

Interview with Jamyang Norbu

JTL Editors

Jamyang Norbu stands among the most prominent and influential voices in the Tibetan exile community. A novelist, historian, playwright, polemicist, and cultural critic, he has played a central role in both chronicling and shaping the modern Tibetan experience. Author of *Echoes from Forgotten Mountains: Tibet in War and Peace* (India Viking 2023) and *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (Bloomsbury 2001) among many other works, former director of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, and the force behind the incisive online blog *Shadow Tibet*, Norbu has been hailed as the “Lu Xun of Tibet” and condemned by Beijing as a “radical Tibetan separatist.” A former member of the Tibetan resistance movement in Mustang, Nepal during the 1970s, he is currently the founder and director of the High Asia Research Center in New York City.

Journal of Tibetan Literature: We want to start with your most recent work, *Echoes from Forgotten Mountains: Tibet in War and Peace*, a powerful blend of literary memoir and historical chronicle. Straddling genres, it weaves together a personal narrative with ethnographic insight and a compelling account of Tibetan resistance.

In the preface you write that: “Tibetans of the past, especially those ur-nomads we call Horpa, among whom the most accomplished Gesar singers are found, have highly accurate, archival memories. This is, of course, a quality found in many oral cultures of the past... In Tibet, the recitation and singing of such accounts were essential features of formal ceremonies in various tribal assemblies and courts of the once independent and semi-independent principalities in Eastern Tibet.... Even with the advent and spread of the written language, from the seventh century CE, such oral traditions have maintained their hold on Tibetan society to this day” (xv–xvii).

Could you expand on why storytelling has remained so vital to Tibetan identity, and how it continues to shape memory, resistance, and cultural continuity today?

Jamyang Norbu: Even after Tibet had literacy, it was mostly confined to religious genres. For lay people, what inspired them were oral stories. Even with Gesar, when these stories are written down, they don’t carry the same power. It’s not just about memorizing—it’s about being inspired by it. People say Gesar entered them, and after that, they could recite the entire epic verbatim.

It has that magical quality. Memory isn’t just a substitute for reading—it’s powerful. For

Tibetans, memory is very special. Also, books were hard to come by. Many of the best folk stories I know were oral. I never studied Tibetan in school; I went to English-language schools, and later, in Dharamshala, I focused on oral traditions, especially ghost stories. I've always been inspired by the oral part, which is why I consider it important.

Even our histories to some extent are oral. In Western Tibet, we have the Molla tradition; in Eastern Tibet, it's called Tamgyema. In certain courts or small kingdoms, the king's matrilineal or patrilineal chronicles had to be recited by heart during ceremonies. Even today, in Tibetan weddings, Molla singers are invited to recite the local history and stories of the gods and mountain deities. A proper recitation empowers the ceremony.

Even in parody traditions like the Jakar, which occur during New Year and weddings, the reciters are treated with great respect. They tell how places like Lhasa and Chamdo came into being through recited lines. These traditions are important in the Tibetan world. That's why I say memory is the real powerful mover in Tibet.

Even more than written words—look at China, which has a strong writing tradition. A lot of people today don't remember Tiananmen or the Cultural Revolution. People from Lhasa have come to ask me about it because no one talks about it and the documents are gone. But oral tradition can overcome authoritarian attempts to erase history. It has power.

The Gesar tradition helped inspire uprisings during the Cultural Revolution. After the main uprising had been crushed, new ones started in nomadic areas, inspired by people claiming to embody Gesar or his generals. A young nun, whose story I tell in the book, was inspired by Gesar and led a major group of Tibetan fighters during the Cultural Revolution. One Tibetan student at Columbia even called her the Tibetan Joan of Arc. Like Joan, she was young, spiritual, and led men to war.

There are many such stories of resistance in the book. The conflict between Tibetans and Communist China is unique. Since 1949, even in distant regions like Amdo, uprisings happened. The 1959 uprising in Lhasa and the CIA operations that followed for 20 years—all of it speaks to the continuity of resistance.

This has been diminished somewhat today because of His Holiness' call for nonviolence, which I respect. But we still need to tell the historical truth. What happened, happened. Just because it doesn't fit someone's ideology doesn't mean we should deny it. That's why I wanted to focus on facts—but not write formal history. I tried to give voice to the people who were there, link their words together, and provide an overall narrative.

JTL: In your introduction you write “that the need to leave behind more permanent testaments has in the last couple of decades resulted in a flowering of memoirist writing in the Tibetan language, which in turn has received considerable academic attention within the world of Tibetan studies” (xxvi). *Echoes from Forgotten Mountains* weaves together a history of the Tibetan resis-

tance with your own life narrative. Could you share your thoughts on the interplay between history, literature, and storytelling?

JN: I wrote such a long book because, although many people have written about Tibet—including scholars and even former CIA personnel—I found that they often lacked knowledge of military history. Few of them had read any Western military history. I've been a fan of military history all my life, so I wanted to view Tibetan uprisings through that lens.

These weren't just innocent victims. Tibetans were real players with real chances to succeed. Even without formal military training, they fought with skill and ingenuity. The 1959 escape of the Dalai Lama was not just spiritual or emotional—it was also a strategic operation. I wanted Tibetans to know we weren't just victims. We had agency. When the PLA invaded in 1950, yes, the Governor General surrendered, but another general stayed behind and organized a retreat all the way from Chamdo to within 150 miles of Lhasa, establishing a defensive line that held for a year. This allowed the Tibetan government time to petition the UN two or three times. But that general is forgotten. The PLA entered Lhasa only in November 1951, a year later. That shows Tibetans had capacity. They didn't just surrender or flee.

Even comparing this with other military retreats—like U.S. troops in Korea or British troops surrendering in Singapore—Tibetans didn't run. Even when overwhelmed, they stood their ground. I wanted Tibetans to take pride in that history. I also tried to bring out the individuals. Take Andrug Gompo Tashi, leader of the Four Rivers, Six Ranges movement. He wasn't some swaggering warrior—he was a calm, soft-spoken diplomat. That's how he built an army.

JTL: Before we move on, we noted that in the dedication of your book, you write: "In memory of my dear mother, who, from my earliest childhood to her last days in the early 2000s, told me stories of Tibet." That sets up so beautifully everything that follows in the book, much of which you've started to describe here. Could you say a bit about the earliest stories you remember from her?

JN: Yes, absolutely. My mother had an incredible memory—really something like perfect recall. You see, she was the eldest child of the Governor General of Eastern Tibet. Much earlier, he also served in the Kashag and was a fighting man. When he was around 18 or 19, that was the time when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama fled Lhasa and went to Darjeeling. His father told him to go and join the Dalai Lama, who was in need of financial support. So the Dalai Lama called on Tibetan aristocrats from Lhasa and elsewhere to contribute, and my grandfather managed to bring, I think, three bags of silver—something like that.

He made the journey and was stuck in Darjeeling with four other young officials and one elder.

But there was little they could do; the British weren't supportive at the time. They had only provided the Dalai Lama with accommodation in Darjeeling, and that was about it.

These young men eventually decided, "We can't just sit here." So, they returned to Tibet with the aim of raising local peasant levies to fight against the Manchus. Of course, it was easier said than done—they were essentially kids. They got clobbered the first time around, but they managed to escape and return to Darjeeling, deeply discouraged. But then the Tibetan prime minister at the time, Shatra Lönchen—a great statesman—summoned them. They were terrified, thinking he would reprimand them. But instead, he welcomed them warmly, saying, "You are heroes. Never forget that. You never win a war at the start, but you went and fought. That's what matters. Next time, you'll win—now you have experience." One of those five young men was my grandfather.

He was just 19 then. From that point, he began a long career of military engagement. In 1912, during the uprising in Lhasa, he returned to fight. Eventually, he helped recapture Shigatsé and Gyantsé, alongside other young generals. By the time he was 21 or 22, he had been made a general.

He reclaimed Chamdo and fought in several battles. I didn't realize the full extent of his involvement until I read Melvyn Goldstein's book and found British records that mentioned him. In the 1930s, during the Long March, the Chinese governor of Sichuan had to move troops to face the Communists. This left parts of the Tibetan border unguarded, and my grandfather seized the opportunity to reclaim territories lost earlier. Even the present Dalai Lama mentioned him when I met His Holiness a few years ago. Despite whatever reputation I might have, he invited me for a conversation and said, "Your grandfather had a special power." There's a Tibetan term for that—I forget now—but it refers to someone destined for greatness. He never lost a battle or skirmish. His Holiness clearly knew of him.

So yes, I've tried to weave these personal elements into the book. My mother was deeply proud of her father and told me everything she could. Being the eldest, she remembered very well. She even traveled with him to Eastern Tibet. Military families often brought their households with them, since they were stationed away for years. She accompanied her father to Dzachuka, on the frontier between Amdo and Central Tibet.

She remembered when two great Golog chieftains came to pay homage to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. That was a significant event. The Golog people were semi-independent and considered quite fearsome. My mother recalled how the Tibetan government had prepared official uniforms for them and held a grand ceremony. Later, I found this exact episode referenced in Joseph Rock's travel accounts—he noted that one chief wasn't present because he had gone to pay tribute to the Tibetan government. That aligned exactly with my mother's memory.

She had so many stories from those years. Because her father had no sons at the time, he dressed her as a boy. She was like his companion and aide. She even carried a small Italian Beretta pistol—we Tibetans called it a saka—a small weapon suitable for a child. She rode a small pony and traveled all across Eastern Tibet, right up to the Amdo border. She knew those regions intimately.

Tashi Tsering, the scholar, once told me that my mother had received teachings from many of the most renowned spiritual masters. Later, even great figures like Jamyang Khyentsé Rinpoché would say they envied her—she had encountered many older lamas in her youth. Being the Governor General’s daughter, she was often smuggled into pujas and rituals, and she remembered all of it.

Tibet was the center of her world—its culture, its people, its spirituality. She was fluent in English, too, so when I was a child, she could speak to me in a way that kept my attention focused on Tibet. She passed that love on to me.

JTL: We want to turn now to your contributions to writing and literature in the service of democracy—especially within Tibetan exile communities. We’re thinking about your work in establishing the Amnye Machen Institute. You mentioned Amnye Machen earlier, and this period—starting in the early to mid-’90s and continuing into the late ’90s—saw you working with Lhasang Tsering, Tashi Tsering, and Pema Bhum. Together, you launched *Mangtso*, a newspaper featuring Tibetan-language news, editorials, and political reporting. You introduced innovations in Tibetan print and publication—like adding word spacing in Tibetan script, which was controversial at the time. You also helped establish the journal *Lungta* and launched a translation project that brought key works of English literature into Tibetan—such as Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* and *Seven Years in Tibet*. What were your aspirations when launching the Amnye Machen Institute? Looking back, how do you see its impact on the landscape of contemporary Tibetan-language publications?

JN: When we started, it was around the time when China was beginning to open up under Deng Xiaoping, and there was a shift in global awareness about Tibet. Before that, people had a general sense of Tibet, but not much real sympathy for the Tibetan cause. The world had leaned more left, and many on the left had aligned themselves with Maoist ideologies.

But with China’s opening, some Chinese leaders started acknowledging what had happened in Tibet—admitting that their actions mirrored colonialism, like what European powers had done in Africa. Once that admission was out there, many of the old pro-Mao, anti-Tibet voices in the West couldn’t hold their ground anymore. In fact, some of them who had written critical things about Tibet came to Dharamshala to write new, more sympathetic accounts. So yes, things changed quite a bit.

Around that time, we also began hearing from people coming out of Tibet, and we realized how much effort had been made inside Tibet to preserve language and literature—something we hadn’t fully appreciated before. I was living in the UK then, and Tashi called me one day and said, “You’ve got to come over—we need to get to work.”

There was this remarkable writer, Pema Bhum, who had studied under the older generation of teachers, and Tashi believed we needed to bring together our different strengths: he was the

scholar of Tibet, Pema Bhum specialized in literature, I brought English-language experience, and Lhasang Tsering was a fantastic administrator, having worked with the Tibetan Youth Congress before.

We had a great team, and we got a lot done during that time. Honestly, they were really happy, productive years. But the truth is, we weren't exactly popular. Well, all of us had our flaws—no denying that. A friend from Indiana University jokingly called us the Angry Machos.

Riga's dad (Tsering Shakya) was also part of that circle. Although he mostly lived in London, he would often come visit and was deeply engaged in what we were doing.

But I have to admit, some of the tensions we faced were because of me. I'd been writing critically for a long time—especially since His Holiness the Dalai Lama began reaching out to China and signaling a willingness to compromise on Tibetan independence. Even before that, I'd started publishing.

I didn't have formal training, but I read obsessively—especially George Orwell—and I developed a style that was sharp, even snarky. When His Holiness began promoting the Middle Way approach, I openly criticized it. I also took aim at the Tibetan cabinet. Back then, *The Tibetan Review* was a major outlet. To their credit, the government genuinely tried to keep it open and democratic. It was a vital platform for Tibetans, and I published in nearly every issue for years. But my critical stance created friction.

I wasn't writing blindly—I'd studied Chinese history intensely, not at a university but through intelligence work. I'd worked with a top French sinologist, living with him for six months. We'd study Chinese Communist Party history from morning till night. He also showed me how to access materials from Hong Kong—which, back in the '70s and '80s, was a goldmine of information that even scholars at Harvard weren't reading. People still believed there had been no famine in China. But I'd read the Western scholars who showed otherwise. So, I kept writing—sometimes forcefully—and that rubbed some people the wrong way.

Eventually, Tashi and others asked me to edit *Mangtso*, our newspaper. We had a great time running it, but it did lead to some struggles. Part of the tension was that we received substantial support—we got the Norwegian Freedom Prize for two years, and George Soros also started backing us. He even came to Dharamshala to explain his support. That visibility made things complicated. When young people like us start attracting international attention and resources, it upsets established power structures. Our words began to carry weight.

We had even begun planning to establish a university in Dharamshala—before Lhasa University was even a concept. We thought: why not here? We had the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the School of Dialectics, the Institute of Tibetan Medicine, TIPPA, and other institutions that could form the basis of a university. But the plan fell apart. There were threats—real ones. At one point, someone placed a bounty of 2 lakh rupees on Pema Bhum's life. It was public,

from an established organization. So eventually, we all disbanded. I left and started writing again, but by then *The Tibetan Review* was gone.

People had started writing online, though I wasn't aware of it at first. I launched a personal blog, *Shadow Tibet*, and surprisingly, people inside Tibet began reading and translating my work. Even a Chinese translator started posting my pieces in Chinese, helping me connect with readers across the border.

Those were great days. But in recent years, the writing culture has all but dried up. People don't really read anymore. It's all YouTube and Facebook now. Opinion pieces dominate—but most are unresearched and lack depth. That's why, when I moved to New York, Elliott Sperling and I dreamed up the idea of starting a research center here. A place for real discussions, gatherings, exchange. We even bought apartments the same year—he in Jackson Heights, and I just 10 minutes away. We had big plans...

JTL: We'll turn to High Asia Research Centre shortly, but first, we have a question about reading and writing. During the early 2000s, we saw the flourishing of Tibetan cyberspace. Many Tibetans around the world—both in Tibet and in exile—read your blog and followed your online essays. I'm curious about your literary influences. In *Shadow Tibet: Selected Writings from 1989 to 2004*, you mention George Orwell as a model. Having read both Orwell's essays and your own, one might imagine Orwell would be proud to have you as a literary heir. You also reference Simon Leys, the noted sinologist. Could you speak about your formative literary experiences—both as a reader and writer—and how they helped shape your voice and style?

JN: You know, as a child, I never really wanted to be a writer. But I was a voracious reader. I went to a Jesuit school, and honestly, it was tough. Miserable, even. The only escape was through reading. That was the one good thing the school offered: unlimited access to fiction. I read constantly. Even when I got to Dharamshala, I kept reading everything I could get my hands on—even if I didn't fully understand it. That's one of my regrets. I read so much profound literature, but without a good teacher or the right environment, I don't think I absorbed as much as I could have. I missed out on a lot of the deeper benefits.

When you read *War and Peace* at 18 or 19, it's probably not the best time to truly appreciate it. But I was hooked. Reading became an addiction. Later, after my time with the Mustang guerrilla group, I started thinking about other ways to contribute to the Tibetan cause—and writing became one of them. In the early 1970s, there was very little writing about Tibet from the West, and what did exist was often very negative—especially among left-leaning circles like *The Guardian* readership. It wasn't until the '80s and '90s that there was more support for the Tibetan issue.

Even writing a letter to the editor felt daunting. I realized that speaking English and writing in English are two very different things. So, I sat down to try and learn. George Orwell became one

of my great teachers. He offered clear, practical advice on writing, and I took it to heart. I didn't just read his work—I absorbed it, especially his collected essays.

At the same time, I was also influenced by writers like Simon Leys and others, including Father Ladány, the Jesuit priest who published the *China News Analysis* from Hong Kong. Their work opened my eyes to what was really happening in China. Among Chinese writers, Lu Xun was a huge influence. I found his books in India—back then, West Bengal was communist, so Chinese bookstores stocked materials from Beijing. Sometimes, they even sent them for free.

I was also very into French literature. I was a Francophile for a long time—reading Proust, Flaubert, and others. I had a huge personal library. Elliot Sperling was another major influence. When he visited, he appreciated my writing and even sent me copies of *The New York Review of Books* from the U.S. That changed the way I thought. I realized that one subject could be approached from many different angles. You didn't have to view it from a single perspective. That journal remains one of the few I still deeply respect—despite the occasional article on Gregorian chants or other niche topics.

JTL: Were there any South Asian Anglophone writers you particularly appreciated?

JN: Yes, absolutely. V.S. Naipaul, for instance—he was a huge influence. People often overlook him, but Naipaul's critical writing—especially on India—was incredibly sharp. Of course, today many see him as problematic, perhaps even racist. There's a kind of "brown sahib" quality to him. But regardless of his personality—he could be a jerk—he was often right. He harshly criticized aspects of Indian society. He described how people defecated in public—on the mountains, the beaches—and yes, it hurt some Indians. But many also admitted he was right. He held up a mirror to society in a way that few others dared.

Then there's Salman Rushdie. I was never a huge fan of his novels—they give me a headache! I've tried, really. But his essays are brilliant. They really opened my eyes. There are many other Indian writers too, especially short story writers. One of the great things about living in India at that time was access to books. Indian editions were very affordable. Even Western books were cheaper, as the Indian government didn't tax them heavily. Later, Indian publishers started reprinting them.

So, all of these influences helped broaden my worldview. And gradually, I think my writing improved. The only issue was that Orwell wrote long essays, so I did too—and people complained about that! But that style stuck with me.

Another key lesson I learned from Orwell was how to write about ordinary things—like comic books or making tea—and infuse them with deeper cultural or political meaning. He showed that even small cultural habits could reveal something profound about a nation. That was a revelation for me.

So, I started applying that to Tibetan topics. I've written about tsampa, about momos—I've

had whole debates about who invented the momo! (The Nepalese claimed credit, but I think I made a pretty strong case otherwise.) These days, I write more on Tibetan environmental and wildlife issues—things that have been ignored in the past.

JTL: Let's turn to High Asia Research Centre and the kind of work you're doing now. We wanted to ask you to dig a bit more into how you see the relationship between literature—and the various forms of writing you've done over the years—and political work, or political consciousness, or even democracy. This question came up while we were reflecting on a quote we found attributed to you on Phayul, where you said something along the lines of: Tibetan advocacy groups are committed, but sometimes they seem to lack clarity about what they're fighting for and who they're representing. There are maybe two ways to think about this relationship between literature and political work. One is in the past, which you've just spoken about beautifully, especially during the Amnye Machen period. And the other is in the present—your current writing, and the institutional base you now write from, namely the High Asia Research Centre, in Jackson Heights, Queens.

JN: One of the most important things for me is that I truly believe in literature. I believe in it implicitly—even as a political tool. People don't really understand political issues deeply unless they're written about. And not just as dry political analysis, but as literature—as story. Not just a single story, either, but multiple, sometimes conflicting narratives. That's okay. When you have different accounts—literary accounts—of events that have taken place in your country, only then do people begin to see things in a broader context. They start to grasp the issues more fully. And I think one of the problems with the Tibetan issue is that we've had very little of that.

I probably shouldn't say this, but when younger writers come to our events and gatherings, I can't always keep my mouth shut. Many of them stick too closely to poetry. Don't get me wrong—I love Dylan. I'm a huge Dylan fan. He infused American folk, rock, and blues with serious poetic and literary weight. Before Dylan, pop lyrics were often trivial. Then he came along and made them profound.

But I think the Tibetan literary world needs to move beyond a kind of immature poetry. Even for those who want to write poetry—why not try writing protest songs? Maybe they won't be great at first, but at least give it a go. And also, write short stories. Write plays. These aren't long forms. I'm glad to see people like Tenzin Dickie and others beginning to explore short stories and essays. It's changing slowly, but we need to go beyond the poetry that once dominated—things like “Lines to a Prostitute” and so on.

What I hope is that when someone publishes a book—like some of the ones we've recently released here—we can actually have real discussions about them. That's a good thing. Even when you argue with a writer, you're honoring their work by taking it seriously. You're treating it with

respect. In the past, most Tibetan writers self-published, then stored a few boxes of their books under the bed. When friends came over, they'd hand out copies.

Writers need a space where, even if their work doesn't sell, at least it gets discussed. That's one of the reasons we're doing this here—and why literature matters so much. Most of the books I've released here haven't been explicitly political. Most are literary. And doing that, for me, brings a kind of happiness.

JTL: Could you do both, though? Could literary work also be political?

JN: Yeah, absolutely. But it takes a while for some people to master that balance. That's why I always say—read Orwell. He's a great teacher in that regard. Especially for modern writers. You know, even in American literature, the stuff I read in the '60s, '70s, and '80s—writers like Thomas Pynchon and others—they're interesting in their own way, but they're not going in the same direction I am.

Orwell was different. I often tell younger Tibetans, who tend to lean very far left these days: Read Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. That book is about the fight against fascism, written by someone who was actually there. And he wrote with complete honesty about what he saw. Hemingway was there too, and I admired him at one point, but Orwell's writing is different. If we're going to talk about something like the Spanish Civil War, we should look at how writers engaged with it directly, in the field. The challenge, though, is that I'm two generations older. The younger generation is still very young. So maybe I need to be a little less demanding. I should give them time and space to come up with their own ideas and approaches.

One of the biggest problems with today's media—especially political media—is the overuse of jargon. Even if you have commendable liberal politics, it often comes wrapped in repetitive, overused jargon. It becomes a kind of laziness. Orwell trained me not to write that way. Not to use academic language or legalese. No jargon. Instead, you form the idea in your head clearly and then write it simply. That's how people understand you. And honestly, I even have trouble talking with my own kids sometimes. They don't want to hear this from me—but it's another world now, so I try not to complain too much.

JTL: As a last question, what's on your desk at the moment? What are you working on? In 1999, you published an amazing novel, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, maybe your only work of fiction so far. Are you interested in writing more fiction? We also know there are stories that you're working on launching a new journal from the High Asia Research Center—*High Asia Journal*. What do you have in the works?

JN: Yes, so we're working on the *High Asia Journal* now. We're hoping to make it biannual. Not

just academic articles—though a few good ones, yes—but we want to include literary writing, photography (preferably black and white, which is also cheaper to print), poetry, and essays, all unified by a thematic focus. But above all, it needs to create a space for serious discussion of real issues facing the Tibetan world. That kind of venue doesn't exist right now. Back in the day, we had the *Tibetan Review*, which we may have overused, yes, but it gave people a place to argue and express. I want this journal to have that vitality—especially through letters. Even short letters responding to articles—whether critical or supportive—are crucial. I want all Tibetans to feel they can participate.

As for my own writing, I've got several things on the shelf. One is a long and messy manuscript on contemporary art in Tibet, tracing the evolution of Tibetan artists even before Gendun Chopel and through those I knew personally from organizing art exhibitions in Dharamshala. Another is a collection of ghost stories—*Tibetan Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. I'd really like to finish that before I head to the pearly gates.

There's also an essay I wrote a while back about language changes in Tibet. It's not scholarly in the academic sense—my Tibetan isn't strong enough for that—but I have a unique background from my family. I grew up hearing how modern Tibetan evolved organically from the 19th century on—through trade, contact with Beijing, India, and elsewhere—long before the Communist interventions. This grassroots modernization is often overlooked. People like Goldstein have documented the Communist reforms—new dictionaries, terminology—but I argue the real linguistic innovation came from below, not from Party academies.

This project connects directly to the present. The Chinese state's boarding school campaign, and efforts to reshape the Tibetan language, are deeply troubling—yes, even genocidal. But I don't think they'll succeed. I remember before the Berlin Wall fell, everyone thought Latvian, Estonian, Ukrainian languages were dead. And yet—just a few years after the Soviet collapse—those languages came roaring back. Tibet can do the same, and in some ways we're better positioned. We have a unique written tradition and a deep literary and spiritual archive that gives Tibetan language continuity and cultural heft.

That's why the tentative title for this book is *Newspeak and New Tibet: Communist China's Claim to Modernizing Tibetan Society and Language*. It's my Orwellian nod, and a challenge to those top-down narratives.

