



IN MEMORY OF ELLIS GENE SMITH (1936-2010)¹

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In Tibet the custom is that we never again say the name of those who have passed away. It is considered impolite towards the family and disrespectful to the one who has died. The deceased are instead referred to as “dam pa” (the “late one”), “zhing gshegs” (the “one who proceeded to the heavenly abode”), “bla ’das” (the “departed soul”) or in more colloquial terms “grong mkhan de” (the “one who died”). In the case of writing a biography or long-life supplication prayers for your Guru when he is alive, we write “don gyi slad du mtshan nas smros na” (“to spell out his name for a specific reason”) before the Guru’s personal or ordained name. If the Guru is no more, we simply say “mtshan brjod par dka’ ba” (“it is difficult to spell out his name”).

After a death, we do not wear our finery, neither dressing well nor displaying jewellery for at least 49 days, or in some cases, a full year. Until 1951, in traditional Tibetan society, we did not write obituaries or conduct memorial services. These practices were adopted after the Chinese occupation and styled after Western traditions. I cannot ignore these changes and so today I am dressed in Tibetan clothes to show my respect to the departed soul and I too will follow modern tradition and say a few words about my mentor and friend Ellis Gene Smith (1936-2010). I feel a little out of place and lacking in legitimate credentials to say anything about Gene after the gallery of very distinguished dignitaries who have already expressed their sentiments.

But I feel I can say something, because I knew Gene for some 32 years and we spent many hours exchanging findings and rare Tibetan books on numerous occasions, both in India and in America.

I like to think that Gene’s interest in Tibet—or his coming to know of Tibet for the first time—goes back to the decade before he dedicated himself to Tibetan studies in 1958. I remember seeing a *Life* magazine issue dated 23rd April 1951 that carried a full length photographic essay by Heinrich Harrer entitled “The

1 This is a keynote speech read, at the “Tibet House Salutes with Remembrance in Gratitude, Ellis Gene Smith (1936–2010)” organized by Tibet House, New Delhi at the India International Centre, New Delhi on February 2nd 2011. Previously published on 23rd September 2011, on the TBRC website’s blog as, ‘For Gene – from Tashi Tsering’ at, <http://blog.tbrc.org/for-gene-from-tashi-tsering/> accessed on the 21st December 2012. I am grateful to my friends Dr. Roberto Vitali and Emma Martin for editing this short paper. However, I take full responsibility for any errors that may be found herein.





flight of the Dalai Lama” concerning the present Dalai Lama’s sojourn in Gro mo.² Alongside it, the issue contained full coverage of the funeral service of the 7th President of the Mormon Church, George Albert Smith (1870-1951), a great uncle of Gene’s.³ When I first saw it, I thought, “My Goodness! Gene had a karmic connection with us by then already.” I once told this to him. He just laughed and did not comment, so I left it there.

I never dared to ask Gene why he chose Tibetan studies. One thing is sure: when nothing was going well for the Tibetans, his new found love for Tibetan culture was a great piece of luck for us. In the 1950s we were facing the most difficult period in our history. Gene’s interest in Tibetan studies resulted in a mammoth contribution towards preserving Tibetan literature, thus taking Tibetan studies to a new height.

During the early years of Gene’s interest in Tibetan culture, the Chinese Communists were already everywhere in Tibet and except for a handful of fellow Communists from the Eastern bloc, no foreigner was allowed in Tibet. At the same time there were only a few places in the Western world where Tibetan and Buddhist studies were taught. Most professors in those days were armchair scholars and the few who had been in Tibet before 1959 were reluctant to share their collections. Those few scholars used to hoard original Tibetan texts, waiting to write something about their “discoveries” in the Tibetan world.

The arrival of the Sa skya phun tshogs pho brang family and Sde gzhung Rinpoche (1906-1987) at the University of Washington, Seattle, in October 1960 was for the twenty-four year old Gene, the highlight and good fortune of his life. This was as if, as a Tibetan proverb goes, “a boulder of gold rolled to your door.” (“gser gyi pha bong sgo khar sgril”). He helped the Sa skya pa family unstintingly for four years. This is where he met his first Guru, Sde gzhung Rinpoche, the living treasure of Tibetan Buddhist Ris med, the nonsectarian tradition, of the last century. It was a classic meeting of the perfect Guru with the perfect disciple. In the years from 1960 to 1965, Gene also benefited from other Tibetan scholars who taught at the University of Washington, Seattle: Nor nang dge bshes ngag dbang blo gros, Jo lags bkra shis tshe ring (b.1929) and finally Sa dbang Zur khang dbang chen dge legs (1910-1977). In the early 1960s Sde gzhung Rinpoche was reluctant to teach any esoteric Tibetan initiations, but after four or five years, he gave Gene the Tibetan name of ’Jam dbyangs nam rgyal, after the most celebrated Rnying ma polymath ’Ju bla mi pham Rinpoche (1846-1912) of Khams. I quote from the biography of Sde gzhung Rinpoche written by my friend Dr. David Jackson,

“For their studies at home, Dezhung Rinpoche sat in a rocking chair, rosary

2 *Life*, April 23, 1951, pp.130-140.

3 “The Mormons Change Leaders” *Life*, April 23, 1951, pp.121-122,127-128.





in hand, while Smith sat at his feet. When Smith's question was a good one, Rinpoche kept muttering his mantras for a few moments, and then gave a most lucid answer in response, with well-organized subject divisions. They studied every morning for an hour between about eight and nine or nine and ten o'clock, after Rinpoche's breakfast, time that was squeezed in between Rinpoche's meditative practices. As Rinpoche taught, he often made little sketches of things he was describing: special hats, gtor ma offering cakes, and so forth."

Nicholas Poppe (1897-1991), the great Mongolist who worked at the University of Washington from 1949 until 1968, told Smith more than once, "You are very lucky to have Dezhung Rinpoche here. But the problem is, you don't yet know what questions to ask him."⁴

Following his intuitions and his teachers' advice, in 1965 Gene travelled to India and Nepal for the first time to conduct fieldwork on original Tibetan resource material. In Dharamshala he met Bco bryad khri chen Rinpoche (1920-2007) and a number of pre-1959 senior Tibetan Government officials. In Dalhousie he met the 8th Khams sprul don bryud nyi ma (1931-1979), in Rajpur the young H. H. the Sa skya Khri 'dzin sgrol ma pho grang (b.1945) and Mkhan po A pad Rinpoche (1927-2010). In the Darjeeling area, Gene met Skyabs rje Bdud 'joms Rinpoche (1904-1986), Skyabs rje Dil mgo mkhyen brtse Rinpoche (1910-1991), Skyabs rje Bka' 'gyur Rinpoche Klong chen ye shes rdo rje (1897-1975), Dpal spungs Dbon rgan Rinpoche (1926-1987), Sgrub dpon Bla ma Ka lu Rinpoche (1905-1989), 'Brug pa thugs sras Rinpoche (1916-1984), 'Dzi sgar mkhan po Nor dbyangs (?- c.1983), Rta nag Thub bstan bshad sgra mkhan po Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin (1904-1991), 'Dar grang mo che mkhan po (?- c.1967) and Rev. Khu nu mthar phyin Babu (1890-1976). At all these localities he had the chance to peruse the collection of books they brought from Tibet.

While in Gangtok, Sikkim, Gene stayed at the students and scholars' quarters of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. His prime purpose to visit Sikkim was to go through the famed private collection of the legendary Rai Bahadur Densapa (Barmiok Athing, 1902-1988), OBE, then the doyen of Tibetan studies in the Himalayan region. Gene went through Densapa's collection meticulously. Among many important texts, Gene copied the whole volume, banned in those days, of the famous, *Modern Bhutanese History* written by Gnyer chen bres po in the early 1960s in typed Wylie transliteration. Gene also copied the entire inventory of the Densapa collection and in the years to come encouraged and helped individual publishers to borrow from Densapa and reprint rare works. Gene also spent time with the Choegyial of Sikkim, Dpal ldan don grub rnam

4 *A Saint in Seattle; The Life of the Tibetan Mystic Dezhung Rinpoche*, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2003, p.256.



rgyal (1923-1982), the co-founder and patron of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. They shared an interest in Tibetology and often enjoyed a few rounds of drinks together.

Gene's visit to the old Rumtek Monastery gave him the opportunity to witness H.H. the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa's (1924-1981) tireless efforts to restore Tibetan literary works by commissioning traditional Tibetan wood block carvings. He got acquainted with Rje dbon Stobs dga' Rinpoche (1942-1997), and enjoyed his company and expertise in Kamtshang studies. In Delhi he was frequently in touch with the Tibetan scholar Lha lung pa blo bzang phun tshogs (1926-2008) of All India Radio and the Sikkimese scholar Renoch Kazi bsod nams stobs rgyas (1925-2009) of Tibet House. Since 1965, with the help of a couple of rich hippies, Gene helped monks from the three great Dge lugs pa seats and other schools at Buxa duar and 'Brug pa thugs sras's centre at Mim Tea Estate, within Darjeeling, to produce mimeograph and lithograph reprints of their obligatory liturgical and philosophical texts.

Gene type copied the following catalogues from the Library of Rai Bahadur Densapa to build his bibliography of Tibetan works:

1. A catalogue of printing blocks from Central Tibet, probably compiled before 1950 at the order of Stag brag Rinpoche, the regent of those days, and concluded in 1957.⁵
2. The catalogue of the *Zhol Bka' 'gyur* printing blocks.⁶
3. The catalogue of the 'Bras spungs monastery's printing blocks.⁷
4. The catalogue of the printing blocks of Dga' ldan pho brang in 'Bras spungs monastery.⁸
5. The catalogue of the Ding ri chos kyi rgyal mtshan editions.⁹
6. The catalogue of the Rtsib ri printing blocks.¹⁰

5 *Gangs can gyi ljongs su bka' dang bstan bcos sogs kyi glegs bam spar gzhi ji ltar yod pa rnams nas dkar chag spar thor phyogs tsam du bkod pa phan bde'i pad tshal 'byed pa'i nyin byed ces bya ba bzhugs so*, 38 folios.

6 *Pho brang po ta la'i zhol bka' 'gyur spar khang steng shod du gsung spar dpe ring ji yod kyi dkar chag bzhugs*, 5 folios.

7 *Chos sde chen po dpal ldan 'bras spungs kyi par khang chen mo'i gsung par dkar chag bzhugs yod*, 8 folios.

8 *Me khyi dga' ldan pho brang gi shag sgor nub brgyud par khang sgo shar blta nang gsung par mdo ma rnams kyi par shing zhal grangs 'di bzhugs kyi dkar chag bzhugs so*, 4 folios.

9 *Ding ri pa chos rgyan nas gsungs spar gsar bskrun gyi dkar chag thar lam shing ra*, 45 folios.

10 *La stod rgyal gyi shri ne'u steng du bzhugs pa'i 'brug pa gtsor 'gyur gsar rnying gsung spar dkar chag nyin byed 'od 'bar*, 28 folios.

His list also included:

7. An unpublished *Sa skya dkar chag*.¹¹

In 1968 Gene joined the United States Library of Congress (L.C.) Overseas Operations Division in New Delhi under the Library of Congress PL-480 programme. At that point the Library had bought just a few Tibetan books in New Delhi from 1963 onwards. He was first hired as “Consultant for Tibetan” (July 1968 to July 1974); then he became Assistant Field Director for Cataloging (August 1974 to January 1978); Deputy Field Director (January 1978 to August 1980), and finally Field Director (September 1980 to September 1985).

His first (and quite bold) step was to encourage Diaspora Tibetans to publish literary works belonging to the various Tibetan traditions, so that aspects of Tibetan civilization could be preserved from destruction through the auspices of the Library of Congress. His immediate motivation to pursue this activity was that he was appalled to see in Nepal in the mid 1960s that rare and precious manuscripts of Tibetan art, culture, literature, medicine and philosophy were being sold on the streets of Kathmandu and that tourists bought just the pages of the manuscripts that contained illustrations of deities and Lamas. Upon returning to India, he had thought seriously of a way to fight this menace that was gradually destroying the literary heritage of a civilization and formulated the Library of Congress system of buying reprints of rare Tibetan manuscripts and subsidizing them so that publishers were able to remain in business by securing them a profit that exceeded sweater selling or some other petty business that the majority of Tibetan refugees were reluctantly engaged in.

Dr. Lokesh Chandra’s three volumes entitled, *Materials for a History of Tibetan Literature* also helped Gene to plan his project further.¹² Gene also

11 The seventh main bibliographical source Gene used was a manuscript of a *Sa skya dkar chag* (later published by Ngawang Topgyal, New Delhi, 1987, *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog chos mdzod bye ba 'i lde mig: A Bibliography of Sa-skyapa Literature*. Dr. David P. Jackson wrote the introduction and table of contents in English). Gene typed and bound his own transliterated copy of the Tshugs ma 'khyug manuscript, a western style notebook which he called the “Lhalung Karchak” because he borrowed it from Sku ngo Lha lung pa Blo bzang phun tshogs (then at 158 Kaka Nagar, N.D.), who had asked H. H. the Sa skya Khri 'dzin in the mid 1960s to compile a list of Sa skya works. Its main source was the long list of Sa skya writings compiled a few years earlier by Mkhan po A Pad (1927-2010) in Sikkim during the early 1960s (the original copy of which is still in the library of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok). Mkhan po A pad's main source for rare Sa skya collected writings was the Central Tibet travel diary of 'Jam dbyang Mkhjen brtse'i dbang po (1820-1892), which Mkhan po A pad borrowed from the Mkhjen brtse Mchod dpon bla ma 'Jam dbyangs blo gros while he worked at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. That diary has long since disappeared.

12 *Materials for a History of Tibetan Literature*, Dr. Lokesh Chandra, Part i & ii,

sent Dr. Bkra shis g-yang 'phel to make a print of all the wood blocks kept in Sikkim, India and Nepal for the Library of Congress and employed him as the first Tibetan cataloguer. With Gene's ideas and guidance, Tibetan works appeared in several literary series including Dr. Lokesh Chandra's Sata-Pitaka Series of the International Academy of Indian Culture, the texts published by the Tibet House, the Sungrab Nyamso Junphel Parkhang Series of Tashijong, Smantsis Shesrig Spendzod Series of Ladakh, and the Geden Sungrab Minyam Gyunphel Series of Gelek Rinpoche, Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series of Sherab Gyaltzen.

Later on in the early 1970s, Gene was deputing Tibetan monastic or individual publishers to locate titles. He based this hunt for sources on two seminal lists of Tibetan literary rarities:

- a list of the Tibetan historical and biographical works consulted by Brag sgom dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1801-1866) in *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, his monumental work on Dge lugs monasteries in Amdo.¹³

- A khu ching Shes rab rgya mtsho's (1803-1875) work, containing an important list of rare works of Tibetan literature, arranged by subject.¹⁴

In short, the field of Tibetan and Buddhist studies is indebted to Gene for his pioneering and pivotal role in giving impetus to the publishing of Tibetan texts in the subcontinent from 1968. It was through Gene's guidance and encouragement as Field Director of the Library's South Asian headquarters that individuals and institutions in the Tibetan Diaspora started reproducing and publishing ancient Tibetan literature.

Gene was personally involved, in one way or another, in the publication of approximately 6,000 titles and 8,000 volumes during his tenure, by revitalizing the Library of Congress' Acquisition Program of Tibetan books from the Tibetan Diaspora, Sikkimese, Ladakhi, Mongolian and Bhutanese publishers, Gene collected and made available a diverse and indispensable literary corpus for the understanding and advancement of Tibetan Studies internationally.

Since the majority of librarians in the West do not read Tibetan and do not know how to wrap the cloths of the poti books, Gene asked everyone to publish them in Western book format. Everyday Gene singlehandedly wrote, in the Library of Congress system of Tibetan transliteration, all the titles for every book on its respective spine, as well as all its main subtitles. He also wrote introductions of

International Academy of Indian Culture, New Delhi, 1963.

13 *Histoire du Bouddhisme dans L'Amdo*, Introduction par Yontan Rgya mcho, Paris, 1972, pp.7-32.

14 *Dpe rgyun dkon pa 'ga' zhig gi tho yig don gnyer yid kyi kun da bzhad pa'i zla 'od 'bum gyi snye ma bzhuqs so*, 60 folios. *Collected Works of A khu ching Shes rab rgya mtsho*, Published by Ngawang Sopa, New Delhi, 1974, vol. 7, pp.406-525.



varying lengths for all the texts that were published. Every Sunday one would see streams of Tibetan publishers visiting him to check and read their proof copies. Since most of the Tibetan publishers did not know English, Gene, while writing the titles and contents of the book in English for the printer, used red ink for all the diacritic marks, alongside using the Library of Congress system of transliteration, so that the printers would not make mistakes. He patiently read time and again each manuscript to correct every reappearing typo. I saw Gene waking up at four o'clock every morning and can still hear the clanking of his type writer until he stopped for breakfast.

His tireless energy helped Tibetans to move first from lithograph printing to letter press and then to the more modern and up to date photo offset printing. Each year the offset printing presses in Ballimaran, Chandni Chowk, Delhi were crowded with Tibetans, Bhutanese and Sikkimese publishers between October and March. During Gene's tenure as Field Director, the publication of Indian regional language texts reached new heights as well.

In 1985 Gene was posted to Jakarta by the Library of Congress. Just before he left in September, as a symbol of appreciation for all he had done, the Guild of Tibetan Publishers (Gsung rabs nyams gso lhan tshogs), headed by Dge rnam of Tashi Jong, which comprised of around 34 institutional and individuals publishers, offered him a brocade hanging inscribed with their messages of gratitude.¹⁵ After

15 The members of Tibetan Gsung rab nyams gso lhan tshogs (i.e. the Guild of Tibetan Publishers), Delhi, in 1985 were:

1. A publisher for the LTWA
2. A publisher for the Tibet House
3. A publisher for Delhi Pal Karmapae Choedhey
4. A publisher for Dudjom Labrang
5. A publisher for Choedey Tashi Lhunpo
6. A publisher for Drepung Losel Ling
7. A publisher for Dilgo Khyentse Labrang
8. A publisher for Penor Rinpoche Labrang
9. A publisher for Ludhing Khen Rinpoche
10. A publisher for Khampa gar, Tashijong
11. A publisher for the Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji
12. A publisher for the Sakya Centre
13. A publisher for Dodrupchen Labrang
14. A publisher for Kargyu Sungrab Nyamso khang
15. A publisher for the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series
16. A publisher for Tana Lama
17. A publisher for Gelek Rinpoche
18. A publisher for Trulku Namkha Drimed Rinpoche
19. Lama Pema Tashi
20. A publisher for C. Namgyal (Ladakh)





Gene left Delhi, the program was halted, but his commitment never wavered, and from 1991 onwards he returned to Delhi to help the new Field Director, Mrs. Lygia M. Ballantyne (who served from July 1990 to October 2002) re-establish what he had started. It was on his suggestion that I acted as a consultant to the Tibetan Program at the Library of Congress in New Delhi. In September 1993, Yarlung Enterprises, Kalka-ji were appointed as sole dealer for the Library of Congress in New Delhi, run by Sonam Choephel until the present day. In April 1994 Pema Dorje was hired as permanent Tibetan cataloguer. He still holds this post today.

Gene's ground-breaking role in encouraging the Tibetan Diaspora to publish their literature in the Indian subcontinent had an indirect impact by stimulating a similar activity in China. For the first time the PRC government allowed their Tibetologists to participate in the 2nd Conference of the International Association for Tibetan Studies at Columbia University, New York, in July 1982. At the conference, scholars and government authorities from China were amazed to see for the first time volumes of Tibetan works reproduced in exile and felt compelled to establish a competing program. In the following years the PRC experienced a resurgence in the publication of Tibetan texts.

When Gene's early retirement became known, His Royal Majesty's Government of Bhutan, through the Bhutanese publisher Kun bzang stobs rgyas, immediately requested him to settle there. He was offered life time support, but Gene declined the invitation. Instead, for the two years following his retirement, for the two years between 1997-1999, Gene ran the Himalayan and Inner Asian Resources (HIAR, later re-named Latse: Contemporary Tibetan Cultural Library), a branch of Trace Foundation, New York, where I also served as consultant for a brief period.

In 1999, Gene established the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre (TBRC), first in Boston and later in New York. From then until last December, he tirelessly

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21. A publisher for Smantsis Shesrig Spendzod
 22. Tsondue Sengge
 23. A publisher for the Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Community, Patshang Lama
 24. Ngawang Topgyal
 25. Damchoe Sangpo
 26. Trulku Pema Lodoe
 27. Lama Kugyal
 28. Tshultrim Tashi
 29. Konchog Ladrepa
 30. Tashi Dorje
 31. Choephel Legden
 32. A publisher for Mongolian Guru Deva Lama
 33. Tobden Tsering and
 34. A publisher for Choedrak Gyatso.





Gene and me (HIAR office, New York, September 1999)

located, collected and scanned thousands of rare and not so rare texts from Tibet, China, India, Nepal and Mongolia, using his own collection as a starting point, to make them digitally available to scholars worldwide. To date, TBRC's Digital Library holds a vast and fully searchable archive of approximately seven million pages scanned.

Whether in lengthy articles, well written and informative introductions or other works, when it came to acknowledging help from fellow scholars or teachers, Gene was the finest example of intellectual honesty among all Tibetologists and Buddhist scholars. And when it came to him helping fellow scholars, his non-attachment to the most rare and important literary works led him to share his materials and findings, always of the highest standard, with anyone who needed them. Indeed from 1968 to September 1985 Gene's place in Delhi was an open house, a meeting point and haven for all scholars and students of Tibetan, Himalayan, Nepalese and Indian studies.

Since my first meeting with him many years ago, Gene has been a personal mentor and a source of great inspiration. I was privileged to offer him a small token of my appreciation when I was the Head of the Tibetan Publication Department of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamshala. The Biography of the First Tre Hor Khang gsar Skyabs mgon Blo bzang tshul khri ms bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1838-1897) was dedicated to him on the occasion of his 60th birthday. I wrote:

"This volume is dedicated to the foremost bibliographer of Tibetan texts, E. Gene Smith, on his sixtieth birthday, for opening up the literary treasures of Tibet



to the rest of the world and for his preeminent contribution to the advancement of Tibetan and Buddhist studies.”

Finally, in 2007, as a small gesture of my personal gratitude towards Gene and for his knowledge of Tibetan culture and boundless altruism in sharing information and texts, I published his Festschrift, entitled *The Pandita and the Siddha; Tibetan Studies in Honour of E. Gene Smith*, and edited by Dr. Ramon N. Prats, with contributions from 24 internationally distinguished scholars.

Gene came into contact with A lags gzan dkar Rinpoche Thub bstan nyi ma (b.1943) in 1997, and initially bequeathed to him his entire personal collection to be placed in a suitable location in the east where they had originated. Gene wanted scholars to access them. He and Rinpoche discussed many locations. Later, in 2007, they decided to place them in Lho nub mi rigs slob grwa chen mo (South West Nationalities University) of Chengdu, Sichuan, because there the texts would be centrally located, beautifully stored and preserved, and available to all nationalities. Chengdu has a large Tibetan population, and the university has a vast Tibetan student body, and it would be easy for Tibetan scholars, monks and laymen to come and go at will. In November 2007 the decision was finalised and a mutual agreement was signed with the university. The first shipment of 443 volumes was dispatched to the University on 13th April 2010, the second consignment of 135 volumes was shipped on 4th May 2010 and the third shipment of 1615 volumes was sent on 14th September 2010. Many more volumes are expected to be sent in the near future. These collections will serve as an invaluable resource for many future generations of Tibetan scholars.

During all the years I knew Gene, he never let people know he was a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner. It was only after his retirement, without much fuss and unlike many Western practitioners, that he finally felt able to reveal where his faith lay. His main root Guru was Sde gzhung Rinpoche and in his latter years his youngest Guru was Rdzong sar 'jam dbyang mkhyen brtse Rinpoche (b.1961). He also shared his long standing admiration for Mkhyen brtse Rinpoche for his skill in teaching the most challenging and difficult Buddhist texts in enlightening, entertaining and profound ways.

As the mid 19th century Tibetan Muslim Kha che pha lu 'ju, or Faizullah, advised:

Yong gin yong gin 'gro gin 'gro gin 'dug

Don du yong mi tshang ma 'gro mi red

'khor ba 'di la rtag pa gcig kyang med

Walking down the path of life leads one to leave it in the end.

Indeed everyone who comes must go:





there is no way to make this illusionary life permanent.¹⁶

Like all stories that have an end, Gene Smith died at the age of 74 on 16th December 2010 at his Manhattan apartment. Prior to his death Gene was in Noida, U.P. India at the residence and office of his long time staff member and friend Mr. Manga Ram Kashyap, where the bulk of TBRC scanning is done.

Most probably I was the last person to share a very rare text with Gene—the selected writings of Bod mkhas pa Mi pham dge legs rnam rgyal (1618-?) of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud school. That Mi pham dge legs rnam rgyal is known as Bod mkhas pa—"The Scholar of Tibet"—is a sign of the greatness of his learning. The two volumes, from the Potala Palace Library,¹⁷ were scanned under his personal supervision in Noida, twenty days before his death. Looking back, I feel fortunate. I can see that our *Samaya* or *Dam tshig* was intact and pure until the last, since our final exchange was connected to a text as special as the works of Bod mkhas pa. This is a prophetic, auspicious omen that Gene will be reborn for the benefit of Tibetan Studies and in due course be another Bod mkhas pa.

When common friends in New York were so kind to inform me about his demise immediately after it happened, I did not feel sad because Gene's passing happened when he had reached the height of his intellectual pursuits and his memory and mental sharpness still were at their best. For many years junior scholars had been friendly, appreciative and attentive to him. At the same time the TBRC project was well established and running smoothly. He died a happy man, admired and respected by friends and grateful colleagues in an extremely positive atmosphere.

In Tibetan tradition scholars are expected to possess the triple qualities of Wisdom, Diligence and Kindness, and are judged by the three requirements of Teaching, Debating and Writing. Of these, the writings left by scholars are considered to be the most important. This idea is best expressed by Rje tsong khapa (1357-1419) in this verse:

Of all Buddha's deeds, His Words
Are the most excellent.
Knowing this, ye wise must remember
The Buddha for his Words.¹⁸

16 *Kha che pha lu'i 'jig rten las 'bras kyi bslab bya bzugs so*, Printed and Published by Thopkung (sic) at Imperial Printing Press, Dharamshala, (1964), p.7.

17 *Bka' brgyud pa'i gsung 'bum dkar chag*, Pho brang Po ta la do dam khru'u rig dngos zhib 'jug khang gis bsgrigs, Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, Lhasa, 2007, pp.280-283.

18 Mdzad pa kun las gsung gi ni/
mdzad pa mchog yin de yang ni/
'di nyid yin phyir mkhas pa yis/





A lover of books, Gene's legendary effort to inspire Tibetans to publish their literature and his own writings can also be seen as an act of gratitude for the writers of the past and present. Their works supplied him not only with the knowledge and intellectual completeness he strove for, but also for inspiration, courage and much pleasure.

This reminds me of the words of the Buryiat Mongolian Dge bshes chos grags (1898-1972) who lived and studied in independent Tibet. He compiled the first Tibetan dictionary in modern book form in 1946, published in 1949. Dge bshes Chos grags had this to say of his work:

Seeking happiness in this world of suffering,
 Wishing to look back even after death,
 All beings by nature diligently strive,
 To leave behind one's own legacy.
 The able ones leave heirs or disciples,
 Words of wisdom or deeds of fame.
 Others leave temples of learning and statues of gods,
 And others buildings of beauty and much wealth.
 With neither spiritual nor earthly wealth,
 The poor wanderer with no possessions,
 In return for long years of refuge,
 Leaves behind this book in a foreign land.¹⁹

What I have said of Gene is so little compared with the enormity of his

¹⁹di las sangs rgyas rjes dran byos//

Rje tsong kha pa, *Rten 'brel bstod pa bzhugs so*, in *Blo bzang dgongs rgyan mu tig phreng mdzes deb bzhi pa*, 'Bras spungs blo gling shes yon lhan tshogs, Mundgod, 1995, p.128.

19 Skyid la sdug pa'i 'jig rten mi yul 'dir/

Shi yang phyi mig blta ba'i re ba yis/

Skye bo thams cad rang gi lag rjes tsam/

shul du lus pa'i 'bad pa ngang gis byed/

'di na 'ga' yis rang gi rgyud 'dzin bu dang slob ma rjes su bzhag/

de bzhin gzhan gyis legs bshad nor dang snyan pa'i grags pa shul du bkod/

la la 'chad mnyan chos kyi sde dang dam pa'i rten rnam bzhengs nas 'das/

gzhan gyi lag rjes bsags pa'i nor dang mdzes pa'i khang khyim 'di dag lags/

chos nor gnyis med sprang po'i lag rjes la/

gong du smros pa 'di dag ma mchis pas/

mi zas yun ring zas pa'i rin 'bab tu/

deb chung 'di nyid mi yi yul du bzag//

Dge bshes chos kyi grags pas brtsams pa'i brda dag ming tshig gsal ba bzhugs so, Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Beijing, 1981, p.971.





achievements and life experiences. Today, on the occasion of the 49th day of his Bardo state, I wish to say an impromptu prayer:

Spyi gtsug pad zla'i gdan steng nas/
 Skyabs gnas dkon mchog gsum po dang/
 Drin chen rtsa brgyud bla ma rnam mkhyen no/
 Gson mi yul gram ma sgang nas tshe 'phos te/
 Gshin yul gram thang skya mo 'grims dus/
 Bar do'i 'jigs skrag las skyob du gsol/
 Lam log par ma gtong shi dmyal bar ma gtong/
 Nyin gyi mel tshe mtshan gyi bya ra mdzod cig/
 Mdun nas bsus shig rgyab nas skyog zhig/
 Dgung sngon mo mi mngon dbyings rum nas/
 Pha mtshun dgra lha'i g-yang skyob mkhan tshos/
 Mi mkhas pa'i mi g-yang ma 'chor zhig
 Zas kyi bcud dang gos kyi bkrag mdangs ma nyams shig/
 Srid pa'i gangs rgan ma snyil zhig/
 Rgya mtsho phyug mo ma 'phri zhig/
 Gtsang chab chu bo ma skam zhig/
 Rgya rdzong nags ri ma tshigs shig/
 Skye ba pho lus thob par shog/
 Dam chos rin chen mjal bar shog/
 Tshad ldan bla mar 'phrad par shog/
 Gu ru mkhyen gu ru mkhyen gu ru mkhyen no//

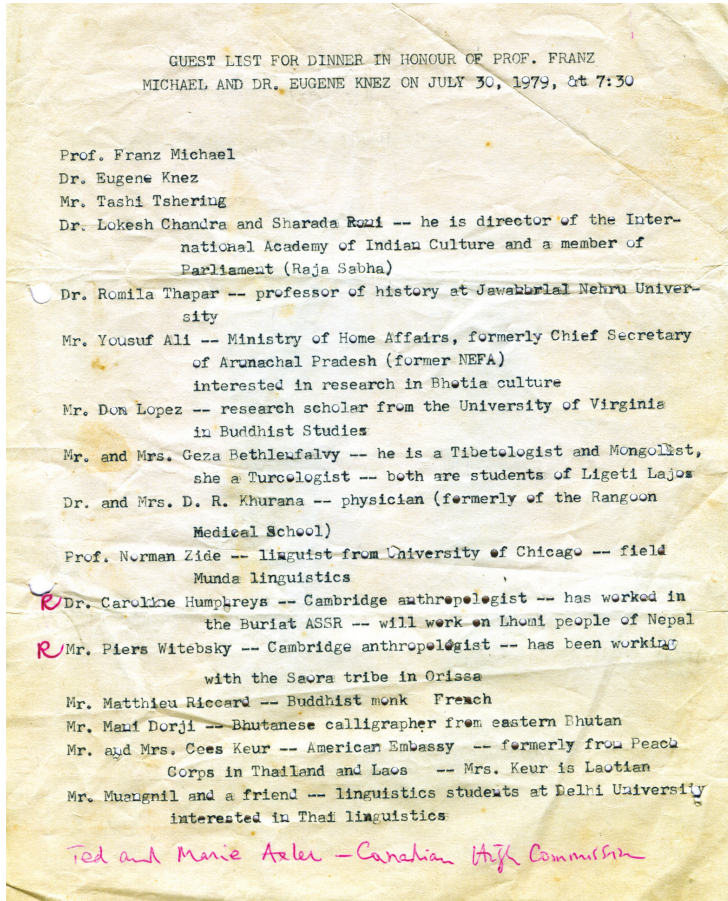
Besides writing my "official" key note for Gene's memorial service, I cannot help but jot down some of my personal accounts about him.

In 1979, at the behest of the Rai Bahadur T. D. Densapa and his son Tashi Densapa (presently the Director of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok), I assisted and interpreted for Prof. Emeritus Franz Michael and Dr. Eugene Knez during their field research based on the Max Weber theory and the Tibetan theocracy. We interviewed Tibetan scholars and elders in Rajpur, Mussoorie and Ladakh.²⁰

It was upon completion of this research phase that I first chanced upon meeting the legendary Gene Smith. I was also invited to the dinner he hosted in honour of the Professors on 30 July 1979 at D-29 South Extension Part II, his residence in New Delhi. Later, during that meeting, I came to know that Gene knew about me through Dr. Michael Aris (1946-1999) who had visited the LTWA in April. We had a long

20 Franz Michael, *Rule by Incarnation: Tibetan Buddhism and its Role in Society and State*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1982.





What a surprise for a young student like me to read my name in the invitation! (dinner hosted by Gene at his residence, South Extension, New Delhi).

discussion on the Tibetan manuscript collections at the LTWA and my field research for the LTWA in Sikkim and adjacent areas. After that, like several other scholars, I began to be acquainted with his untiring efforts in preserving Tibetan literature.

During winter 1979, while in Delhi, I visited Gene again and, to my surprise, found him writing down the title and contents of my own copy of the *Brtag thabs pad ma dkar po'i 'chun po*, a work by Sngags 'chang Hum kara dza ya, which was going to be published by Tashi Dorje, Dolanji. Gene asked me at once to write in Tibetan a short introduction to the text. I was young, inexperienced, shy and reluctant to write anything which may have not been worthwhile. So I refused. Gene was adamant that I should do it, and I penned a short introduction then and there. I borrowed Gene's Tibetan typewriter (Remington 1976, Calcutta,



designed and patented by the LTWA) and, laboriously typing with two fingers, wrote whatever little I knew about the brtag thabs literature. The next year I was asked to head the LTWA's Department of Tibetan Publications, and in the following quinquennium I published 61 volumes of Tibetan books, all due to Gene's support and kindness.

Only sometime later was I able to reciprocate his generosity. Since 2000, I let Gene scan a fairly large number of rare Tibetan books from my own library and helped him by drawing his attention to other important Tibetan collections in India and Nepal.

By being with him I realised that, whenever Skyabs rje Dil mgo mkhyen brtse Rinpoche or Sde gzhung Rinpoche visited Genes' place in New Delhi, the host would move to one guest room and prepare his room for the Lamas much in advance. He even had a collection of China and porcelain cups reserved for Rinpoches alone.

In my off-hand observation, I came to detect where his penchant lay in terms of the various literary traditions. Among all of his Tibetan texts he did not particularly treasure Pha bong kha pa bde chen snying po (1878-1942) and Bon gsar ma texts. They are kept either in the last row of the bookshelves near the door or in the store room.

Gene meticulously procured everything and anything that was published by the Tibetan Diaspora, even grey literature, since internal squabbles and intrigues are plentiful in the exiled Tibetan society. During the twenty years he spent in Delhi he did not bother to go to Dharamshala. He was not particularly fond of the Tibetan establishment there. I do not know whether this was due to doctrinal differences, or to personal and political motives. Generally, in my own experiences in Dharamshala, we draw significant numbers of weird and wacky westerners. At the same time the Tibetan establishment has a knack for attracting opportunist and mgo ser sycophants, but not genuine scholars.

Gene finally visited Dharamshala in September 2008 on an official visit to interview Bka' blon khri pa (5th) Zam gdong Rinpoche Blo bzang bstan 'dzin chos kyi rgyal mtshan (b.1939) for the documentary on his life ("One Man's Mission to Save a Culture"). Only then did Zam gdong Rinpoche host and request Gene to give a talk entitled "Tibetan books and how to catalogue them with modern electronic facilities" to the highest ranking Central Tibetan Administration officers down to the level of deputy secretary.

Despite his many achievements, his work remains incomplete, because the effort to discover and preserve documents of the Tibetan literature will occupy scholars for quite sometime to come. I'd now like to stress one or two aspects of Gene's activities that are less well known, but are important.





Two of his most revealing papers are unpublished. They deserve attention beyond the fact that they have not been circulated. One is entitled, “Notes on the History of the Cult of Rdo rje shugs ldan”. It was presented at the Inner Asia Colloquium, University of Washington, Seattle, as early as July 25th, 1963. In those days Gene felt that there was a potential risk of controversy in the doctrinal handling of this deity. Today, those pro and anti “ghost issue” divisions have come to nurture mutual hatred in a hopelessly pathological and extreme manner. The issue is so hot and biased that in 2008, and for the first time in the history of the Dge lugs pa school, the Dga’ ldan shar rtse grwa tshang (founded in 1424) broke into two factions. The PRC government has taken advantage of the situation; it is scheming, it is nosey and it has a finger in this imbroglio.

The other work is an example of Gene’s accuracy and diligence. He found out that Dge lugs pa ruling dignitaries have altered the autobiographical writing of the 5th Dalai Lama, the *Dukula’i gos bzang* volumes. Gene read a paper entitled, “Persistent Themes in the Cultural History of Lamaism Politics: Two Attempts at Rewriting the Early Life of the Fifth Dalai Lama”, at the workshop on “The History of Tibet; New Resources and Perspectives, A Tribute to Hugh Edward Richardson in His Ninety-third Year”, organised by Dr. Michael Aris at St. Anthony’s College, Oxford, 23rd May 1997, in which I also participated.

Gene also wrote volumes of notes; an activity he pursued from 1965 to 1985, a solid twenty years. They are all neatly typed and properly bound- subject wise, something I noticed first in 1979. These volumes include inter-disciplinary studies on Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim and Mongolia. Unfortunately, in 1997, when Gene sent his collection to New York from Cairo, a couple of boxes of those legendary notes were lost. These notes are the fruits of Gene’s tireless jotting downs and typing of important findings while reading numerous Tibetan texts since the mid-1960s. This incident is most regrettable and can never be amended.

It is advisable that all the remaining notes by Gene should be published as they are for the benefit of students and scholars.

APPENDIX
TEXT OF THE SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE
SCREENING OF “DIGITAL DHARMA”
(the film documenting the life and work of E. Gene Smith,
the U.S. Embassy, New Delhi, December 8th 2011)

I cannot stop thinking about Gene and I want to praise his contribution towards making the world of Tibetan Literary Heritage accessible to the world. We Tibetans and everyone else cherish and salute his monumental achievements. His name will hold a special place





in Tibetan Literary history. I can speak for the Tibetans, and I'm sure that he will always be remembered by us.

The death of Gene has left a big void in the community both from the humane and professional viewpoints. We all are trying to cope with the fact that he is no more.

I'm here to offer you briefly an outsider's view of how colleagues and friends of Gene around the world, during the last year, have tried to keep his legacy alive and pursue the work that he was undertaking in his last days.

I think of this last year because we met here in Delhi at India International Centre in February 2011 on the 49th day after Gene's demise.

I do so from the angle of an old friend who has shared the same interests in Tibetan literature for a number of decades.

I had the opportunity to spend some time at his TBRC last December when I was in New York for a conference on Tibetan language. During my stay there I realised that the project of scanning and cataloguing the available Tibetan literature has undergone important developments.

Following Gene's donation of his own books to Chengdu University (a project that was completed in the most during his last days but is still on-going), a good number of volumes are on their way to Sichuan.

At the same time a new TBRC branch office at Chengdu is going to be opened at the end of this month in order to scan and catalogue all the material from Tibet and China.

Another branch office, operated by Chris Thompson, is in Kathmandu with the same task to scan all the books from Nepal and the various Himalayan regions.

They add to the historical TBRC office at Noida, run for many decades by the most valuable Mr. Manga Ram Kashyap who is sitting here tonight.

A most important innovation is that the TBRC New York office will be relocated to Cambridge, Boston from June 2012. This decision reflects a realistic vision of future developments in the organisation. Some of the closest colleagues and friends of Gene are planning to carry on his heritage, and it is more convenient for them to do it from Massachusetts. The Trustees and the TBRC staff are aware that Gene's capacities in fund raising and contacts with everyone in the Tibetan world cannot be matched, but still they are struggling hard to locate enough resources to keep the work going as before.

For my own part, I especially welcome, as a lover of Tibetan literature and traditions, the idea that TBRC will print his legendary "green books". Gene spent some twenty years from around 1965 to around 1985 jotting down his observations on the many aspects of Tibetan culture. Their release will be a great contribution for all scholars who will benefit from his unpublished insights which advance the knowledge of Tibetan heritage.

A last remark concerns tonight's documentary. It was first shown in NY, an obvious choice given the location of the TBRC office, and I had the privilege of being there. This happened during the same seminar on Tibetan language which was held last December. This was a unique opportunity to gather the TBRC Trustees, amongst others, A lags gzan dkar Rinpoche and a good number of colleagues and friends of Gene from all over the world. The documentary was webcast. Tonight's screening here at the American Embassy in New Delhi is another special occasion.

The documentary led Gene to do something he would have been unlikely to do otherwise. Gene told his story; he had always been reluctant to talk about his achievements in other circumstances. The work on the documentary was in progress when he died, and





it is admirable that the director and everyone else involved in it had a strong determination to bring the documentary to completion.

I'm sure everyone will enjoy it very much. Thank you and Tashi Delek!

