

ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES

VOLUME 6

Edited by

Charles Kevin Stuart

Gerald Roche

Tshe dbang rdo rje ཚེ་དབང་རྡོ་རྗེ། 才项多杰

Timothy Thurston

Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རྡོ་རྗེ། 仁青多杰

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Front Cover: This photograph by G.yu lha (of her mother) was taken in Siyuewu 斯跃武 Village, Puxi 蒲西 Township, 'Dzam thang (Rangtang 壤塘) County, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Aba zangzu qiangzu zizhizhou 阿坝藏族羌族自治州), Sichuan 四川 Province. Siyuewu Villagers are officially classified as Tibetans and consider themselves as such, but speak the Rgyalrongic Lavrung language.

Back Cover: Workers rest while building the wall of a prayer hall using traditional building tools. Photograph by Zla ba sgrol ma, Sman shad Region, Sde dge (Dege 德格) County, Dkar mdzes Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Ganzi zangzu zizhizhou 甘孜藏族自治州), Sichuan Province.

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FROM THE EDITORS

Asian Highlands Perspectives welcomes submissions that allow us to better hear and understand voices from the highlands of Asia relating their experiences—what they mean and how they are understood—all with a view to enriching our knowledge of this vast area. We hope to feature autobiographical accounts and studies of songs, jokes, tongue twisters, weddings, divorce, funerals, 'dirty' stories and songs, love songs, rituals of romance, illness, medicine, healing, clothing, music, rites of passages, orations, gender, herding techniques, agricultural practices, trading, flora and fauna, the annual cycle of work in rural communities, 'development', language, religion, conflict, architecture, education, apprenticeships, art, and everything else that informs us.

Prospective authors are welcome to use theory to interpret what they report, however, the editors are particularly interested in careful, detailed, contextualized descriptions revealing local meanings of what is being described, and how this connects with relevant publications. It is especially hoped that local scholars who lack access to educational systems emphasizing theory will contribute. All submissions are peer reviewed. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* is available in hardcopy as well as on-line. Published authors receive PDF versions of their published work.

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Editors

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FOLKTALE: THE KING OF SEVEN SEEDS

Sonan Jetsun

Tashi Finds a Rabbit Brother

Many years ago there was a very kind and honest child named Tashi whose parents died when he was ten years old. He was alone with no sisters and brothers and, with both parents dead, had to do everything by himself. His wheat field was on a mountaintop and the wheat was often eaten by a rabbit. He did not know how to solve this problem and then asked an old man to help him. The old man and Tashi went to his wheat field and looked for the place where the rabbit entered his wheat field through a fence of thorny bushes. Finally they found the place and placed a trap there.

Three days later Tashi returned to his field to check and found a plump rabbit in the trap. He thought, "Today I will have the best meal of my life," and got ready to kill the rabbit.

Rabbit said, "Please don't kill me, I will do anything for you."

"You eat my wheat when I don't have enough food to eat. How can you help me? You have to remember you are a rabbit, not a god, OK?" Tashi replied.

"I'm very sorry that I ate your wheat, but do not kill me, please. I promise I will repay you. Please give me a chance to change—just once chance. Please!" Rabbit pleaded.

Tashi thought, "This rabbit is very pitiful so maybe I should give him a chance to change. Also I feel very lonely when I go to work and stay at home, so why don't I try to make him my friend?"

Tashi said to Rabbit, "OK! I will spare you, but I have a demand—you must promise to be my friend. We can work together and live together. Is that OK?"

Rabbit nodded happily.

Tashi and Rabbit then lived together. Everyday they went together to work. Later, no animals came to eat his wheat but, because the weather was bad, they lacked food. Even so they had a very happy time together. They were like blood brothers in helping each other.

Tashi Finds a Bride

Time passed quickly and Tashi was eighteen years old. One day when they went to their field to work, Rabbit discovered a cave of rich ghosts on the mountaintop. At night these ghosts killed people and brought their bodies to caves where they ate them. The ghosts also took things from those they killed and brought these things back to their cave. For this reason the ghosts were very rich.

That evening as they returned home from working in the field, Rabbit asked Tashi, "Do you want to marry?"

Tashi was very surprised and did not know how to answer for a moment. Then he nodded bashfully, and said, "You know how poor we are, right? Nobody wants to marry me."

Rabbit laughed and said, "Don't worry! I have an idea. You go borrow five horses, two bags of wheat flour, two bags of wheat, two bags of *khadak* and silk, two very good shirts, and two very good pairs of trousers and boots from the villagers. Then I'm sure we can find someone to marry you. Right now you need a new, better name."

Rabbit then opened their lunchbox and noticed seven wheat seeds. He and Tashi then decided that a good new name was King of Seven Seeds.

The following day, Tashi went to village homes and borrowed the things that Rabbit had named. Some villagers lent horses, others lent wheat and wheat flour, others lent *khadak* and silk, and one villager lent two good shirts, two

pairs of trousers, and boots. He was able to borrow everything he asked for.

The next morning Tashi and Rabbit put on the clothes. Rabbit put *khadak* in Tashi's boots instead of insoles. They put the other items Tashi had borrowed on a horse, traveled for about a half-day, and then reached a village. Rabbit asked passersby which village family was the richest.

"That family is the richest," one man replied, pointing to a large decorated house.

"How many daughters do they have?" Rabbit asked.

"They have three daughters," he said.

Rabbit and Tashi went to the rich family's courtyard where there was a large container of water. Rabbit said, "Hey! Brother, shall we stay here tonight?"

Tashi nodded.

Rabbit unloaded the horses, made a seat of silk, and said, "Master, please sit here."

Tashi sat on the seat of silk.

The oldest daughter looked out the window and saw a rabbit taking *khadak* out of Tashi's shoes and adding new *khadak*. Rabbit said, "Master, your feet are sweating."

Oldest Daughter could not believe what she had just seen and heard and said to her parents, "Others say that we are the richest family in this village, but I just saw a truly rich man in front of our courtyard gate. He uses *khadak* for his insoles and is seated on silk."

Her parents did not believe her and told their middle daughter to look out the window. She did so and watched as the rabbit poured two bags of wheat flour into the big container of water, which their horses began drinking. The middle daughter thought, "We are rich, but we never pour flour into the pool and let our horses drink it. Unimaginable! They must be very rich." She told her parents, but they didn't believe her and told their youngest daughter to look out the window.

When she looked out the window, she saw Rabbit pour two bags of wheat on the ground, which the horses began to eat. "Oh! My Buddha!" she yelled. Tashi turned when he heard this and saw a very beautiful girl looking out the window. They looked at each other for a moment and then each smiled.

Rabbit noticed and knew what to do next.

Youngest Daughter told her parents what she had seen and her parents believed her.

Tashi said to Rabbit, "This girl is very beautiful, right?"

"Yes. She is beautiful. Master, if you want her for your wife, I will help you," Rabbit replied.

Rabbit called to the family's father, "May we stay at your home tonight, please?"

"Of course you can," the father answered kindly.

Tashi and Rabbit then entered the home. The family offered butter tea and much delicious food for Tashi and Rabbit, which Youngest Daughter served.

Rabbit said, "He is our master and his name is Tashi. His family is called 'King of Seven Seeds' and his parents died when he was ten years old. We are searching for a lady to marry our master. Are your daughters married?"

"Yes. They are married, except for the youngest," the mother answered.

"May your youngest daughter marry our master?" Rabbit asked.

"We want our daughter to marry a rich man, but we must ask her. If she agrees, her mother and I also agree," the father said. Then the mother and girl went to another room.

After a bit they returned and the mother said, "My daughter wants to marry you."

"Thanks! Which day is the best to marry? I think tomorrow is the best. Do you agree?" Rabbit asked.

"Yes, I agree. She is my youngest daughter. I want to make this wedding grand," the father said.

Rabbit said, "OK! No problem! We also want to make the wedding grand. I want your family to send one hundred men to my home with me today and send 200 men with guns with our master and his bride to our village tomorrow. Also send some people with drums."

"OK! We can do that. But can you explain why we should send men with guns?" the father asked.

"I just want to make this wedding grand. Tomorrow when you see smoke on the mountaintop then shoot the guns into the sky and beat the drums loudly, OK?" Rabbit said.

"OK! Good luck," the father replied. Then Rabbit left with one hundred men.

Killing the Ghosts

The next day Rabbit told the one hundred men, "When you see smoke on the mountaintop, set fire to the grass near the ghosts' cave and come to the mountaintop quickly."

Rabbit went to the ghosts' cave and said to the ghost leader, "I'm your neighbor. Leader, this morning I went to the village and I heard the villagers say they will come here and kill every ghost. You must run away if you don't want to die."

"Do you think we will believe your lie? No, we are not children! We are ghosts and they are human. They cannot kill us," said the ghost leader.

"Really, my honorable neighbor? They invited a lama from another village who kills using his beads and drums. Two hundred men with guns will come here soon. If you don't want to die, you must accept my help. I have a good plan to save you," Rabbit said.

Finally the ghost's leader believed Rabbit and said, "Tell us your plan?"

"You're very smart my neighbor. OK! You must go out and hide in the grass near your caves. I will make smoke

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on the mountaintop when I see the villagers and the lama coming. You must then move down the mountain in the grass slowly. I'm sure they will kill you if they discover you," Rabbit said.

The ghosts then hid in the grass and Rabbit waited for his master and bride. He soon saw them coming, and made smoke on the mountaintop. The one hundred men saw the smoke and set the grass afire. The bride's father ordered his men to shoot and drum when he saw the smoke from the grass.

Meanwhile, the ghosts saw the smoke and heard the shooting and drumming. They were terrified, stayed in the grass, and didn't move. After half an hour the ghosts were all burned to death. Rabbit told the one hundred men to clean the ghost cave when they reached it.

Tashi and his bride soon arrived and they were amazed to find a cave full of gold, silver, and jewelry. That evening they all drank, danced, sang, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

The next day the bride's father said, "Tashi, be kind to my daughter. Daughter, your mother and I will visit you when we can. When you and Tashi have time you must visit your mother and me."

"Father, don't worry about your daughter. I will be kind to her and we will visit you and Mother," Tashi said.

Tashi's father-in-law nodded and left with his men.

Rabbit Tests Tashi

Two years passed and Rabbit enjoyed his life with Tashi, Tashi's wife, and a three month old son; but he thought that now that they did not need him, they might kill him. One day he lay in bed and said, "Tashi, I think I'm sick. Would you and your wife visit a fortuneteller rabbit who wears a black hat and lives in a cave? Please ask him how I can get well."

"Of course we will. How do we reach this cave?" Tashi asked.

"When you go, you must climb up a rocky mountain. When you return, climb through a rocky valley," Rabbit said.

"OK!" Tashi replied and left with his wife.

Rabbit got up a short time later and hopped along a shortcut to the cave. He put on a black hat, sat, and waited for some time for Tashi and his wife to come slowly climbing along a rocky mountain. When they arrived they saw a rabbit wearing a black hat that hid most of his face.

There is a sick rabbit in my home. Please tell me how he can get well," Tashi said politely.

"OK!" the rabbit said and began chanting and divining. A short time later he said, "You have a son. If that sick rabbit eats your son's heart, he will recover. There is no other way for him to recover."

Tashi thanked the rabbit and left.

A very short time later, Rabbit hopped back to his home as Tashi and his wife climbed through a rocky valley.

Tashi's wife said, "Will you kill our son for Rabbit?"

"I don't know. I must save Rabbit. Without his help, we would not have all that we have today," Tashi said.

Tashi's wife said, "No, I don't want to lose my son."

"Wife, we are young and we can have another son but if Rabbit dies, I will regret it all my life," Rabbit said. Finally his wife agreed.

When they got home, Rabbit was lying on his bed.

"What did that fortuneteller say?" Rabbit asked.

Tashi didn't answer. He wife was crying. Tashi washed his son and then got ready to kill him.

"Stop!" Rabbit said and got up. "I'm sorry. I pretended to be sick. That rabbit wearing a black hat was me. I just wanted to know if you really cared about me! I've very sorry! Please forgive me!"

Tashi angrily demanded, "Why did you do that? Am I not good enough to you?"

"No! No! You two are very kind to me, but I thought that we are different. You are human and I'm an animal. I thought that you might kill me one day because you no longer need me. I was wrong. I'm very sorry! Please forgive me! Please!" Rabbit said sadly.

"My brother, I understand you and I forgive you. But you must promise never to do something like this again," Tashi said.

Rabbit Leaves

"Thanks! Brother, before I promised that I would repay you and I have done that. Now I must leave and find a life that is mine. I also want to find a wife and have a family," Rabbit said.

"OK! I understand and I respect your choice, Brother. You are welcome to return at anytime. If you need help just return and tell me. The door of this home is always open to you," Tashi said tearfully.

Rabbit then left in search for a life of his own.

Sonan Jetsun (Bsod nams rgyal mtshan; b. 1988) is from Lan yid (Lianyi 联谊) Village, Gom mo (Gongbo 贡波) Township, Sde rong (Derong 得荣) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi 甘孜) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan (四川) Province. He writes:

When I was a child, there was no electricity, no TV, and no videos in my village. Every night Grandmother (Tshe ring sgrol ma; b. 1926) told me stories. *King of Seven Seeds* was my favorite because it described friendship between people and a rabbit.