survival of lesser-used languages.

KEYWORDS

Translator training, minority languages, Tibet, China, Tibetan Buddhism

1. Introduction

In Translation Studies, the relationship between minority languages and translation is a relatively recent area of inquiry, with Michael Cronin (1995, 1996, 2003) being the leading voice on this issue. However, even Cronin has little to say on the relationship between minority languages and translator training programmes, devoting only one paragraph to the subject in his 2003 monograph in which minority issues figure prominently. In this paragraph, Cronin briefly discusses the dearth of translator training programmes for minorities and states that "much more needs to be done to encourage translation exchanges between lesser-used languages on the planet, and translator-training institutions need to explore ways in which this can be done" (2003: 153).

Minority language users are often among the least served in terms of translator training programmes (TTPs), due to their language's weakened status in relation to the major language, as well as to the mere fact of having a smaller population to demand such training. In countries where TTPs do exist, they invariably involve the major language of that country, paired with one of the main international languages such as English. And in general, only if there is a thriving job market for bilingual speakers within national borders—such as in the area of local tourism—are minority TTPs financially viable for universities or other institutes. As Cronin writes, "training of

translators in a minority language can usually only be justified economically if a major language is involved, but translator-training institutions have to argue beyond the rationale of the accountant for more inclusive training programmes that have minor-minor combinations" (*ibid*.).

However, beyond the needs of the job market and the economic viability of running TTPs for minorities, can such programmes also play a role in helping to promote and protect minority languages? Due to their often marginalised status within their country, minority languages are highly vulnerable to what Cronin terms "impoverishment," a process which results due to the imposition of a national language on minorities, who through necessity tend to gravitate toward using the major language rather than their mother tongue, particularly in social arenas. Cronin explains that "as the minority language is spoken less often, its domains of use become more restricted and the language's lexicon and linguistic structures suffer continual impoverishment" (2003: 66).

Cronin's description of impoverishment of minority languages aptly describes the status of the Tibetan language in the People's Republic of China, where official language policy for minorities has long been one of assimilation, with educational directives that require all citizens to learn standard Chinese (Mandarin) from an early age.[1] And while minority languages in China are protected under law, the economic and social reality of life in China increasingly requires fluency in Mandarin for the vast majority of the population. For these reasons, and others, many minority languages are under threat of extinction, with the United Nations reporting that over 100 minority languages in China are in danger of dying out (Blanchard 2010).

The urgency of this situation, coupled with the fact that China has 55 ethnic minorities within its borders, make it an ideal country in which to examine the current status of TTPs for minorities. Yet, despite the large number of minority languages in China and the recent explosion of research by translation scholars in that country, no studies have thus far been carried out on the number (or type) of TTPs available for minorities in the PRC. Do such programmes even exist, and if so, where are they, what do they teach, and what are the goals of these programmes? Further, what can minority-language TTPs reveal about education in general and the state of translator training in particular, as well as the job market in that country, for minority speakers?

This paper attempts to contribute to our understanding of these questions by focusing on the Tibetan language, one of the minority languages in the PRC for which translator training programmes do exist. The paper first provides a brief overview of translator training in the PRC in general, and then examines the situation of Tibetan-Chinese translator training programmes in Tibet and other parts of China, linking these to the job market for translators in these regions. The paper then explores a unique

parallel development outside of China of translator training programmes (Tibetan-English) that have been established for students of Tibetan Buddhism who wish to train as interpreters or translators. The contrast of these two widely differing sets of training programmes reveals the divergent market forces at work that spur the development of such programmes, and also highlights the role that translator programmes may play in the survival of minority languages.

Within the PRC, Tibetan is spoken by more than five million Tibetans, approximately half of whom live in Tibet proper, known in China as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The remainder of the Tibetan population is distributed over 12 Tibetan 'autonomous areas' outside of the TAR, in the four provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan. Of China's 55 ethnic minorities, Tibetans rank ninth (as of the 2000 census) in terms of population (Blondeau and Buffetrille 2008: 152). Due to the relatively large population of Tibetans and the existence of an indigenous written language, Tibetan is considered one of the more important, or main, minority languages in the country.[2]

In addition to being a minority language within the PRC, globally Tibetan is both a "language of lesser diffusion"[3] and a "less translated language," the latter of which has been defined as "all those languages that are less often the source of translation in the international exchange of linguistic goods, regardless of the number of people using these languages" (Branchadell and West 2005: 1). Indeed, Tibetan is seldom the source or the target of global translation activity except in the area of Buddhism, which has been exported to the West since the 1960s through a dual process of transmission and translation.

2. Translator training in the PRC

While Malmkjær's statement that "by and large, translation is now firmly established as an academic discipline" (2004: 1) may apply to some parts of the world, such as Europe, this is certainly not the case in China. In the PRC, translation training has long been confined mainly to foreign languages departments, in particular English departments, where translation courses are only offered peripheral to the main task of teaching English. As Xu remarks, for a long time in China there was a "false idea" that graduates of foreign language departments would be able to do translation "automatically" (2005: 235). And although the Ministry of Education stipulated in 1978 that translation be a required subject for foreign language majors, the number of such courses offered is very small, with English majors only able to take a maximum of four translation courses in total (Xu 2005: 236).

In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition of the need for qualified and professionally trained translators and interpreters in the PRC, due to the country's rapid globalisation and economic development. In the early part of this decade, it became apparent that the demand for

translators and interpreters in China "far exceeds supply" and that the scope of translation work is continually expanding (Lin 2002: 211). In 2008, Ding estimated that there were some 40,000 TI (translation and interpretation) professionals in the country (2008: 20), while Jun and Gentzler placed the number at 60,000 (2009: 177). In addition, there are estimated to be some 500,000 "amateur" TI workers, most of whom have received no professional training (Ding 2008: 20). However, the current estimated number of professional TIs working in China (40,000-60,000) fulfills only ten percent of the country's market needs for such individuals (Ding 2008: 19-20).[4]

To help fill this tremendous gap between market supply and demand, the Ministry of Education began establishing translation departments in a number of universities. The Translators [sic] Association of China (TAC), an official body that provides data on the accreditation and training of translators and interpreters in the PRC, lists a total of 13 departments of translation and eight schools of translation that have been established in universities across China. It should nevertheless be noted that these figures are for public (government-run) institutions only; 'incomplete' statistics for translation training programmes in private institutions are also provided on this page (see TAC "Translation Training"). Of the 13 translation departments, ten were established after 2001, reflecting the growing demand for translation experts in the last decade in particular.

The language pair most commonly taught in China's tertiary-level translation departments and schools is Chinese-English. Although six other foreign languages (Japanese, French, Arabic, Russian, German and Spanish) are included in the government-run China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (see TAC, CATTI), English is by far the most popular foreign language studied. Such accreditation has only been carried out since 2003, and is still at the earliest stages of development (Ding 2008: 22).

Given the quite recent establishment and introduction of translation departments and accreditation for TI professionals, as well as the emphasis on English as the main foreign language for TIs in China, it is perhaps not surprising that minority language users are not well served in terms of translator training. As yet, there is no accreditation available for translators of minority languages, and none of the 21 university-level translation departments or schools are located in minority regions, including Tibet. However, there are translation programmes available for some minorities in China; for Tibetans, there are programmes both between the minor language and Chinese (Tibetan-Chinese) and between Tibetan, Chinese and English.

3. Tibetan translator training programmes in the PRC

3.1 Programmes within the Tibet Autonomous Region

Of the five tertiary institutions in the Tibet Autonomous Region, only Tibet University in the capital of Lhasa offers courses on translation.[5] Tibet University was founded in 1985 and has an undergraduate student population of about 9,000. It offers a total of 42 BA degrees in nine major areas of study. Translation courses are available as part of two separate programmes: the Tibetan Language and Literature (*Zangyuyan wenxue*) undergraduate programme in the university's Institute of Literature (*Wenxue yuan*), and as part of the English major in the Tourism and Foreign Languages Institute (*Lüyou yu waiyu xueyuan*), both of which lead to a BA degree.

In the Institute of Literature, students may select, among others, a Tibetan-Chinese Translation Stream (*fangxiang,* lit. "direction") which is offered as part of a four-year undergraduate major in Tibetan Language and Literature. This programme is aimed at cultivating the skills required to work in a variety of jobs requiring Tibetan-Chinese bilingual and translation abilities. The core courses in this stream include Modern Tibetan, Modern Chinese, Linguistics, Tibetan Writing, Tibetan Poetry, Tibetan Modern Literature, Tibetan Contemporary Literature, Tibetan Classical Literature, Introduction to Religion, and Tibetan History. In addition, five "specialised courses" (*tesi kechen*) are offered in translation subjects: Translation History, Translation Theory, Chinese-Tibetan Translation Practice, Tibetan-Chinese Translation Practice, and Translation Criticism and Appreciation. A total of 188 credits must be completed to graduate, of which 145 credits must be coursework and 43 credits must be a practicum, such as a final-year project or thesis. The amount of time students spend on translation coursework is 648 credit hours, which is approximately 25 percent of the total number of hours required to complete their BA degree (Table 1).

Course Type		**Credit hours**
General foundation courses		714
Major foundation courses		989
Major stream and specialised courses	Req.	540
	Elec.	108
Culture and interdisciplinary courses	Req.	180
	Elec.	108
Translation practicum		32 weeks*
Total		**2,639**

*The practicum is not counted in the number of credit hours.

Table 1: Course Structure and Credit Hours for the Tibetan-Chinese Translation Stream at Tibet University.

The emphasis on learning Tibetan subjects in the core curriculum of this stream indicates that students have already sufficiently mastered the Chinese language but require further academic studies in Tibetan, which in most cases is the students' native language. The career path for graduates of this stream, according to the university's course description, involves working in government administrative bureaus, particularly in broadcasting, television and media, and carrying out Tibetan-Chinese translation work in village- and county-level government offices.

The second major under which translation courses are offered at Tibet University is in the Tourism and Foreign Languages Institute, where a four-year BA degree in English is offered with an option to choose the Tibetan-Chinese-English Translation Stream. According to the course description, the aim of this stream is to produce students with a strong foundation in both English and Chinese language skills[6] who can work in foreign affairs, trade, tourism and other departments of the government that require translation work between English, Chinese and Tibetan.

The core courses in this degree include eight subjects in English (e.g. Foundations of English, English Listening Skills, English Speaking Skills, English Grammar, English Reading), Translation Theory, Chinese-English Interpretation, Introduction to Tibet, Introduction to Western Culture, and Business Negotiating. The emphasis on English in this degree programme clearly indicates that the primary focus of study is not translation between Tibetan and Chinese but rather between English and Chinese. The programme is apparently designed on the premise that students are already fluent in Chinese and Tibetan but need training in English skills in order to be competitive in the job market in Tibet, where tourism is a major industry.

The two translations streams offered at Tibet University reveal several key facts about the TAR: Firstly, training qualified translators and interpreters is not accorded high priority in tertiary education in Tibet. This can be seen from the nature of the programmes, which in both cases are not majors in themselves but rather secondary "streams" within other majors, as well as from the small number of translation subjects as compared to non-translation subjects in both streams (five out of 15 in the first programme, and two out of 13 in the second programme). Secondly, job opportunities for translators in Tibet are limited to working in government offices or in the tourism industry. Government bodies include state media, state-owned enterprises, and government offices at various levels, where translation work is often undertaken by translation committees and is almost entirely in the Chinese-Tibetan direction.[7] Thirdly, in the Tibetan-Chinese Translation Stream, the fact that the majority of the core courses are related to Tibetan language and culture indicates that—despite the fact that the majority of students are native Tibetans—Tibetan-language education is insufficient and that both Tibetan linguistic and cultural competences are lacking. This latter issue will be further discussed below.

3.2 Programmes outside of the TAR

Several of the universities set up especially for minorities (*minzu,* translated in China as "nationalities") outside of Tibet also offer courses in Tibetan-Chinese translation, including Southwest University for Nationalities (*Xinan minzu daxue*) in Sichuan Province, Northwest University for Nationalities (*Xibei minzu daxue*) in Gansu Province, and Qinghai University for Nationalities (*Qinghai minzu daxue*) in Qinghai Province.[8] The majority of Tibetans living outside of the TAR reside in these three provinces, and each of the universities has an Institute of Tibetan Studies, where undergraduate and graduate degrees in subjects related to Tibetan Studies are offered, including a BA degree in Tibetan Language and Literature. Of the several streams offered under this degree, students may choose the Tibetan-Chinese Translation Stream.

The programmes offered at these three universities are very similar to that of Tibet University's programme in its Institute of Literature, and the aim of the programmes at the three universities for nationalities is also to train students in bilingual skills in order to prepare them to work in government departments in Tibetan-populated areas. The main difference between these programmes and that at Tibet University's Institute of Literature is that only three translation courses (Translation Theory, Translation Practice, and Appreciating Translated Works) are offered at all three universities, whose curricula appear identical to each other. China's highly centralised educational system is no doubt responsible for the similarities between these programmes, and since they mirror quite closely the programme at Tibet University discussed above, there is no need to elaborate further on them.

By far the most comprehensive translator training programme between Tibetan and Chinese anywhere in the PRC is at the relatively small and lesser-known Sichuan University for Nationalities (*Sichuan minzu xueyuan),* which was originally established in 1985 as the Kangding Nationality Teachers University (*Kangding minzu shifan zhuanke xuexiao)*. With approximately 7,000 students and 14 departments, the focus of this newly-accredited university is Tibetan studies and education. It is located in Kangding, a city in a remote area of Sichuan province where the majority of the population are ethnic Tibetans.

The translator training programme offered at this university is a three-year degree (roughly equivalent to an Associate's Degree) in the Tibetan Language and Literature Department. Not a "stream" underneath a major but a major programme itself, the Tibetan-Chinese Translation Major is aimed at students who are already competent in the Tibetan and Chinese languages, both the oral and written forms. Theoretically this could refer to students of either Tibetan or Chinese ethnicity, but in practice it is Tibetan students (who are necessarily bilingual) that make up the main student body, since ethnic Chinese are not required to learn Tibetan.

According to the university's course description, graduates of this major should be capable of taking up positions as conference interpreters and/or translators in various government departments. More specifically, graduates are expected to find work in Tibetan regions in the fields of education or culture, in Party or government organs, media, and in certain county or village-level grassroots government departments. Other possible career paths for graduates are working in Tibetan research or teaching Tibetan language and Tibetan-related subjects.

The aim of preparing students to work in government offices is clearly reflected in the curriculum. Job opportunities for Tibetan-language professionals are extremely limited throughout the PRC and normally only exist in Tibetan autonomous areas; of these jobs, government positions appear the most numerous. The curriculum for this three-year major is very comprehensive and includes a wide range of practical courses (Table 2).

Course	**Type***	**Credits**
Tibetan Grammar	R	7
Modern Chinese	R	7
Selections of Tibetan Literature	R	10
Tibetan Rhetorical Studies	R	4
Buddhist Logic (Pramana)	R	3
Tibetan Writing	R	4
Tibetan-Chinese Translation Theory	R	7
Tibetan Orthography	R	2
Translation in Practice	R	4
Selected Historical and Modern Government Documents	G	4
Administrative Management Studies	G	4
Government Document Writing	G	4
Techniques in Translating Government Documents	G	2
Farming and Animal Husbandry Technical Translation	G	6
Scientific and Technical Translation for Industry	G	6
Techniques in Scientific and Technical Translation	G	2
Translation Criticism of Masterpieces of Chinese Literature	G	4
History of Tibetan Literature	G	6
Masterpieces of Tibetan Literature	G	4
Techniques in Translating Literature	G	2
Tibetan History	G	4
Introduction to Five Types of Buddhist Reasoning (*wu ming xue)*	G	4
Basic Sanskrit	G	2
Tibetan Studies Research in China and the West	G	2
Tibetan-Chinese Translation History	F	2
Turfan Literature	F	4
Introduction to Tibetan Arts	F	2
Selected Ancient Tibetan Documents	F	4
Introduction to Linguistics	F	4
Tibetan Logic Studies	F	2
Introduction to Folk Literature	F	4
Tibetan Astrology	F	2
Fundamentals of the Tibetan Language	F	6
Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism	F	2
Techniques in Interpreting	F	2
Techniques in Tibetan-Chinese Translation	F	4

*R – required; G - guided electives; F - free electives.

Table 2: Course List for the Tibetan-Chinese Translation Major at Sichuan University for Nationalities.

A total of 135.5 credits are required to graduate, and students must take a certain number of courses from three different clusters including general education, major programme modules, and professional modules (Table 3).

Type of course	**Credits Needed**			
	Required courses	*Guided electives*	*Free electives*	**Total**
General education	30	1.5	12	**43.5**
Major program modules	44	16	7	**67**
Professional modules	20	0	5	**25**
Total	**94**	**17.5**	**24**	**135.5**

Table 3: Credit Structure for the Tibetan-Chinese Translation Major at Sichuan University for Nationalities.

Courses are further divided into three types: required, guided electives and free electives. The number of credits in a course correlates to the number of class hours, with courses ranging from two credits (30 hours) to 10 credits (192 hours).

If we consider the courses offered in this programme in light of Kelly's list of elements present in most translator training programmes, which she derives from the notion of translator competences (2005: 64), the courses may be broken down as follows:

- Seven courses in language competence, six of which are in Tibetan language subjects;
- Thirteen courses in cultural and intercultural competences, such as Tibetan literature, astrology, arts, and history;
- Eleven courses in professional competence, such as government document writing and translation, technical translation, translation theory and history, and interpreting techniques; and
- Five courses in subject area competence, which in this case is the subject area of Tibetan Buddhism. (These five courses could also, of course, be considered cultural competence courses, since Buddhism is an integral part of Tibetan culture.)

From this curriculum, it is apparent that the primary aim of this major is to train Tibetans in their own language and culture, as 24 of the 36 courses are related to these two main areas. The secondary aim is to train students to become competent bilingual workers and translators who can adapt to a wide variety of job situations. The eleven professional competence courses are of a highly practical nature and include topics directly relevant to the job market in Tibetan regions, such as government document translation, farming and animal husbandry translation, and scientific and technical translation. Thus, translation as an academic discipline is not the focus of this programme, which has a cultural and vocational nature.

4. Cultural competence and the translation market for minorities

The translation curricula of the various Tibetan-language TTPs discussed above highlights an important question regarding minorities and translator training: that of cultural competence and the need for training in one's own language and culture. As Kelly notes, one of the core competences for translation graduates should be "cultural and intercultural competence," which she defines as "encyclopaedic knowledge" of the two cultures involved, as well as knowledge of the "values, myths, beliefs, behaviours and textual representations of these" (2005: 32). Nord also emphasises the importance of "intercultural competence" for translators but states that such training should ideally be a "prerequisite for" rather than an "object of" translator training (2005: 211).

For minorities, however, especially minorities who live in countries where they are required to study not in their own but in the dominant, major language, and where learning about one's own culture is not part of mainstream education, cultural competence in the source culture may be far weaker than their competence in the target culture. This then becomes an issue that must be accounted for in translator training programmes.

We can see this phenomena clearly in the TTPs studied above: Just as the curriculum for translators at Tibet University indicates that Tibetans need more training in Tibetan-language subjects than they do in Chinese, due to their being schooled from an early age in Chinese, the heavily culture-specific curriculum at Sichuan University for Nationalities indicates that Tibetans are also not sufficiently educated in their own culture to act as professional translators or cultural mediators. Thus, the curriculum at Sichuan University for Nationalities, with its strong emphasis on Tibetan language and culture, both stands as a model for how to train minority speakers who are studying translation and also brings to light the lack of attention paid to minority languages and culture in mainstream education in a country such a China, where education policy and planning is tightly controlled by the government.

The TTPs discussed above also reveal an important fact about translation work for Tibetan speakers in China: there appears to be more of it outside of the TAR than within Tibet itself. Although roughly half the entire population of Tibetans in China is located outside of the TAR and half within the TAR, there are many more TTPs outside of Tibet than inside. In addition, the most comprehensive programme is located outside of Tibet. This would indicate that there is greater market demand for Tibetan-Chinese translators outside of Tibet than inside.

The main factor responsible for this is most likely a simple fact of demographics. Tibetans make up more than 90 per cent of the population of the TAR, while outside of the TAR the percentage of Tibetans in any given locality varies but is most commonly well below 90 per cent. Thus, the need

for individuals to mediate between Tibetans and Chinese is higher outside of Tibet proper. This need was dramatically highlighted during the 2010 earthquake in Yushu, a mainly Tibetan-populated county in Qinghai Province, where the government had to scramble to find interpreters, 500 of whom were students from several of the "universities for nationalities" (Radio Free Asia 2010).

Other possible reasons for the larger number of TTPs for Tibetans outside of Tibet than inside of it can only be conjectured, but may relate to the relatively less developed economic status of the TAR and the fewer resources devoted to higher education there, as well as to the common practice of sending Communist Party cadres trained in Beijing to staff Tibet's government offices, rather than hire local residents, due to the heightened political tensions in the TAR.

5. Tibetan Translator Training Programmes Outside of China

There are currently no undergraduate (or graduate) Tibetan-language TTPs in universities outside of the PRC. However, after the takeover of Tibet by the Chinese and the subsequent Tibetan diaspora communities that formed in India and elsewhere, a new trend in translator training gradually appeared due to the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to Western countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, as Tibetan lamas (Buddhist teachers) began to migrate to the West, they initially brought with them an urgent need for interpreters. Their students, either Tibetan or Western, invariably took on this role, most without any training in translation or interpretation. Bilingual language skills, knowledge of Buddhist texts, and devotion to their lama were the main requirements. In the next decades Tibetan Buddhism spread rapidly across the world, and by the start of this decade, it was the fastest growing form of Buddhism in the United States (Paine 2004: 11). As the number of Tibetan Buddhist centres grew and the demand for both interpreters and textual translators increased, there developed a new market for qualified individuals who could mediate between the Tibetan language and culture and those of Western countries.

As a result, there has been a boom in recent years in the number of courses available for studying the Tibetan language, which are offered both in Tibetan Buddhist centres and in some universities as foreign language subjects. In addition, private centres and institutes have begun providing vocational training in translating and interpreting Tibetan Buddhism. While no formal statistical survey on such programmes worldwide has yet been undertaken, my own findings reveal that there is a small but growing number of these training programmes. Approximately half a dozen specialised institutes now offer Tibetan-language TTPs, some of which are aimed at training interpreters for Tibetan lamas, while others focus on the written translation of Buddhist texts. A summary of information on five of the most prominent programmes is provided below in Table 4.

Name	**Location**	**Duration**	**Emphasis**	**Types of courses offered**	**Notes**
The Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo Translator Programme	Dharamsala, India	Four years	Interpreter training	Colloquial and written Tibetan; daily conversation practice with native Tibetans	The last two years are spent working in a Buddhist centre as an interpreter
The International Buddhist Academy's Tibetan Language Translator Intensive Programme	Kathmandu, Nepal	17 months, spread over 2 years	Buddhist text translation	Colloquial and classical Tibetan; Sanskrit; two month-long workshops on translating Buddhist texts; oral interpretation; genre-specific translation	Preference given to applicants willing to stay after graduating to work on the academy's translation projects
The Nitartha Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies' Tibetan Translator Training Programme	Washington, USA	Two years (summer term only)	Buddhist studies, Buddhist text translation	Classical written and modern spoken Tibetan; grammar; readings in classical Buddhist texts; translation practice	No obligations after graduating but students are invited to join the institute's translation group
Guna Institute's Tibetan Translator's Degree Programme	Bir, India	Five years (five six-month sessions)	Buddhist text translation	Fundamentals of the Tibetan language; classical Buddhist texts; translation skills	Graduates of the programme may join the institutes' translation committee
Rangjung Yeshe Institute's Translator Training Programme	Kathmandu, Nepal	One year	Interpreter training	See Table 5 for details	Applicants must have one year of prior training in colloquial and classical Tibetan language

Table 4: Data on Five Tibetan-English Translator Training Programmes Outside of China.

These programmes are mainly targeted at students of non-Tibetan ethnicity and are unidirectional, from Tibetan into English in most cases, or Tibetan into another major Western language. They last from a minimum of two summer terms to a maximum of five years and focus primarily on language acquisition, with a strong emphasis on translating Buddhist texts or

interpreting oral teachings. Thus, most of the programmes are located in regions where there are large numbers of ethnic Tibetans (e.g. India or Nepal), as one of the essential components of many of the programmes is to have daily conversation practice with a native Tibetan speaker. These TTPs consider fluency in the second language, combined with exposure to Buddhist terminology, philosophy and text comprehension, to be the most critical areas of study; therefore, any translation training that is included in the curriculum is of a practical rather than academic nature.

Of the five programmes listed in Table 4, the programme with the greatest weighting given to translation skills and practice is the programme for training interpreters at Rangjung Yeshe Institute, which runs for 12 consecutive months of full-time study. In this programme, students are expected to have already completed at least one year of formal study of the Tibetan language, as they enter at an intermediate level for the first summer term (Table 5).

Term	**Course content**	**Hours per week**	**Total hours**
Summer Term (8 weeks)	Intermediate Tibetan	16	128
Fall Term (14 weeks)	Classical Tibetan 3 (2nd year-level course) or Translation Project	3	42
	Colloquial Tibetan 5	5	70
	Tibetan Philosophical Discourse 1	5	70
	Translation Training	5	70
	Reading, Writing, Dharma Conversation Practice	5	70
Winter Term (2 weeks)	Translation Seminar	10	20
Spring Term (14 weeks)	Classical Tibetan 4 or Translation Project	3	42
	Colloquial Tibetan 6	5	70
	Tibetan Philosophical Discourse 2	5	70
	Dharma Conversation	5	70
	Translation Practice	5	70
Summer Term (8 weeks)	Translation Training	10	80
	Translation Practicum	10	80

Table 5: Curriculum of the Rangjung Yeshe Institute Translator Training Programme.

By the fall term, they are already introduced to the basics of interpreting (the word "translation" is used in the programme description to indicate interpreting, or oral translation) and by the winter term focus entirely on interpreting practice and training. The programme continues with emphasis on formal interpreting work, and students are required to live with a Tibetan family for the duration.

A common feature of these TTPs is that graduates are often either required or requested to serve the centre or community that sponsored the

programme for a period of one or two years, working as an oral interpreter in a Buddhist centre or on the translation committee of a Buddhist institute to translate Buddhist texts. In some cases this is enshrined in a signed agreement before students begin their studies; in others, it is merely a suggestion for graduates to consider upon their completion of the programme. This rather unusual feature of the programmes underscores the urgent need in the West for trained and qualified translators and interpreters between Tibetan and other languages.

6. Conclusion

In research on translator training, non-academic TTPs such as the Buddhist programmes discussed above are often excluded or overlooked, based on the premise that "translation competence is most effectively developed at an academic institution" (Ulrych 2005: 3). However, as Pym writes, one of the common misconceptions (what he terms "naiveties") in Translation Studies is that translation training must take place in universities, and that in fact, "there is a whole range of possible training situations" and "a lot of good training is happening outside or on the fringes of universities, where it has always been" (2005: 3).

For the researcher, of course, there are certain difficulties in studying TTPs in non-academic settings, perhaps the greatest of which is that analysis of the course structure, curricula, and training methods is necessarily limited, because each type of programme has its own unique requirements and there is no central authority to oversee and standardise curricula. In addition, private institutes and organisations often change their curricula without warning, according to the teachers and textbooks available for any given year; this was found to be the case with the private Buddhist institutes examined for this paper.

Nonetheless, a comparison of the non-academic Buddhist programmes with those found in universities across China reveals a number of important distinctions in terms of institutional motivation, curricular development, and market forces. Firstly, within China the TTPs (Tibetan-Chinese) are all implemented under a state-run educational system and are part of undergraduate degrees. Thus, the presence (or absence) of such TTPs is entirely at the discretion of the central authorities and is subject to the political, social and economic factors prevalent at any given time. This is true not only for Tibetan but for any minority language in China. In contrast, outside of China the TTPs (Tibetan-English) are run by privately-funded religious organisations whose aim is to promote and spread the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, and are mainly motivated by the needs for translators within their own organisations.

Secondly, the curricula of the two types of TTPs are markedly different, with those in the PRC aimed at teaching a variety of practical language and translation skills for students who are already speakers of the Tibetan and

Chinese languages. Outside of the PRC, the TTPs focus primarily on Tibetan-language acquisition and secondarily on translating or interpreting Tibetan Buddhism. Thirdly, market forces within and outside China in relation to the Tibetan language are widely divergent, with most jobs for Tibetan speakers in China being in government bodies, while outside China the job market is within the highly specific realm of Tibetan Buddhism, particularly within the communities that sponsor the TTPs. Thus, market forces clearly dictate the type and content of programme available.

However, what is of special interest to the study of minority language TTPs is the role that the programmes—in particular those outside the country of origin—may play in helping to preserve the language. In China, the presence (or absence) of TTPs is at the sole discretion of the government and is based largely on the job requirements of the country at any given time. Currently, translation training is considered to be of increasing importance, and the Ministry of Education is aiming to establish more TTPs between the major language, Chinese, and important international languages such as English. Whether or not this trend will lead to the eventual establishment of more TTPs for minorities is yet to be seen.

Outside of China, global market forces—driven by Westerners' interest in studying Tibetan Buddhism—have created a burgeoning demand for translators and interpreters in Buddhist centres and organisations. And although Tibetan-English TTPs are a relatively recent phenomenon, they have created a minor rebirth in the study and use of Tibetan outside the borders of China, thus helping to promote and preserve what many consider to be an endangered language. In this sense, Tibetan is more fortunate than the other 54 minority languages in China, which lack imperatives for language and translation training outside of the country's borders.

This paper has aimed to examine and analyse TTPs for Tibetans inside China, as well as to bring to light the phenomena of Tibetan training programmes outside that country. The significance of the latter programmes, though of a vocational nature, should not be overlooked, and translation researchers focusing on minority issues should examine such programmes closely for the possible links they may have to the question of language preservation and protection. In addition, more studies of translator training programmes for minorities should be carried out to determine how well minorities are served by such programmes, what their distinctive features are, and what special requirements (such as linguistic and cultural competences) need to be accounted for in preparing curricula for minorities. Finally, methods for studying and analysing minority-language TTPs—in both academic and non-academic settings—should be developed, possibly based on case studies such as this one.

List of Abbreviations used

CATTI - China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters
PRC – People's Republic of China
TAC – Translators Association of China
TAR – Tibet Autonomous Region
TI – Translation or Interpretation
TTP – Translator Training Programme

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Biography

Roberta Raine completed her Ph.D. in Translation in 1999 at the City University of Hong Kong, after which she worked for eight years as a Chinese-English translator for human rights organisations in the US and Hong Kong. She began teaching in the Department of Translation at Lingnan University in Hong Kong in 2007. Her main research interests are minority languages and translation in China, the history of translation in Tibet, and the translation of Tibetan Buddhism.

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[1] For a full discussion of the impoverishment of the Tibetan language and its marginalisation in the PRC, see Raine (2010).

[2] China classifies its minority languages into three levels according to their social function. Level 1 consists of seven minority languages that have their own traditional writing systems (Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur, Kazak, Korean, Yi and Dai). There are 12 Level 2 languages, including the Zhuang language, and more than 100 Level 3 languages (Huang 2003). These latter languages do not have extant writing systems and are therefore likely the same 100 languages declared by the United Nations to be under threat of extinction as discussed above. For more on these levels, see Huang (2003).

[3] The term "language of lesser diffusion" has been in use for at least a decade (see, e.g. Schäffner 2000: 3, 18) to describe languages spoken by relatively small populations.

[4] Ding lists the following reasons for the shortage of professional TIs in China: the "old-fashioned education ideals and pedagogy", lack of supervision of the TI market, insufficient specialised TI institutes, and lack of qualified teachers (Ding 2008: 22).

[5] The other four are the Tibetan Traditional Medicine College (*Xizang zangyi xueyuan)*, Tibet Police College (*Xizang jingguan gaodeng zhuanke xueyuan*), Tibet Professional Technology College (*Xizang zhiye jishu xueyuan*), and Lhasa Teachers' College (*Lasa shifan gaodeng zhuanke xueyuan*)]. Sometimes included in the list of Tibetan institutes of higher education is the Tibet Institute for Nationalities (*Xizang minzu xueyuan*) which caters to Tibetans but is located in Shaanxi Province.

[6] No mention is made of Tibetan in the description; therefore, one may assume that the first language of the students is Tibetan.

[7] For a discussion of the types of work available in Tibet for translators, see Raine (2010).

[8] Minorities in the PRC are mainly educated at 11 special "universities for nationalities" (*minzu daxue*), most of which are located in provinces or autonomous regions with large populations of minorities. These include Southwest University for Nationalities (*Xinan minzu daxue*) in Sichuan Province, Northwest University for Nationalities (*Xibei minzu daxue*) in Gansu Province, Qinghai University for Nationalities (*Qinghai minzu daxue*) in Qinghai Province, and the Tibet Institute for Nationalities (*Xizang minzu xueyuan*) which is (oddly) located in Shaanxi Province. In addition, the Sichuan University for Nationalities (*Sichuan minzu xueyuan)* in Sichuan Province caters specifically to Tibetans.