

Indexing Tibetan names: some suggestions

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In 1959, after the revolt in Lhasa and the subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India, I had to include in my index a number of Tibetan names: this was, for me, new ground and necessitated some research.

Most of the names were composite and my first step was to ascertain whether they were combinations of family and personal names on the lines of the Chinese (e.g. Chou En-lai); combinations of personal and caste or family names similar to many Indic names (e.g. Chetpat P. A. Ramaswami Aiyar); or combinations of a term of address with a personal name as with the Burmese (e.g. U Thi Han and Sao Shwe Thaike).

I soon found out that, more often than not, most of the components of a name represented offices held or honorific titles. These might be combined with place-names of monasteries or districts, with the names of noble families or with an individual's personal name.

Now, no good indexer would use as an entry word an individual's office or title. (For example, for Chairman Khrushchev no one would use the entry word 'Chairman'; for President Kennedy the entry word 'President'; for the Duke of Edinburgh the entry word 'Duke'; or for the Bishop of Birmingham the entry word 'Bishop'.) Following this principle, I decided that the entry word for a Tibetan should be his personal name or the name of the noble family to which he belonged; failing that, the name of his monastery or the district he governed; and that all titles and offices should be subordinated to these names.

The next step was to compile lists of personal and family names. Examples (very incomplete) are given below.

Personal names

Choden
Dorji
Gele
Gyalo
Jigme
Lobzang
Ngawang
Samten
Tendar
Thondup
Wangchuk
Yeshi

Names of noble families

Bondong
Kapshopa
Khemed
Kunsangste
Lhalu
Lheding

Luksang (Lukangwa)
Namseling
Ngapo
Phala
Phunkang
Ragasher
Rampa
Sandup Potrang (Sampo)
Shjagappa
Shokang
Surkhang
Tendong
Tering
Tsarong
Yutok

(Strictly speaking, what are termed 'family' names of the great nobles are not really family names but the names of the estates they hold.)

Having isolated these, I then tried to compile lists of districts governed by prelates and monasteries.

Districts governed by prelates

Cham-do
Ngar
Sa-kya
Tshurbu

Some of the many hundreds of monasteries

Dre-pung
Gan-den
Loseling
Ne-sar
Re-ting
Sam-ye
Se-ra
Sha-lu
Shi-de
Ta-lung
Ta-shi Lhünpo
Ten-gye-ling

The next stage was to identify titles, offices and modes of address.

Titles of monks

Karmapa Lama
Khenchen
Khenchung
Khenpo

Lama
Rimpoche
Ta Lama

Titles of monk and lay officials of the government

Chikyap Kenpo (monks only)
Depon
Dronyer Chenpo (monks only)
Dzasa (a title of honour rather than an official post)
Kalon
Lachag
Magchi
Mipon
Rimshi (a title of honour rather than an official post)
Shap-pe
Silon (lay only)
Theji (lay only; a title of honour rather than an official post)
Trungyik Chenpo (monks only)
Tsechag
Tsipon

Lesser officials

Kandron
Nyertsanga
Rupon
Shondron

I then examined how these various names, titles, offices, etc. were combined. This, it appeared, very much depended on the class of individual. Ordinary monks were known by a personal name only: this usually had two parts, e.g. Lobzang Samten. Incarnate Lamas were known by a special title, sometimes drawn from the name of their monastery, but usually from some religious allusion. For example, Ngari Rimpoche is the Lama of the Ngari district in Western Tibet. (Rimpoche means Precious One and is a title of Lamas.) Similarly Tshurbu Karmapa Rimpoche signifies the Karmapa Lama of the Tshurbu district. Among prelates there were, for example, Lheding Ta Lama, signifying the Ta Lama of the Lheding family, and Khenchen Choden Tendar, signifying the Bishop Choden Tendar.

Monk officials connected with the administration of the great monasteries had special titles, of which the principal was Khenpo (Abbot). These officials might be known by the names of their monastic colleges, e.g. Loseling Khenpo, signifying the Abbot of Loseling, or by their personal names, e.g. Khenpo Lobzang Samten, signifying Abbot Lobzang Samten.

Monk and lay officials of the government, if of high rank, were known by the name of the office held attached to their personal names, or if they belonged to a noble family, to their family name. Thus there were, for example, Phala Dronyer Chenpo, signifying the Dronyer Chenpo (Chamberlain) belonging to the Phala family; Kunsangtse Dzasa, signifying the Dzasa of the Kunsangtse family; Trungyik Chenpo Lobzang Wangchuk, signifying Great Secretary Lobzang Wangchuk. (Note: a rank precedes a personal name, but follows a family name. As the highest offices are usually held by members of the nobility it is almost invariable that the 'name' will be a family name.)

Coming to lesser offices, it may be that the holder is not a member of the higher nobility or is a cadet of a family of lesser nobility: in these cases he may be known by his personal name, e.g. Shondron Lobzang Yeshe. (A Shondron is a clerk in the Cabinet, and the personal name follows the rank.)

Against this background, I suggest the following examples of indexing:

Tshurbu Karmapa Rimpoche, *index as* Tshurbu Karmapa Rimpoche.

Lheding Ta Lama, *index as* Lheding Ta Lama.

Khenchen Choden Tendar, *index as* Choden Tendar, Kenchen.

Khenpo Lobzang Samten, *index as* Lobzang Samten, Khenpo. Phala Dronyer Chenpo, *index as* Phala Dronyer Chenpo.

Trungyik Chenpo Lobzang, *index as* Lobzang, Trungyik Chenpo.

Shondron Wangchuk Gele, *index as* Wangchuk Gele, Shondron.

Gyulo Thondup, *index as* Gyulo Thondup.

Finally, a very simple case after all these permutations and combinations: I would have no hesitation in making an index entry of 'Dalai Lama (14th incarnation)'.

I put forward these suggestions in all humility; others, better experienced than I am in indexing and better informed than I am on Tibetan names and customs, have probably evolved a better system.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the great help and advice that I have received from Mr H. E. Richardson, CIE, OBE, who was, for many years first British and then Indian Trade Agent in Gyantse and Officer in charge of the Mission, Lhasa.

This article is reprinted with acknowledgement from The Indexer, vol. 3, no. 2.