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THE WAY OF  
KHAM-S-PA

康巴方式

江洋才让 著

Patric Burton 江玉清 译

中国出版集团  
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**Chiangyong Tsering** is a contemporary Tibetan novelist and poet currently freelancing in China. He has written several novels and the “Trilogy of Khams-pa People” is the representative work among them. *The Way of Khams-pa* was selected by the major periodical *Selected Novels* when it was published. *Book of Khams-pa* and *Yak’s Strolling* complete the trilogy. He has also published *The Scattering of Ashe* and *With a Stone in Arms*. At present, he is devoting himself to a series of novels reflecting the life experiences of contemporary Tibetans.

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## *Chapter 1*

NEVER HAD MY grandpa expected that he himself would lose his thokcha—an amulet obtained from some mysterious period. At the time when grief and frustration caused by the loss permeated his heart and etched his face, I made a move in my mother's womb, which would be enough to delight her. Grandpa was too preoccupied with the lost thokcha to concern whether I was male or female. Worriedly, he almost turned his copper ware room upside down but still couldn't find it. Then he called out to my mother and she entered the room for help. Unfortunately, things came out as you predicted, Mother and Grandpa searched every inch of the room, but the thokcha was just nowhere to be found. Finally, Grandpa had to believe the legend that thokchas might vanish into the ground.

Completely at a loss, Grandpa looked at my mother. Just when she was about to comfort him, my mother felt my move again, which was more violent this time, as if to inform that I was going to come out. It made what was prepared to say slipped my mother's mind. Subconsciously she put her left hand on her bulging belly, and a kind of warm touch remained in her palm. She walked out

of the room silently. She sat under a poplar tree in the courtyard with her chins in her hands, alone and expectantly. Meanwhile my father Qisam and my brother Nyima were driving a herd of pack yaks on the way to Baqing County. Brother kept complaining about the loosening buff bag, which left behind a trace of golden Qingke (highland barley) grains as if a route was marked intentionally. Father gave him a pat kindly and told him to relax and consider it as a treat to earth. After some time, I got to know they would go to Baqing regularly at this time of the year as to submit some barley and sell some mountain products. They were glad to see their hard-earned paper money exchanged to some daily necessities. Of course more money could mean more goods. There was a long packet of brick tea under Father's left arm, a 15-kilo barrel full of kerosene in his right hand. He said, *what is money? It's just paper! It will rot away unused.* Brother brought a packet of cigarettes with the money given to him, and gingerly put the rest of his cash in the shirt pocket which was close to his heart. After that, he watched the bright picture on the wall at the attempt to cement it in his memory . . . But back then I was living in the womb and didn't know any of these. The small space didn't satisfy me. I wanted to turn, to cry and to come out. In this situation, Mother was disturbed by the violent movement inside her belly. She frowned and gasped, then stood up and walked out of the poplar shade. She had no idea of what was about to happen: a new life was arriving while an old one was going to leave! In those days, Grandpa suddenly changed into a different person who alternated between confusion and sobriety. Sometimes, he leaned himself against a column under a swallow nest with a stupefied look, as if his soul had roamed somewhere flown out of his body. Even sometimes, he

looked like an aging eagle who was aware of the approaching death, waiting in the enclosure of snow-capped mountains. At the sight of Grandpa's status, Mother had to stop puffing the sheep skin to help Grandpa. At present the only relief could lie in the recovery of the thokcha which was heavenly copper brought down onto the ground by lightning. This thokcha once had opened its eyes and quavered on the bosom of Grandpa. He once said that it had been a witness to his past 73 years and would remain along with his life. But now the thokcha was gone. Mother knew what it meant for Grandpa. Therefore, he was almost driven to distraction by this loss. Mother began the carpet search in the principal room and the kitchen. Soon her forehead was covered with small beads of sweat. She wiped away the sweat with the back of her hand without stopping the rummage. Mother's bedroom and Brother's bedroom were ransacked as well, only to find Father's long-lost snuffbox, and Brother's semen-stained underwear. Grandpa was depressed even more. As the night fell, Grandpa's room was shrouded in unprecedented darkness. Mother fetched safety matches from the kitchen and struck one to light the oil lamp, where only a bit of kerosene was left. She made the bed in the dim light, turned to Grandpa and said: "Father, go to bed early!" Mother heard Grandpa heave a deep sigh behind when she left. Unable to find words to reassure him, she had to leave quietly. That night, Grandpa didn't sleep away until the lamp burnt out, clinging to the memory of the missing thokcha . . . Grandpa never woke up from his sleep. At the same time I hurried out of my mother's womb and descended onto this wind-cooled world.

## *Chapter 2*

**T**HE MINUTE THE cold air touched my neck, I began to miss the warmth of Mother's womb, where I felt I was like a fish in the beginning and then a turtle. But in the subsequent phase I found myself sleeping like a huddling pig. With the flash of scissors, the midwife cut the umbilical cord on me. Out of pain, I cried loudly as to express my first discontentment about the world . . . The midwife stood still, with no idea of how to behave in front of my mother. Grandpa's corpse was wrapped in white cloth and placed in the next room where the lamp was not lit. It seemed that time was frozen . . . The death of Grandpa brought relatives who hurried to make wicks for butter lamp in spite of sadness. Some of them were busy with melting butter on the iron stove . . . Soon, all the rooms, apart from Mother's and Grandpa's, were lit with the few butter lamps. Mother lay in bed with a haggard face. None of the relatives showed much concern for my birth. What I didn't know was most of them considered me as a bane at that time. Only Mother thought otherwise. She took me from the midwife into her arms and looked at me in tears. With my eyes closed, two fists balled up as if clutching a precious jewel, I was like a newly

hatched bird in mother's hands. According to our legends, there was always something precious in the hands of newborns which would vanish into air as the fingers spread. Mother couldn't help bursting into tears. She gave me a slight kiss on the reddish skin, put me on top of her saggy tummy, and then began to recite the Great Mercy Mantra in a whisper. With the rhythm past my ears like flowing water, I got tired. Prior to sleep, I uttered loud cries, which sounded hollow in the dark and calm night. Far against the distant sky could be seen the jagged peaks of the mountain range. A meteor was streaking across the top. How many people would be enlightened by its appearance.

In the meantime, my father and my brother were on their way home after finishing their business in Baqing. They drove the pack yaks and walked for a long time in darkness. Yet it is impossible for a pack practitioner to lose direction at any time. Either the valley wind or high-hanging stars can serve as the signal of directions. Having herded the 11 pack yaks into the valley, Father stood in a relatively open area to observe the indistinct surroundings, and then said to Brother: *Nyima, let's have a rest here tonight!* Brother mumbled with a lit cigarette in his mouth . . . He yelled at the pack yaks to stop them. After some urgent shouts, Brother began to unload the purchases from the pack yaks and then unsaddled them one by one. The packsaddles were stacked into a waist-high windbreak wall, under which was laid the felt that had been fetched from the yak back with temperature. Brother was as skilled with it as Father. In this way, a makeshift shelter was built. Meanwhile, Father had fastened the ropes to the ground and tied the yaks with them. With a relief, he said: *Sleep well, son, may the stars illuminate your dream!* Then he lay on the blanket, took off the leather coat to



cover himself. No pillows were available, but with the place under his head made up the vacancy of pillow. After a while, Brother lay down with his back to Father. The light of his cigarette glinted, "Stub it out!" Father said with his eyes closed. The hollow voice almost startled Brother, who stood up and walked outside. He tossed the cigarette into the ground and pissed onto it. The cigarette was put out with a sizzle. Relieved, Father muffled up his head with the leather garment and began snoring soon. It surprised Brother that Father fell into sleep so quickly. He shook his head to the snore, turned his back to Father, and closed his eyes.

His ears were filled with Father's rhythmic snoring and the yaks' ruminating noise.

On this night, Grandpa left the world, while I arrived as if premanaged. It was unexpected to everyone. Mother didn't reveal the cause of Grandpa's death to anybody because she understood that the loss of the thokcha would be regarded as a sign of decline of our family. The grudges against Grandpa were what Mother would like to see last. Although grieving, Mother remained intelligent, which was beyond the ability of many men. Mother shed tears, which glistened like the star hanging above Father . . . But right at the moment in the grassland, below that star was a brown bear making its way to the yaks of Father and Brother.

This bear was extraordinarily huge and its nose was able to smell scent in the wind from a mile away. Excited by some different smell, the brown bear wrestled along against the wind. The noise came out as the big paws stomped on the grass.

Slobbering all the way the brown bear came close to its target. Unaware of the humans behind the saddle-made wall, it approached the yaks directly . . . Suddenly it burst into howl, which was loud