

གཞིན་ལུ་ཐུག་གི་ཉོགས་བཟོད།



The Six Brothers

An English Translation

Pema Gyatso & Geoff Bailey



བོད་ལྗོངས་མི་དམངས་དཔེ་སྐྱོན་ཁང་།

Tibet People's Press

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

六青年的故事/(印)杰瓦德著;杰夫等译. -拉萨:
西藏人民出版社,2007.7
ISBN 978-7-223-02203-3

I.六… II.①杰… ②杰… III.宗教文学-民间故事-
印度IV.I351.7

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2007)第079240号

六青年的故事

编 著 古印度诗人杰瓦德
译 者 白玛加措 杰夫·贝利
责任编辑 道韩·才让多杰
封面设计 杰夫·贝利
出版发行 西藏人民出版社
(拉萨市林廓北路20号)
印 刷 四川大自然印刷有限公司
开 本 787mm×960mm 1/16
印 张 16
字 数 120千
版 次 2007年7月第1版
印 次 2007年7月第1次印刷
印 数 01-2,000
书 号 ISBN978-7-223-02203-3
定 价 32.00元

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གཞི་ཅན་བྱ་བུ་ག་གི་རྟོག་པ་བརྗོད་ཀྱི།

ཚིག་མཁན།	ཆུ་གར་གྱི་སྟན་ངག་མཁན་ཀུལ་བ་ལྷེ།
སྐྱུར་མཁན།	པད་མ་ཆུ་མཚོ། རྩེ་ལྷུ།
ཚིག་སྒྲིག་འགན་འཁུར་བ།	རྣ་སྤེལ་ཚེ་རིང་རྣོ་ལྷེ།
མདུན་ཤོག་འཚར་འགྲོད་པ།	རྩེ་ལྷུ།
དཔེ་སྐྱུར་འགྲེམས་སྤེལ་ཚན་པ།	བོད་རྒྱ་རྩེ་མི་དམངས་དཔེ་སྐྱུར་ཁང་། (ལྷ་ས་གྲིང་རྫོང་གྲུང་ལམ་གློ་ཡང་20)
པར་འདེབས་ཚན་པ།	སི་ཁྲོན་རང་བྱུང་ཁམས་པར་འདེབས་ཚད་ཡོད་ཀྱང་སི།
དེབ་ཚད།	787mm × 960mm 1/16
པར་ཤོག	16
མིག་གྲངས།	ཁྱི་12
པར་གཞི།	2007ལོའི་ཟླ7པར་པར་གཞི1བརྒྱུག་ས།
པར་ཐེངས།	2007ལོའི་ཟླ7པར་པར་ཐེངས1བཟུང་།
པར་གྲངས།	01 - 2,000
དཔེ་དེབ་ཡང་རྟོག་ས།	ISBN978 - 7 - 223 - 02203 - 3
ཕོན་ཚང་གློ་རྒྱ།	32.00

པར་གཞི་སྐྱེད་བཟུང་གི་ཕོན་ཚང་འདྲ་བའི་ཕོན་ཚང་འདེབས་མི་ཚོགས།

Book Title: The Six Brothers
Translators: Pema Gyatso, Geoff Bailey
Publishing Editor: Dobi Tsering Dorje
Cover Designer: Geoff Bailey
Cover photo: Geoff Bailey

Printing Press: Tibet People's Press
20 North Lingkor Rd, Lhasa, TAR

First Edition: July, 2007

ISBN 978-7-223-02203-3

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Lhasa, TAR All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

PREFACE 1

INTRODUCTION 3

OPENING SALUTATION 11

CHAPTER ONE 17

CHAPTER TWO 27

CHAPTER THREE 53

CHAPTER FOUR 79

CHAPTER FIVE 93

CHAPTER SIX 117

CHAPTER SEVEN 137

COLOPHON 155

BIBLIOGRAPHY 157

TIBETAN TEXT

PREFACE

Translating into English such a text as *The Six Brothers* is a task not to be undertaken lightly. It is with some trepidation that we present this English translation. As this book represents the first attempt to render *The Six Brothers* into English, we anticipate that different opinions will arise as to the lexical choices we made and our overall approach. Translation is not a perfect science and often requires one to have a ‘feel’ for the author’s originally intended meaning as well as knowledge of both the linguistic structures employed and the historical and religious context in which a text has been written. Indeed, there is debate amongst Tibetan scholars as to the precise meaning of certain passages of *The Six Brothers*, so some ambiguities have required delicate treatment on our part.

Helping us in our quest for accuracy, we are deeply indebted to the great mind of the eminent Tibetan scholar, Professor Tsewang, of Tibet University. Close personal contact with him over the years, and careful study of his excellent commentary on *The Six Brothers*, (གཞིན་རུ་བླ་གྱི་ཚོགས་བརྗོད་གསར་འགྲེལ། *A New Commentary on The Six Brothers*. 2002.), has allowed us to improve this translation in a way that would otherwise have not been possible. It was with great sadness that we learned of his sudden and tragic passing away during the course of working on this translation. We will always fondly remember his generosity of spirit in teaching his many students, his quick wit and lucid intellect. His contribution to Tibetan studies will form a lasting legacy,

We are also very grateful for the Tibetan instruction we have received from other outstanding teachers at Tibet University over a period of many years. In particular, special thanks is due to Professor Lhakpa Tseten, the Director of the Foreign Students Department, for his comments and thoughtful input.

There are others, of course, that deserve our sincere gratitude for their help in producing this book. Jigme Dorje, Tsering Penjor, and Tsomo of the Tibetan Academy of Social Science, Lhasa, have been tireless

in their support of this project. Tsewang Gyurme, the former president of the Tibetan Academy of Social Science, has shown great interest in this work and is always a source of encouragement. Mr Sun Yung, the current president of the Tibetan Academy of Social Science, has also been a keen supporter of joint co-operative projects. We also wish to thank the People's Printing Press of the Tibet Autonomous Region for kindly supplying us with a manuscript of the Tibetan text for reproduction at the back of this book. It was a pleasure to work with the staff of the People's Printing Press during the publication process.

Thanks is also due to Mark Patterson and Mike Randall for their proof reading and valuable comments and suggestions. A big thank you also to Elke Martin for all her work on the layout and formatting.

Finally, we wish to thank the Tibet Autonomous Region Foreign Affairs Bureau in Lhasa for supporting this project and providing the necessary visas. Their unequivocal support, especially through the personal involvement of Mr Ju Jianhua and Mr. Ma Zhijian, has been greatly appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

The writer of the colophon cautiously suggests that *The Six Brothers* originated from India, written perhaps by the Indian Pandita Umapati (ཡུམ་པ་ཏི་). He further speculates that the Pandita Umapati is the Indian scholar who was invited to Ngari by Khamba Gedun Sanbo, being the same Umapati mentioned in the scripture *Thubten Chidor* (ཐུབ་བསྟན་ཅི་དོར་) written by Kedrup Rinpoche. There may be no reason to question Umapati's authorship, but since there is no conclusive evidence to indicate whether this is true, other theories about the authorship exist.

It is clear from the text itself that *The Six Brothers* is derived from India, being set somewhere in the northern part. The likelihood that this text has been translated from Sanskrit into the Tibetan language is quite high, as this would follow an established tradition. However, because of the absence of an original manuscript in Sanskrit, there is continued speculation as to whether this is the case. Some suggest that *The Six Brothers* could not be a translation from Sanskrit, because of the beautiful way it has been written and that no translator, however skilful, could reproduce this so well in Tibetan. There is a school of thought which suggests *The Six Brothers* was first composed in Tibetan by an unknown scholar who spent many years living in India. It may be that this great Tibetan scholar first received this story as an oral teaching from an Indian pandita and then decided to record it in Tibetan.

Another established opinion by certain scholars in the Tibet Autonomous Region is that *The Six Brothers* was written by Shangshung Chöwang Tragpa, (ཞང་ཞུང་ཚོས་དབང་གྲགས་པ་) the famous disciple of Tsongkhapa, in order to dispel criticism that monks of the Gelugpa sect were not capable of writing poetry. Regardless of who the author or translator may be, all agree that he was a supreme master of the Tibetan language and has written (or translated) a story, perhaps six or seven hundred years ago, which is considered to be something of a masterpiece.

The title of this text, གཞོན་ལྷ་དྲུག་གི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ could be translated into English as 'The Biography of the Six Youths'. However, it is immediately clear from the story that these six youths are indeed brothers. The category of literature known as རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ (the abbreviation of རྟོགས་པ་བརྗོད་པ་) has a broader meaning than just 'biography'. The term རྟོགས་པ་བརྗོད་པ་ is derived from the Sanskrit word 'avanda' and literally means 'the narration of a realisation'. A རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ is a story or narrative which typically deals with practical lessons about living an ethical life. A biography, or more specifically a spiritual biography, is known in Tibetan as a རྣམ་ཐབ་ .

The Six Brothers is an intriguing narrative describing the six perfections or 'paramitas' of the Bodhisattvas (which are the foundation for obtaining enlightenment) and an exhortation to practice them. According to the system of classifying texts into the 'three baskets' of teachings (ཐུགས་རྒྱུད་གསུམ་), a system established during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (ཁྲི་མོང་ལྷེ་བཙུན་) in the eighth century, this particular རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ is considered to be a teaching which pertains to the 'basket' of teachings on ethical discipline – (འདུལ་བའི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུད་).

Tibetan poetry, or perhaps more correctly 'poetics', (སྐད་པག་ literally 'pleasant sounding speech') can be a rich blend of both prose and poetic verse. Poetic verse has strict metrical demands, being dependent upon a certain number of syllables per line. The number of syllables per line is always an odd number. Verses are typically four lines comprised of five, seven, nine or eleven syllables. Though somewhat rare, poetic verse can have up to as many as thirty three syllables per line. In The Six Brothers there are a number of stanzas which contain four lines each with thirty one syllables.

In contemporary Tibetan poetry, poetic verse is often broken up into stanzas of four lines, with, of course, each line having the same number of syllables. Stanzas do not necessarily require the same number of syllables per line as the preceding stanza. Though somewhat less common, stanzas of two, six or eight lines (all with the same syllable count) are also possible. An entire poem can be one long stanza of many lines, all containing the same number of syllables. Apart from the syllable count, the foremost consideration in composing Tibetan poetry, be that poetic prose or verse, is that it must

be pleasing to the ears – known in Tibetan as ལྷན་པོ།. Though this may appear somewhat of a subjective criteria, it is one that Tibetans seem to have a unique ability to be acutely attuned to.

The Tibetan text of The Six Brothers is divided up into seven chapters, including an introductory salutation. The division between the stanzas of poetic verse and the sections of poetic prose are not marked in the Tibetan text. However, we have separated the English into poetic stanzas (usually of four lines, though there are some of six and eight) and poetic prose. This has been done for ease of reading and understanding.

This particular style of poetry, which combines verse and prose, is known as ཚིག་བཅད་དང་ཚིག་ལྷུག། or in its more commonly abbreviated form བཅད་ལྷུག་སྟེན་མ་ – ‘a mix of verse and prose’. (ཚིག་བཅད་ means ‘verse’ or ‘chopped/cut words’ and ཚིག་ལྷུག་ means ‘prose’ or ‘loose/relaxed words’.) We have translated each stanza of verse by looking at it as a whole rather than line by line. A line by line translation of Tibetan poetry can often be very difficult to comprehend in English. When studying the Tibetan text, it is necessary to look at the whole stanza in order to grasp the intended meaning. Tibetan poetry can be very dense and packed with meaning, usually requiring expansion in English. What appears as a few words in the Tibetan text often requires many words in English. Unable to preserve the poetic meter of the Tibetan original, we have rendered the English verse form in what could be called ‘free’ prose.

The subject of a sentence or a clause is often left implicit in Tibetan. We have supplied the subject or agent when this has been necessary for comprehension. We have also, on occasions, added other information which is clearly implied by the context but is not explicit in the text itself. This is again to help with clarity of understanding for the reader. When the subject or contextual information has been added, we have chosen not to enclose this in parenthesis, as is the practice of others, as we felt that this impedes the natural flow of the text.

Tibetans divide translation styles into three categories. The first is known as ཐད་སྒྲུབ་ ‘direct translation’, the second རང་སྟོན་བཞག་པ་ ‘leaving

as is' translation (this is primarily concerned with transliterating the pronunciation of Sanskrit words) and the third is དོན་སྤྱད་ 'meaning translation'. We have endeavoured to follow the 'meaning' school of translation without, we hope, compromising the actual words of the author. We have preserved the many similes, metaphors and synonyms that are replete in this text, even though they may not always sound perfectly natural in English. At times we have been more direct or 'literal' in our translation, keeping in mind the need to primarily transfer the intended meaning of the author.

Widely considered as the 'mother' of all contemporary Tibetan poetry, The Six Brothers contains as many as one hundred and thirty different kinds of metaphors, similes and synonyms. The scope of this study does not include an identification or detailed explanation of these. This would be a study of its own that would require another volume. Our goal has been to transfer the meaning of this text as clearly and accurately as possible. Tibetan poetry makes distinctions between many kinds of similes and metaphors, and also has an elaborate system of མངོན་བརྗོད་ 'synonyms' or 'epithets'. The study of མངོན་བརྗོད་ (also translated as the study of 'synonomics' or 'metaphors') forms an important part of Tibetan literature. Synonomics is one of the five 'lesser' or smaller branches of knowledge – known as the རིག་གནས་རྒྱུད་བཞུགས།¹

When མངོན་བརྗོད་ appear in the text, we have noted this as a footnote. Sometimes we have translated the synonym or metaphor directly and on other occasions we have given the meaning of the synonym. For example, the moon has many different titles. One of them is ལྷ་རྒྱལ་བདག་པོ་ 'The Lord of the Stars'. We have used this title in the text and given a footnote explaining its metaphorical content. In the following cases, which are also all synonyms for the moon, we have not always given the literal translation in the text but rather used

¹ The five minor branches of learning are: 1. ལྷན་ངག་ poetry, 2. མངོན་བརྗོད་ synonyms, 3. ཟླ་བ་སྐྱུར་ literary composition, 4. ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ astrology, 5. ལྷ་སྐྱུར་ dance and drama. The five major branches of learning, known as the རིག་གནས་རྒྱུད་བཞུགས་ are: 1. བཟོ་རིག་པ་ arts and crafts, 2. གསོ་བ་རིག་པ་ medicine, 3. སྐད་རིག་པ་ grammar/language, 4. གཏན་ཚིགས་རིག་པ་ logic, 5. རྣམ་དོན་རིག་པ་ Buddhist philosophy.

'moon' with an explanation in the footnotes: བདེ་འབྱུང་གཙུག་ཀྱི་རྒྱ་ 'Source of Happiness', སྤེལ་གྱི་གཞུང་མེད་ཁང་ 'Crystal Mansion', མཚན་མེད་དབང་ལྷག་ 'Lord of the Night', རི་བོང་ཅན་ 'Rabbit Bearer', ཀུན་དགའི་བཞིན་ལྡན་ 'The Face Everyone Loves', བདུད་རྩིའི་འབྱུང་གནས་ 'The Source of Nectar', རི་བོང་གཟུགས་ལྡན་པའི་བསེལ་ཟེར་ཅན་ 'The One of the Rabbit Image and Cool Rays'.

We have translated only the first part of the colophon, as this section was relevant to the text itself. The remainder of the colophon we did not directly translate but gave a general summary as it has no immediate relevance to the text itself. The entire colophon has been included in the Tibetan text for those who may wish to study it. The Tibetan manuscript that we used is the one published by the Tibet People's Press (བོད་རྫོང་སྤེལ་གྱི་དམངས་དབུ་སྐྱེན་ཁང་།), in 1980. (The same manuscript was reprinted in 2000, being the one that appears at the end of this book. In the 2000 edition of the manuscript, a contents page and chapter headings have been added. We have not translated these contemporary additions as they were not part of the original text.)

Tracing the lives of six brothers, this enchanting story is an analogy of the six transcendental perfections or 'paramitas' of the Bodhisattvas. The three older brothers represent all that is evil in the worldly existence of samsara and the three younger brothers represent the perfect conduct of a true Bodhisattva – one who vows to attain enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings. Both the conduct and the names of the three younger brothers (*Great Understanding*, *Virtuous* and *Loving Kindness*) clearly indicate their exalted status as Bodhisattvas. Through the course of the story, the three younger brothers exhort the older brothers to flee their corrupt lives of folly and to enter the true path of enlightenment. Eventually they succeed in doing so, but not without numerous misadventures along the way.

The first chapter introduces each of the six brothers, describing their various characteristics. The remaining six chapters are devoted to one of the six perfections, presenting them in the correct order of importance. The six perfections are: generosity, ethics, perseverance, diligence, concentration and wisdom. (For a fuller discussion of

these, please refer to footnote number twenty in the opening salutation on page sixteen.)

The primary focus in preparing this translation has been for those who may wish to study the Tibetan text in conjunction with the English translation, hence the extensive footnotes referencing the Tibetan text. However, we have also attempted to make the translation meaningful for those who are not students of the Tibetan language.

Finally, our intention in undertaking this translation has been to further research Tibetan language and culture. It is to this end that we hope we have made a worthwhile, though small, contribution to the burgeoning discipline of Tibetan studies.





OPENING SALUTATION

In Sanskrit:² *Kegu-mārā-awā-dhāna*.³

In the Tibetan language: *gzhon nu drug gi rtogs pa brjod pa*.⁴

Homage to the All Knowing One.⁵

*You, the one who, born of the universal monarch⁶ lineage in
Sergya,⁷ discarded the kingdom of the four continents⁸ like
throwing away chaff and lived the life of an ascetic,⁹*

*Who alone, in front of the precious tree,¹⁰ defeated all the
hosts of devils and obtained the holy nectar of
incomparable enlightenment,*

*Who, for the purpose of leading migrators¹¹ to the path of
the three vehicles¹² and making them like yourself,
spun far and wide the wheel which illuminates
all false doctrines,*

*Who, in order to complete all of your deeds,¹³
entered into sublime peace¹⁴ in the Sala¹⁵ forest,
you, the Ruler of the Victorious,¹⁶ protect us.¹⁷*

*Whoever listens will enjoy drops of nectar to the ears,
and beautiful images will bring great happiness
to the eyes.*

*The tongues of the readers will be endowed with good
fortune, and the minds of those who practice this teaching
will be given the fruits of their wishes.*

*The treasury of the intellects of those who understand
will greatly increase, and the ignorance of those
who do not understand will be overcome.*

*This profound, excellent and great poetic story indeed
deserves to be highly praised in the presence of the wise.*

Even though worldly people¹⁸ are inherently awash in the affliction of the three poisons,¹⁹ which is the origin of endless suffering, by believing in the vast Buddha nature²⁰ and having compassion and sublime wisdom, and by practicing the six perfections²¹ of the way of