

Hiroyuki Suzuki\* and Sonam Wangmo

# Language evolution and vitality of Lhagang Tibetan: a Tibetic language as a minority in Minyag Rabgang

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**Abstract:** Lhagang Tibetan is a dialect of Khams spoken in central Lhagang [*IHa-sgang*] Town, in the area surrounding Lhagang Monastery in Kangding Municipality, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, western Sichuan Province. The region where this dialect is spoken was traditionally called Minyag Rabgang [*Mi-nyag Rab-sgang*], and is where Darmdo Minyag, a Qiangic language regarded as a minority language by linguists, is spoken. Previous studies have identified the Tibetic languages as its cultural superstratum. However, Lhagang Tibetan is one of the local Tibetic varieties which is least influenced by Darmdo Minyag. Instead, it is in greater contact with Amdo, which is spoken by Tibetans living around Lhagang Monastery. In this unique sociolinguistic situation, Lhagang Tibetan has become a minority language of the Minyag Rabgang area. The linguistic situation of the Tibetic languages in Minyag Rabgang is complicated, and only a few studies have dealt with this issue. In this article, we will discuss: (1) the geographical definition of Minyag Rabgang and the distribution of languages within it; (2) the current situation of the Tibetic languages spoken around Lhagang Monastery, and; (3) the ongoing language evolution and vitality of the sedentary Khams variety of Lhagang Tibetan.

**Keywords:** Tibetan, Khams, language contact, language vitality, migration history

## 1 Introduction

This article aims to present the current linguistic situation of Lhagang [*IHa-sgang*] Tibetan, a Tibetic variety spoken in the central area of Lhagang Village, surrounding Lhagang Monastery (Figures 1 and 2), in Kangding Municipality,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

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\*Corresponding author: Hiroyuki Suzuki, University of Oslo, 0315 Oslo, Norway,

E-mail: minibutasan@gmail.com

Sonam Wangmo, University of Oslo, 0315 Oslo, Norway, E-mail: sonam107wangmo@gmail.com



**Figure 1:** Lhagang Village (seen from south, 2013).

while also presenting a geographical description of the Minyang Rabgang [*Minyang Rab-sgang*] region and the distribution of languages within it. This article also aims to discuss Lhagang Tibetan's linguistic multistrata, as well as its language evolution and vitality.

The main purpose of the article is to describe the sociolinguistic situation regarding the Tibetic language spoken in Lhagang Village. This variety has not been well described so far, and is subject to misunderstandings. Those who have never been to Lhagang might think that the village's Tibetan dialect is a kind of Khams, according to its geographical position. However, those who have been there may say that the dialect spoken there is a kind of Amdo Tibetan, because one can frequently hear conversations of Tibetans in an Amdo nomadic variety. Both claims are, unfortunately, correct only in some aspects. The language situation in Lhagang Village is so complex that one cannot describe it succinctly. There are at least *four* varieties of Khams and Amdo spoken in Lhagang Village, as we will describe in Section 3. This article will focus on providing detailed information on the current sociolinguistic situation of Lhagang Tibetan from both a linguist's and a native anthropologist's view.



Figure 2: Lhagang Village (seen from north, 2014).

## 2 Minyag Rabgang: its geographical definition and distribution of its languages

Lhagang Village is located within a traditional territory known as Minyag Rabgang, but the exact area designated by this traditional name has not been clearly delineated in previous works. This section presents a geographical definition of Minyag Rabgang based on literature in Chinese, Tibetan, and English, while also taking into account the perceptions of local natives. A short introduction to the distribution of languages within Minyag Rabgang is also provided.

### 2.1 Geographical definition of Minyag Rabgang

Minyag Rabgang is known as one of the six plateaux [*sMad-mdo-khams sGang-drug*] in the Khams region, from the viewpoint of Tibetan traditional geography. The six plateaux are: Zalmogang [*Zal-mo-sgang*], Tshawagang [*Tsha-ba-sgang*], Markhangang [*sMar-khams-sgang*], Pomborgang [*sPo-'bor-sgang*], Mardzagang [*dMar-rdza-sgang*], and Minyag Rabgang (Karma rGyal-mtshan 2002: 438).

Unfortunately, there are no written documents indicating the exact geographic range of Minyag Rabgang. However, the ‘*Dzam-gling chen-po’i rgyas-bshad snod-bcud kun-gsal me-long*’ (henceforth ‘*Dzam-gling rgyas-bshad*’), a book on geography edited in the early nineteenth century, mentions the geographical position of *Mi-nyag-sgang*<sup>2</sup>:

li-thang-nas nyag-chu brgal-ba’i shar-na mi-nyag-gi yul yod-pa der mi-nyag dga’-bzhi dgon sogs sa-skya-ba dang/ mi-nyag skyi-li dgon sogs dga’-lugs-pa’i dgon-pa mang-po dang/ mi-nyag-gi byang-mtha’ hor-khog dang nye-sar rgyal-dbang rin-po-che’i gdan-sa mgar-thar-du grags-pa sogs yod/

[Crossing over Nyagchu from Lithang to the east, one finds the land of Minyag, where there are many temples of the Saskya sect, such as dGa’bzhi, and of the dGelug sect, such as as sKyili.<sup>3</sup> The northern boundary of Minyag is Horkhog and, close to it, the birthplace of the Dalai Lama is located in mGar thar.]

(Cited from Karma rGyal-mtshan 2002: 436–437)

Compared with the present geography, *Mi-nyag-sgang* designates the plateau between Lhagang and Watshe [*Wa-khral*; Waze] village, and to the east of Nyagchu [*Nya-chu*] (the central area of the Figure 3). In the description of the ‘*Dzam-gling rgyas-bshad*, *Mi-nyag-sgang* is distinguished from *Mi-nyag-rong*, which is one of the small *rongs*, or valley districts, in Khams.<sup>4</sup> Based on the fact that the description of *Mi-nyag-sgang* does not include the name of well-known monasteries inside Minyag Valley,<sup>5</sup> we assume that *Mi-nyag-rong* designates the area of Minyag Valley, including such villages as Phungposhi [*Phung-po-gshis*<sup>6</sup>; Pengbuxi], Sade [*Sa-bde*; Shade], Lugpa [*kLu-pa*; Gonggashan], and so on.

The *Bing*-series *Xifanguan Yiyu*, a Chinese-Tibetan vocabulary edited in the sixteenth century, is another written source that mentions Minyag Rabgang (Nishida 1963).<sup>7</sup> It claims that Minyag Rabgang is a Tibetan name for the Changhexi region, which designates the territory of the Cala [*lCags-la*] Chieftain,<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The following passage is cited from an amended version of Karma rGyal-mtshan (2002: 436–437). The original document is investigated by Wylie (1962).

<sup>3</sup> The correct orthography of ‘sKyil-li’ is sKyid-legs. A great interest for linguists is why this incorrect spelling exists.

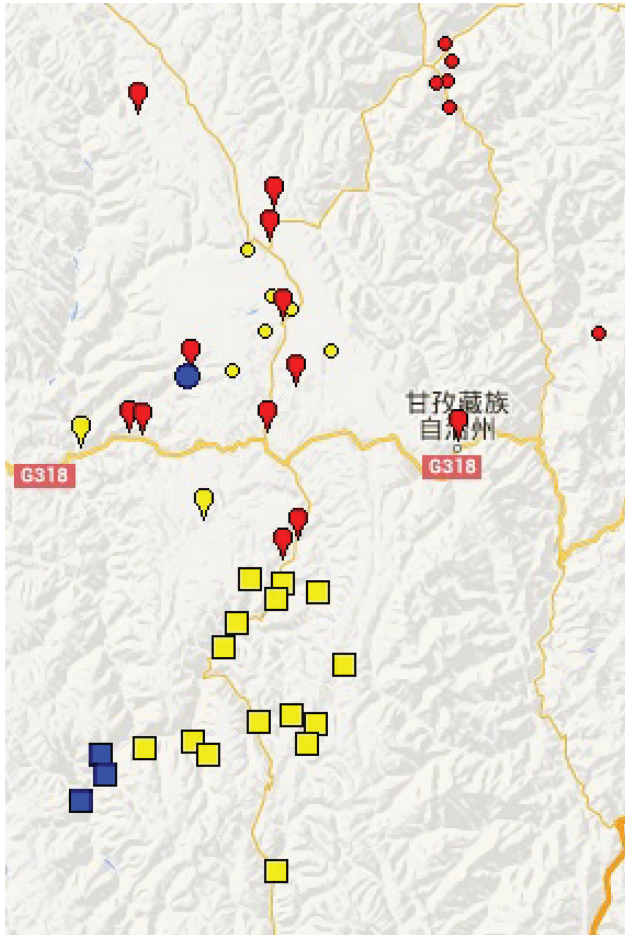
<sup>4</sup> See Karma rGyal-mtshan (2002: 433). The *four greater rongs* [*rong chen bzhi*] designate Tshawarong, Sangarong, Nyagrang, and rGyalmorong (= rGyalrong), and there are many small *rongs* including Minyagrang in Khams.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Rikhu Monastery of the Saskya sect. See Sonam Wangmo (2013: 55–57).

<sup>6</sup> Also written as *Bon-po-gshis*.

<sup>7</sup> Another type of word list was also edited in the eighteenth century, called *Xifan Yiyu* or *Dajianlu Yiyu*. Two kinds of the Tibetan language spoken in Dartsendo were also described by Migot (1957).

<sup>8</sup> See Yudru Tsomu (2009) for a detailed description about lCags-la Chieftain.



**Figure 3:** Language distribution of the Minyang Rabgang group. 📍 Minyang Rabgang 📍 Southern Route 📍 Muli-Dappa 📍 Darmdo Minyang (Qiangic) 📍 Lhagang Choyu (Qiangic) 📍 Rongbrag 📍 Amdo.

who had just moved from Sewurong [Se'u-rong] to Dartsendo [Dar-rtse-mdo; Lucheng] at that time. The fact that *Xifanguan Yiyu* recorded Minyang Rabgang as a translation of Changhexi implies that Minyang Rabgang included *Mi-nyag-rong*, *Mi-nyag-sgang*, and Dartsendo at that time (Suzuki 2013).

At present, most Tibetan inhabitants of *Mi-nyag-sgang* and *Mi-nyag-rong* identify themselves as *Mi-nyag-pa* 'people of Minyang'. Thus, we temporarily determine the geographical range of Minyang Rabgang as: the border between Lhagang and Basme [Ba-smad; Bamei] townships as the northernmost point, and the mountain range including Mt. Zhara [bZhag-bra Lha-rtse; Yala], Mt. Julam [brGyud-lam;

Zheduo], and Mt. Minyag Gangkar [*Mi-nyag Gangs-dkar*; Muya Gongga] as the eastern border. The mountain range between *Mi-nyag-sgang* and Nyagchu forms the westernmost border, while the southern border is not clearly delineated, but is located in the northern part of Jiulong County.

## 2.2 Distribution of languages in Minyag Rabgang

The present situation of the language distribution within Minyag Rabgang is very complicated. We can count the following languages: Khams (Minyag Rabgang, Southern Route, and Muli-Dappa),<sup>9</sup> Amdo, Darmdo Minyag,<sup>10</sup> and Lhagang Choyu.<sup>11</sup> Outside of Minyag Rabgang, languages such as Khams (Rongbrag), Amdo (rGyalrong-surrounding group), Geshitsa, sTau, nDrapa, and Guiqiong are spoken. Needless to say, Sichuan Chinese (a kind of Southwestern Mandarin) is widely used, especially in the region to the east of Minyag Rabgang, where it has become a lingua franca.

Figure 3 is a distribution map of the dialects of Minyag Rabgang Khams and its surrounding dialects and non-Tibetic languages. It is mainly surrounded by Darmdo Minyag to the south, Amdo Tibetan to the north, the Southern Route group (Khams) to the west, and Chinese (Southwestern Mandarin, not shown in Figure 3) to the east.

Lhagang Village is located in the northernmost area of Minyag Rabgang, and Lhagang Village is situated in the area where the Minyag Rabgang dialect group of Khams Tibetan and Amdo Tibetan contact each other. The Tibetans living on the grassland around Lhagang Village generally speak a variety belonging to Amdo (see Section 3.2).

## 3 Background of Lhagang Village

### 3.1 Geography of Lhagang Village

Lhagang Village is located approximately 113 kilometers northwest of Dartsendo Town, the capital of Kangding Municipality. The village is in a pastoral area at

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<sup>9</sup> Following the analysis of Tournadre (2014) and Tournadre and Suzuki (forthcoming), these three are posited in an independent “language” level within the Tibetic languages respectively. So is Rongbrag below.

<sup>10</sup> See Dawa Drolma and Suzuki (2015) for more on Darmdo Minyag.

<sup>11</sup> A newly recognized language. Under investigation.

an altitude of around 3,730 meters, where local Tibetans practice mobile pastoralism,<sup>12</sup> and pastoralists generally speak vernaculars of Amdo Tibetan. However, at the center of Lhagang, a sedentary village has formed around the famous monastery called Pal Lhagang Gon [*dPal lHa-sgang dGon*],<sup>13</sup> and now has a population of about 150 households, including 80% locals, 14% immigrants from other villages, and 1% other minorities.<sup>14</sup> Almost all inhabitants, both real pastoralists and villagers, identify as *'brog-pa* 'pastoralists'. Sedentary villagers also identify themselves as *Mi-nyag-pa* 'people of Minyang', an identity they share with other Tibetans living in the Minyang Rabgang region.

There are two spellings of the village name: one is *Lha-dga'*, designating 'the Bodhisattva's favorite place', and the other is *Lha-sgang*, an abbreviation of 'the place of the Bodhisattva in Minyang Rabgang', because the village is named after the monastery. Today, the most commonly used spelling of the village's name is *Lha-sgang*.

Villagers claim that Lhagang Village is laid out in a crescent shape, which they consider very auspicious. The village is said to be surrounded by four holy hills, considered a perfect combination, with each hill represents a different Buddha: Mañjuśrī [*Jam-dpal dByangs*] in the west; Avalokiteśvara [*sPyan-ras gZigs*] in the south; Vajrapaṇi [*Phyag-na rDo-rje*] in the east; and Tārā [*rJe-btsun sGrol-ma*] in the north.

### 3.2 Sociolinguistic environment of Lhagang Village

In 1930, Lhagang Village was a pastoral settlement with only 13 households.<sup>15</sup> Locals call those households *Lhagang Rawa Cunsun* [*lHa-sgang Ra-ba bCu-gsum*], the '13 Households of Lhagang'. Even though they identify themselves as *'brog-pa* 'pastoralists', the same as Amdo-speaking people living in the vicinity of the village, we assume that their descendants speak a variety of Khams Tibetan, which belongs to the Minyang Rabgang dialect group, as shown in Section 2.2.

<sup>12</sup> See Tan (2013b) for a description of the nomadic Tibetan life in Dora Karmo, southeast of Lhagang Village. Sonam Doomtso (2011) provides another description of life in the pastoral area of Lhagang.

<sup>13</sup> See Sonam Wangmo (2016) for a detailed description of the relationship between monastic and lay communities in Lhagang.

<sup>14</sup> An estimate figure provided by one of the second author's aunts who has worked in the township government.

<sup>15</sup> The description of this subsection is based on Sonam Wangmo (2013: 28-30).

Due to the village being the administrative center of Lhagang Township, today, this former nomadic area is a booming village compared to others in the vicinity, with development coming through tourism, business, and government policy. One of the most dramatic changes in Lhagang Village happened in 2004, under the policy of “The New Rural Construction”,<sup>16</sup> which led many local Amdo-speaking pastoralists to sell their domestic animals, purchase new houses, and come to dwell in Lhagang Village together with pastoralists from other villages. Suddenly, the population of Lhagang Village doubled. At the same time, a lot of pasture was used for the construction of houses for these new settlers.<sup>17</sup> The village therefore made a rule in 2004, allowing anyone who moved before 1999 to be considered a Lhagang villager. If someone from other villages wanted to live in Lhagang after 1999, they had to buy land in order to build a new house. If a new couple has at least one person from Lhagang Village, they can be given a share of land on which to build their house. In addition to changes in housing, job opportunities in Lhagang have also become diversified. Today, villagers work as drivers, businessmen, and shop owners, or are involved with tourism. Under these circumstances, recent Tibetan immigrants from the surrounding nomadic area use Amdo Tibetan. Hence, Tibetans living in the village speak multiple kinds of Tibetan, not only both Amdo and Kham, but also “mixed” types of both.<sup>18</sup>

As shown in Figure 4, several newly developed settlements have appeared around Lhagang Village in 2012. Inhabitants of these new hamlets speak Amdo Tibetan, except for people who emigrated from Lhagang Village for reasons of marriage or work. In the new village in Figure 4, people usually speak the Gongrima (northeastern) variety of Amdo Tibetan.

Nowadays, people in Lhagang Village are more concerned about education than previously, not only due to the policy enforcing nine-year education, but also to villager’s interest in higher education. Currently, more than 16 people from the village have attended college, and another 70 have attended other different technical secondary schools. Compared with the past, the number of

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**16** *Xin Nongcun Jianshe* in Chinese.

**17** The west side of the bridge in Figure 1 is basically an enlarged region for new settlers, most of whom are from the western and northwestern area to Lhagang Village. Hence, they usually speak the gYukhyim variety of Amdo.

**18** Compare with the term “mixed dialect” used by Trudgill (1986: 60), who defines it as: “varieties where accommodation is taking place, but where it has not gone to completion”. Even though we follow the language classification within the Tibetic languages provided by Tournadre (2014), we refer to features of dialect contact rather than those of language contact, as mentioned by Siegel (2010: 7-10).





**Figure 4:** New village on the grassland of Lhagang (2013).

students has increased three times in the primary school since 2005, and many parents now support and encourage their children to go to college.

Education and changes in lifestyle may influence changes of the oral Tibetan language. It is therefore highly possible that language change in the future may occur in unexpected ways that cannot be observed in contemporary Lhagang Village society.

## **4 Lhagang Tibetan in Lhagang Village: its multistrata and varieties**

Numerous works on dialectology (e. g., Chambers and Trudgill 1998; Walter 2008; Mæhlum and Røyneland 2012) mention that the word *dialect* includes two main categories of variation: social and spatial (or geographical/local). Generally, the latter has been the main focus of discussions of the dialectology of “Tibetan” or Tibetic languages. Of course, sociolinguistic varieties have also been described, especially on Lhasa Tibetan, but it is a description regarding particularities of Lhasa Tibetan within Central Tibetan dialects (Beyer 1992: 26-18).

The case of Lhagang is, in fact, different from that of Lhasa: geographical varieties and social varieties are related to each other. We must clarify the nature of *multistratum* when investigating Lhagang Tibetan, and specify what a local dialectal variety is and what is a sociolinguistic variety. In order to illuminate this complex situation regarding Lhagang Tibetan, we try to analyze it using linguistic and anthropological approaches.

#### 4.1 Previous studies on Lhagang Tibetan

Of the languages spoken in Minyag Rabgang, the Tibetic varieties have received less attention from linguists so far. Research has generally focuses on the Qiangic Minyag language, resulting in an accumulation of literature (e. g., Huang 1985; Ikeda 2002; 2006; 2007). This kind of tendency is, unfortunately, found everywhere in the Chinese Tibetosphere where non-Tibetic languages are spoken (cf. Roche 2014), for the Tibetic languages are not regarded as a minority whether the present language situation is minor or not (Suzuki 2014d).

The first linguistic description of Lhagang Tibetan (Suzuki 2006) mentions that it is a dialect of Khams Tibetan. This dialect was identified as belonging to the Minyag Rabgang group of Khams Tibetan,<sup>19</sup> which is a dialectal group spoken in the Minyag area centering on Dartsendo. This group is classified into two subgroups: northern (or archaic) and southern (or innovative), represented by the Lhagang dialect and the Rangakha [*Ra-mga-kha*; Xinduqiao] dialect respectively. This viewpoint is also supported by a study conducted by a native speaker of Lhagang Tibetan (Lha-mo-skyid 2010).

The present authors have recently collaborated on sociolinguistic research to illuminate the current language situation in Lhagang Tibetan (Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo 2014, 2015a) based on the anthropological description of Sonam Wangmo (2013; 2014). We two have also published a contrastive wordlist of two sociolinguistic varieties (cf. Section 4.2) spoken in Lhagang Village (Suzuki and Wangmo 2015c), based on which a systematical lexical difference is revealed. In addition, we, together with Lhamoskyid, author of the above-mentioned work, have collected and edited the best-known local oral historical legend [*lo-rgyus*],

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<sup>19</sup> It is called Middle Route (*Zhonglu* in Chinese) dialects by sKal-bzang 'Gyur-med (1985). Suzuki (2009) proposed to rename it *Minyag*, but because of the identical name to the Minyag language belonging to the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman, Suzuki (2013) renewed the name again and determined it as *Minyag Rabgang* or *Minyak Rabgang*. The Qiangic Minyag language is now also divided into two languages, one of which is called Darmdo Minyag, appearing in Section 2.2 (Dawa Drolma and Suzuki 2015).

*Lhagang, the Place Loved by the Bodhisattva*, narrated in Lhagang Tibetan, with a commentary (Suzuki et al. 2015ab)

## 4.2 Brief description of multiple strata of Lhagang Tibetan spoken in the Village

In Lhagang Village, we can hear communication of the local people in multiple varieties of the Tibetan language.<sup>20</sup> There are at least four types of speech attested, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Varieties spoken in Lhagang Village.

Name	Description
Lhagang-A	Variety of the Minyag Rabgang group of Khams heavily influenced by Amdo
Lhagang-B	Variety of the Minyag Rabgang group of Khams transmitted by ‘13 Households of Lhagang’
Gongrima	Variety of the archaic nomadic group of Amdo, spoken in northeast Lhagang
gYukhyim	Variety of the archaic nomadic group of Amdo, spoken in northwest Lhagang

As described in Table 1, the first two are Khams, and the second two Amdo. In explaining the dialect names, we should recall that it is a principle of dialectology to name dialects using toponyms. Since there are four varieties attested in Lhagang Village, we are required to analyze which variety should be called Lhagang. As in Table 1, we name the varieties of Khams ‘Lhagang’, because they must be related to the language spoken by the earliest settlers, the ‘13 Households of Lhagang’ (Section 3.2). The speakers of the Gongrima and gYukhyim varieties of Amdo Tibetan are principally recent immigrants (2012) from the nomadic areas, Gongrima and gYukhyim.<sup>21</sup> After coming to Lhagang Village, they still speak their mother tongue in everyday communication. Hence, we propose a use of the original name of those settlements for those dialects.

Let’s take two examples that evidently display phonetic and lexical differences in the four varieties of ‘Lhagang Tibetan’. See Table 2.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo (2014; 2015a) for a more detailed description.

<sup>21</sup> They are administratively within Lhagang Town. Another nomadic variety of Amdo called Shingnyag is also spoken by recent immigrants, but we do not count it here because of its very small number of speakers.

<sup>22</sup> As for the phonological system of Lhagang Tibetan, see Appendix A.

**Table 2:** Phonetic and lexical differences in the four varieties of ‘Lhagang Tibetan’.

Meaning	Lhagang-A	Lhagang-B	Gongrima	gYukhyim
‘Lhagang’	/ːla̠ ʰgɔ̃ - ːla̠ ʰgə̃/	/ːla̠ ʰgɔ̃ - ːla̠ ʰgə̃/	/la̠ ʳgaŋ/	/la̠ ʳgaŋ - la̠ ʳga/
‘cat’	/ːmō ziʔ/	/ːmō ziʔ/	/lə lə/	/le le - li li/

Here, the main differences are found in the second syllable, especially its preinitial and final as well as its tone (suprasegmentals), as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3:** A linguistic description of the form ‘Lhagang’ in the four varieties.

Language	Lhagang-A	Lhagang-B	Gongrima	gYukhyim
Preinitial	preaspirated	preaspirated	r-consonant	r-consonant
Rhyme	nasalised vowel	plain vowel	always nasal final	possible nasal final
Tone	existent	existent	none	none

Another example, ‘cat’, shows lexical variation, with Khams and Amdo using different lexical forms from each other. The Amdo form is widely used by Amdo speakers and often written as *lu-lu*, *le-le* or *a-le* in Written Tibetan (WRT),<sup>23</sup> whereas the Khams form is original in Minyang Rabgang. Figure 5 shows the distribution of word form of ‘cat’ in Minyang Rabgang and its surrounding area; the word form like /ːmō ziʔ/ is shared only by the dialects belonging to the Minyang Rabgang group<sup>24</sup> (cf. Figure 3), moreover, this form has been used for at least more than 400 years (Suzuki 2014b).<sup>25</sup>

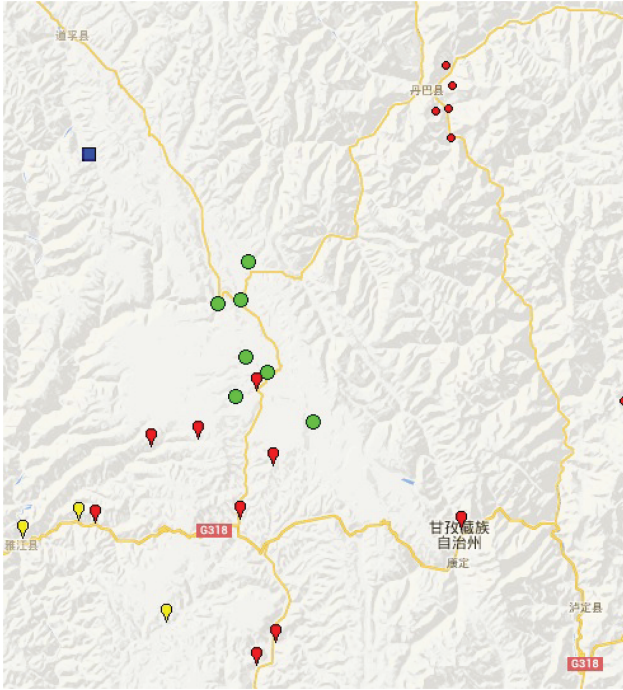
### 4.3 Differences between Lhagang-A and Lhagang-B, and their coexistence in “one” speaker

The difference between Lhagang-A and Lhagang-B is principally based on the degree of the recent influence from Amdo Tibetan (Gongrima and gYukhyim), not on a genetic difference. Lhagang-A has been more influenced by Amdo and

<sup>23</sup> Word forms such as *a-li* or *a-le* are included in DTLF (1899: 682, 1081) and Giraudeau and Goré (1956: 55).

<sup>24</sup> An exception is the Shingnyag dialect, which is a dialect of Amdo Tibetan, but uses the /mō ziʔ/-type for ‘cat’.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the word form ‘cat’, see Suzuki (2014a).



**Figure 5:** Word form of ‘cat’. ● /mō ziʔ/-type ● /woʻdzə/-type ● WrT lu lu-type ■ WrT a lu-type ● WrT byi la-type .

is still undergoing linguistic changes via this language contact, while Lhagang-B has retained more characteristics of Minyag Rabgang Khams (Suzuki 2015a). These two varieties are, indeed, existent in one speaker, who sometimes uses A-variety, sometimes B-variety, according to the situation of the communication. Sometimes, expressions peculiar to Amdo Tibetan can appear inside an utterance of the Lhagang dialect (both A and B). This situation means that the inhabitants of Lhagang Village use one or more types of these varieties in one village, which is peculiar to Lhagang in a context of the Khams Tibetan-speaking community. Lhagang-A can be regarded as an “interdialect” as defined by Trudgill (1986: 62).

Lhagang-A has shares many phonetic features with the nomadic group of Amdo Tibetan, for example, a complicated consonant cluster system of initials (Suzuki and Wangmo 2014). In addition, lexical features are also influenced by Amdo, as described in Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo (2015c). The varieties Lhagang-A and Lhagang-B are not perfectly regarded as independent of each other, because Khams-speakers in Lhagang can generally use both; the

difference between them is merely attested in the pronunciation, but the grammatical construction is similar (though some differences certainly exist). Hence, we can regard them as one dialect with two sociolinguistic varieties.<sup>26</sup>

It is highly possible that the members of the ‘13 Households of Lhagang’ were originally speakers of the early Lhagang-B dialect, judging from their language use in various generations, based on long-term observations by the second author, even though their identity was ‘nomad’ or ‘pastoralist’.<sup>27</sup> In the Khams region, pastoralists are not always Amdo-speakers; for example, there are many pastoralist Khams-speakers in Derge, the central area where Tibetans speak the so-called “standard” Khams (Rinzin Thargyal 2007). Therefore, our analysis suggests that the Amdo-like features attested in Lhagang-A were not inherited and recently acquired.

We take some examples from a narrative<sup>28</sup> related to the origin of the toponym Lhagang from Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo (2015a):

- (1) The pronunciation in the whole utterance belongs to Lhagang-B<sup>29</sup>

ˊnə ma ˊ <sup>h</sup> na ˊ <sup>h</sup> na-la	ˊ <sup>h</sup> dza ˊ <sup>h</sup> za ˊkō dzo	ˊpo-la	ˊja la
<i>nyi ma gna' gna' la</i>	<i>rgya bza' kong jo</i>	<i>bod la</i>	<i>yar la</i>
long ago-LOC	Princess Wencheng	Tibet- LOC	upwards
B	B	B	B
ˊ <sup>h</sup> de tʃ	ˊ <sup>h</sup> kaʔ-la		
<i>gdan drongs</i>	<i>skabs la</i>		
invite	when-LOC		
B	B		
‘A long time ago, when Princess Wencheng was invited to Tibet,’ (Line 1)			

<sup>26</sup> Thus, ‘Lhagang Tibetan’ can be used as a unified name for Khams spoken in Lhagang Village. The variety-A or -B will be mentioned when necessary. This article, of course, needs to specify this distinction.

<sup>27</sup> It is certain that the Tibetans belonging to the ‘13 Households of Lhagang’ identify themselves as *'brog-pa*, however, recent research of the authors has found that their language is regarded as a farmers’ dialect by Tibetans around Lhagang Village, such as in Shingnyag and Thamkhas.

<sup>28</sup> The whole narrative text with an interlinear English translation appears in Appendix B. This story was narrated by a woman (b. 1987). For a detailed background on this story, see Sonam Wangmo (2013: 32-51).

<sup>29</sup> Each example consists of the following elements: The first line: pronunciation in Lhagang Tibetan, the second line: Written Tibetan correspondence; the third line: linguistic analysis; the fourth line: stratum of Lhagang-A or -B; the fifth line: translation. The abbreviations used in the third line are: CPV-copulative verb; DEF-definite specifier; INE-inessive; LOC-locative; STA-stative. The marking of the absolutive (*zero*) is omitted for the simplicity’s sake.

- (2) The pronunciation of Lhagang-A inserted into the narration in Lhagang-B  
 ་ལྷ་སྒང་མ་རྩ་མིང་ལྷ་དག་ཟེར་ལེན་  
*lha sgang ma rtsa ming de lha dga' zer red*  
 Lhagang principally name-DEF Lhaga say-CPV  
 A B B B B  
 'The name of Lhagang was principally Lhaga.' (Line 19)

- (3) The grammatical feature of Lhagang-A inserted into the narration in Lhagang-B  
 ་ལྷ་སྒང་འཇུག་མཛེས་ལྷ་གུ་ལྷོ་ལེན་  
*a na lha sgang jo khang ni bzhag gi red*  
 here Jokhang of Lhagang-INE put-STA-CPV  
 B B A

'(she [Princess Wencheng]) put it [a replica of the Jowo statue] here, in the Jokhang of Lhagang, where it still exists.' (Line 15)

These three examples are taken from a sequence of one locally well-known story,<sup>30</sup> named *Lhagang, the Place Loved by the Bodhisattva*. It may be surprising that a single story narrated by one person includes multiple linguistic strata, but this is, in fact, a rather ordinary occurrence in the sociolinguistic field that two or more languages (or dialects) are used in the same community.

In the examples above, we can note that the toponym *Lhagang* appears in two pronunciations /*ལྷ་སྒང་*/([3] Lhagang-B) and /*ལྷ་སྒང་*/([2] Lhagang-A). Analyzing the whole story (see Appendix B), we can see the reason for this phenomenon: the pronunciation of Lhagang-B appears in the part of the legend of Princess Wencheng and Jowo, whereas that of Lhagang-A appears in the part of the interpretation of the change of toponym (cf. Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo 2015). The style is thus different, as the interpretation of the toponym is to some extent related to Written Tibetan, which the speaker relates to the Lhagang-A variety, probably because the pronunciation of this variety is closer to Written Tibetan.

The examples above show that the stratum of Lhagang-A is easily inserted into the speech of Lhagang-B. The characteristics of Lhagang-A probably originate in Amdo Tibetan, rather than in other languages such as Darmdo Minyag or Southern Route Khams (Figure 3). Hence, the process of the formation of Lhagang-A should be carefully investigated.

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**30** It is certain that this story is widespread within the Minyag Rabgang area, but there are to some extent differences of its content. See Warner (2011), Tan (2013a), Sonam Wangmo (2013: 32-51), and Suzuki et al. (2015ab) for more detail.



Figure 6: Lhagang Jowo (2012).

#### 4.4 Process of the formation of the Lhagang-A dialect

The Lhagang-A dialect can be regarded as a kind of sociolinguistic variety of the Lhagang-B dialect, a local dialect belonging to the Minyag Rabgang dialect of Khams, at least at the present stage, because there are no speakers who only speak this variety. As mentioned in Section 4.1, the Lhagang-A variety has been influenced by Amdo Tibetan spoken by pastoralists living around Lhagang Village. In Section 4.3, we described how the Lhagang-B variety originated from Minyag Rabgang Khams with little possibility to have had a long-term intense language contact. Then, in Lhagang Village, there are many opportunities for language contact, for the village has Lhagang Monastery, an important destination for pilgrimage in Khams from the surrounding areas, including Minyag Rabgang, Horkhog, and rGyalrong.

The languages spoken in the above-mentioned areas are various: Minyag Rabgang (Khams; Section 3.2), Rongbrag (Khams), Southern Route (Khams), Archaic-nomadic (Amdo), Darmdo Minyag (Qiangic), Lhagang Choyu (Qiangic), nDrapa (Qiangic), sTau (rGyalrongic), Geshitsa (rGyalrongic), and Situ-rGyalrong (rGyalrongic). Based on the discussion in Sections 3.1 and 3.2, the early settlers



in Lhagang Village, the ‘13 Households of Lhagang’ would speak an older dialect of Lhagang-B, and it is to some extent different from the dialects spoken around Rangakha. According to the present linguistic research, Lhagang-A has an evident influence only from Amdo, among the languages above on the substratum of Lhagang-B. The principal differences between Lhagang-A and Lhagang-B are found in the phonetic/phonological aspect, not in the morpho-syntactic or lexical aspects. This situation has been discovered through an analysis of elicitations and narrations.

Another noteworthy topic regarding language contact is the influence of mass-media, i. e. radio and TV programs. Many Tibetans living in Lhagang Village can enjoy Tibetan TV programs from three stations – Xizang TV, Qinghai Tibetan TV,<sup>31</sup> and Kangba TV – which broadcast in “the three greater languages” of Lhasa, Amdo, and Khams respectively.<sup>32</sup> Recently,<sup>33</sup> the frequency of television watching has increased, however, the influence of this practice on Lhagang dialect is estimated to be small. Tibetans in Lhagang Village prefer to watch Qinghai Tibetan TV rather than other TV channels, because its programs, especially music and dance,<sup>34</sup> are considered more attractive. Additionally, compared with Lhasa Tibetan, its language (Amdo) is easier for Lhagang people to understand. The variety of Amdo used on Qinghai Tibetan TV is, however, different in phonetic aspects from that spoken by pastoralists living near to Lhagang, i. e. gYukhyim and Gongrima, and no traces displaying specific distinctive linguistic features of Qinghai Amdo are attested in Lhagang-A.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the development of Lhagang-A, as mentioned above, mainly depends on ongoing everyday language contact between sedentary people and pastoralists in the village.

Returning to the linguistic substratum of Minyag Rabgang, we will see that it is possible that the Darmdo Minyag language once functioned as a linguistic substratum according to historical narratives. Lhagang-B may have its influence, however, compared with another subgroup of Minyag Rabgang Khams (southern group such as Rangakha), it does not possess evident traces of the existence of Darmdo Minyag. Probably, Lhagang Tibetan is a kind of languages of which the

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31 Now renamed as Amdo TV.

32 Ganzi TV also broadcasts locally, but cannot be received in Lhagang Village.

33 Electricity first arrived in the village between 1992–1993, and televisions became widespread around 1995.

34 Similar programs of Kangba TV, which are fewer than those on Qinghai Tibetan TV, are also enjoyed by the local people.

35 According to the first author’s research in multiple “archaic nomadic” vernaculars of Amdo, it is certain that dialectal differences among them exist to some extent in phonetic and lexical aspects. See also Green (2012) regarding the intelligibility of Amdo Tibetan Media in the Amdo-spoken region. However, it does not include the case of Ganzi Prefecture.

changes regarding multiple linguistic aspects such as phonology and lexicon occur rapidly, but we cannot assume whether the substratum of Darmdo Minyag has already been lost or originally existed less. More investigations are needed.

The reasons why the Lhagang-A dialect merely shares common features with Amdo may be as follows:

1. communication between the settlers and the pastoralists has been frequent for a long time, and they each use their mother tongue;
2. the majority of new settlers in Lhagang Village are pastoralists that lived in the grasslands near the village;
3. pilgrims from elsewhere who come to visit the monastery have few occasions to communicate with Lhagang residents compared to local Amdo-speaking pastoralists.

Regarding (1), the communication between the settlers and the pastoralists is mainly in regards to trade, pilgrimage, and religious ceremonies (see Figures 7 and 8).

Regarding (2), the western (left) side to the bridge in Figure 1 has recently been expanded for new settlers, following the governmental policy (Section 3.2).



**Figure 7:** A great lama coming to Lhagang (2005).



**Figure 8:** Pilgrims and tourists in Lhagang (2012).

Regarding (3), the first author has travelled with local friends from Danba County to Lhagang several times, and has never seen them communicating with the people in Lhagang except for conversations in the monastery shop to buy butter and ceremonial scarfs [*kha-btags*].

Hence, the villagers speaking the Lhagang-B dialect would have frequently contacted speakers of the nomadic varieties of Amdo, and a new variety, called Lhagang-A, could have been generated through frequent language contact with Amdo.<sup>36</sup>

## 4.5 Issue in the language vitality of Lhagang Tibetan

As discussed above, Lhagang Tibetan is in intense contact with surrounding languages, which has brought an evident change for the sedentary variety. The

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**36** Even though Lhagang-A is strongly influenced by Amdo, its basic language construction still maintains the nature of Khams. The intelligibility between Lhagang-A and Amdo is relatively high, but this does not mean that Lhagang-A has become Amdo. Several Lhagang-A speakers say that there is somewhat difference between the two varieties, which may prevent speakers from high intelligibility. Additionally, it is also attested that a variety of Amdo has begun to be influenced by the Lhagang-B dialect. However, this case needs more investigation based on long-term observations.

language evolution triggered by this contact in Lhagang Village will be discussed because it displays a different type of language change from what has previously been described in the Tibetan cultural area. The language vitality of the sedentary variety is also an interesting topic, which differs completely from a well-known case of Tibetic languages, as reported in Suzuki (2014c).

First, we will summarize the four varieties spoken in Lhagang Village. Lhagang-B is the most traditional local variety transmitted by the inhabitants (the 13 Households of Lhagang), and Lhagang-A is regarded as a variety that has developed with great influence from Amdo-speaking people in the context of intense contact with Amdo-speaking people (so far approximately 30 households). On the other hand, the varieties of Gongrima and gYukhyim are originally spoken by the pastoralists living in Gongrima and gYukhyim hamlets respectively. Recently, members of these communities have chosen to settle in the village, and thus their language can now frequently be heard there. Based on an analysis of the sociolinguistic background of Lhagang Tibetan, we concluded that the everyday use of languages is extremely diverse in Lhagang Village, but knowing more about the history of migration, we can understand that the original variety spoken in the village is a kind of Khams, contrary to an expectation that a nomadic language, Amdo Tibetan, is broadly spoken in such a nomadic area as Lhagang. Based on the sociolinguistic situation summarized above, we can now discuss the evolution and vitality of Lhagang-B.

It may seem unnecessary to discuss the vitality of a Tibetic language spoken by people who strongly identify as Tibetan and who are entrenched in an environment dominated by spoken Tibetan. However, Suzuki (2014c) has pointed out several factors that may lead a minor Tibetic language to endangerment, including: (1) few occasions to contact Tibetans who speak different dialects; (2) minor languages are not supported by the majority of villagers; and (3) extremely few cultural activities, such as religious practices and a writing tradition in Tibetan. Not all these factors are true in the case of Lhagang Tibetan. There is frequent communication with non-local Tibetans, and the majority of villagers speak Lhagang Tibetan, moreover, Lhagang is a religious center of the region.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, it is also true that the language contact occurring in Lhagang Village is extremely intense in commercial, religious, and educational

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<sup>37</sup> From this more general point of view regarding endangerment, we can consider the case of Dartsendo Tibetan of the Minyag Rabgang dialectal group of Khams. At present, the Dartsendo dialect (northern subgroup of Minyag Rabgang) faces endangerment and is nearly extinct (Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo 2015b).

contexts, as well as in the case of intermarriage; as a result, a new language, Lhagang-A, has been generated (Section 4.4). Observations of the language use in conversations within a family and in public places show us that use of Lhagang-B is quite limited within families in which all the members are from Lhagang Village. In other cases, the language used in conversation is Lhagang-B, with some elements of Lhagang-A, as in the story analyzed in Section 4.3. Lhagang-A is mainly used within families in which at least one member is from outside Lhagang Village, and in conversation with Amdo speakers and pastoralists. There seems to be no specific pattern concerning gender and language in the family, rather, the local micro-context of the household appears to be more significant. Hence, outsiders cannot easily access Lhagang-B, the traditional sedentary variety of Khams. This situation has already been observed before, and it certainly existed at least ten years ago, especially from 2004, due to the policy to encourage pastoralists to settle down (of 3.2).<sup>38</sup>

The sociolinguistic function of Lhagang-A is similar to a lingua franca for Lhagang-B speakers. However, it is also noteworthy that not all the native speakers of Lhagang-B speak Lhagang-A. Since Lhagang-A is a sociolinguistic variety, there are Lhagang-B speakers who have not acquired it. We have no concrete data on the proportion of the speakers who speak Lhagang-A, but it is estimated that the number of Lhagang-A is increasing with intensifying communication with Amdo speakers in Lhagang Village. And while the increase of Lhagang-A speakers does not mean the decrease of Lhagang-B speakers, this language situation may influence the development of the traditional variety, Lhagang-B. Languages are always changing, little by little, and sometimes in drastic ways. Lhagang-B may possibly face endangerment because of its weak social function, and we should continue to observe the process of language change occurring in Lhagang Village.

On the other hand, new settlers from the Amdo-speaking nomadic areas still maintain their mother tongue in everyday use in Lhagang Village. However, they are learning, little by little, how the older villagers speak. It is an interesting topic whether another new variety, Amdo influenced by Khams, will also be generated in the near future.

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**38** This peculiarity attracted the first author, who described phonetic characteristics of Lhagang Tibetan after his second research trip to Lhagang (Suzuki 2006). However, he was unable to distinguish Lhagang-A from Lhagang-B at that time. With the second author's work (Sonam Wangmo 2013), the nature of linguistic multistratum in Lhagang Village was clarified.

## 5 Conclusion

This article investigated a linguistic complexity attested in Lhagang Village. Firstly, it clarified the geographical range of Minyag Rabgang and the position of Lhagang Village and the language distribution within it. Secondly, it provided a description of the sociolinguistic environment of Lhagang Village. Thirdly, it classified the Tibetic languages spoken in Lhagang Village into four varieties: two of them are Khams, the others, Amdo. Lastly, it discussed linguistic characteristics of the two varieties of Khams. The variety called Lhagang-B is a dialect of Minyag Rabgang, Khams, transmitted by the descendants of the 13 Lhagang Households from an older period, whereas the Amdo varieties are spoken by more recent settlers.

Regarding language evolution and vitality, the case in Lhagang Village is totally different from those that have previously been discussed. Through a consideration on Lhagang Tibetan, we can see how a language can change under the situation of intense language contact, which may cause endangerment of local vernaculars. This viewpoint deserves greater attention in the study of Tibetic languages.

To sum up, detailed knowledge on the history of each society is crucial to understanding the related linguistic situation. Especially, regions such as Lhagang should be well-surveyed for the study of Tibetan dialectology. Otherwise, the linguistic varieties attested in Lhagang Village may be misunderstood, and a localized vernacular transmitted by sedentary people might be ignored. Therefore, it is important to study and record the sedentary variety of Lhagang Tibetan transmitted by the local people before it disappears because of the rapid and drastic change of language situation.

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## Appendices

### A. Phonological system of Lhagang Tibetan (A, B) and its description

The phonemic inventory (consonants and vowels) as well as tones of the Lhagang Tibetanis as follows:

– Consonantism

		A <sup>a</sup>	B	C	D	E	F	G
plosive	aspirated	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	t̪ <sup>h</sup>		c <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	
	non-aspirated	p	t	t̪		c	k	ʔ
	voiced	b	d	d̪		ʃ	g	
affricate	aspirated		ts <sup>h</sup>		tʃ <sup>h</sup>			
	non-aspirated		ts		tʃ			
	voiced		dz		dʒ			
fricative	aspirated		s <sup>h</sup>		ʃ <sup>h</sup>		x <sup>h</sup>	
	non-aspirated	ɸ	s	ʂ	ʃ		x	h
	voiced		z		ʒ		ɣ	ɦ
nasal	voiced	m	n		ɳ		ŋ	
	voiceless	ɱ	ɳ		ɳ̥		ŋ̊	
liquid	voiced		l	r				
	voiceless		l̥					
semi-vowel	voiced	w				j		

<sup>a</sup>A: bilabial; B: denti-alveolar; C: retroflex; D: prepalatal; E: palatal; F: velar; G: glottal

Lhagang-B lacks /c<sup>h</sup>, c, ʃ/; the others are common to B. The principal difference between A and B is found in the system of initial consonant clusters.

– Vocalism

i		ɨ		u
e		ɵ	ə	o
ɛ			ɔ	
	a		ɑ	

The contrasts short/long and plain/nasalised are attested. No difference between A and B.

– Suprasegmentals

A four-way pitch distinction in word tone functions. The following phonemic signs precede a word form:

ˊ: high level [55/44]ˊ: rising [24/35]ˋ: falling [53/31]ˋˊ: rising-falling [132]

For monosyllabic words, the tonal contrast is only two-way (high and low). No difference between A and B, however the tendency of tonal appearance is different.

**B. *Lhagang, the place loved by the Bodhisattva: Lhagang-B text and its English translation***<sup>39</sup>

1. / ˊnə ma ˋˊna ˊna-la ˋˊdza ˊza ˋkō dzo ˊpo-la ˊja la ˋˊde tʃ ˋˊkaʔ-la/  
[A long time ago, when Princess Wencheng was invited to Tibet,]
2. / ˋtʰɔ ˋˊdza po-gə ˋkʰo-la ˊtso wo ˊtciʔ ˋzɪ-zə-reʔ/  
[Emperor of Tang (Taizong) gave her a Jowo statue.]
3. / ˊte ˊtso wo-tə-na ˋˊdza ˊza ˋkō dzo-gə ˊla sʰa ˊja la ˋkʰu ˋˊdo-ˊgo ˋˊsã-zə-reʔ-sə reʔ/  
[This Jowo, Princess Wencheng intended to take it to Lhasa]
4. / ˊte ˊla ˊgo ˋˊtseʔ ˋˊkaʔ-la/  
[Then, when she arrived at Lhagang,]
5. / ˊtso wo-gə ˋkʰa tʃaʔ-zə-reʔ-sə reʔ/  
[Jowo opened the mouth and spoke:]
6. / ˋsʰa tɕʰa ˋˊtci po ˊtʃaʔ mo ˊtciʔ ˊreʔ/  
[This is a really happy and beautiful place,]
7. / ˋkʰo ˊta ˊja la ˊmə-ˋˊdo ˋze:-zə-reʔ-sə reʔ/  
[I will not go upwards]
8. / ˊte ˋˊdza ˊza ˋkō dzo-gə ˊze:-na/  
[then, Princess Wencheng said (in such a way [from line 10]):]
9. / ˋtɕʰoʔ ˊja la ˋˊdo-ˊgo-reʔ ˊmə tsʰe/  
[Not only you must go upwards,]
10. / ˊla sʰa ˊja la ˋkʰu ˋˊdo-ˊgo-reʔ ˊtə ˊda ˋze:-zə-reʔ-sə reʔ/  
[But also I must take you to Lhasa]
11. / ˊte ˊtso wo-gə ˊze:-na/  
[Then, Jowo said:]
12. / ˋkʰo-da ˋˊda ˊda ˊtciʔ ˊte ˊla ˊgo ˋˊdzɔ-nə ˋˊzaʔ-roʔ-fio/  
[Please make the same one as me and put it in Lhagang.]
13. / ˊte ˋkʰo ˊja la ˋˊdo-li: ˊze: ˋˊkaʔ-la/  
[Then I will go.]

<sup>39</sup> The original text of this story with a grammatical analysis as well as a translation is provided in different ways and for various perspectives in Suzuki and Sonam Wangmo (2015a) [French version] and Suzuki et al. (2015a) [Japanese version], and the Chinese and Tibetan translation of the last work (Suzuki et al. 2015b).



14. /'te ʰdza ʱza kō dzo-gə ʔa na ʔa sʰa-gə ʔəo wo ʔji zǐ ʔno ru-da ʔda ʔda ʔtɕiʔ ʰdʒɔ̃-nə ta/  
 [(Because he said that [from line 13]), Princess Wencheng made here the same one as Jowo Yibzhin Norbu, at present in Lhasa,]
15. /ʔa na ʔa ʱgɔ ʔtɕu xʰɔ̃-nə ʰzaʔ-ʔə-reʔ/  
 [she put it here, in the Jokhang of Lhagang, where it still exists.]
16. /'te ʔa ʱgɔ ʰtseʔ ʰkaʔ-la-tə ʔəo wo-gə ʔkʰa ʔaʔ-ji ʰdʒu ʱtsʰɛ:tə ʰtʰɔ̃-la-nə/  
 [So, considering the reason that Jowo spoke when he arrived at Lhagang,]
17. /'te ʔa ʱga ʰze:-nə-tə ʔa ʰga-we: ʔsʰa tɕʰa ʔji-na/  
 [(we can see that) the name Lhagang is the place which the Bodhisattva loves,]
18. /ʔa ʱga ʔze: ʔmǐ ʰtaʔ-zə-reʔ/  
 [so one named it Lhaga (*Lha-dga*)]
19. /ʔa ʱgɔ ʔma ʰtsa ʔmǐ-tə ʔa ʱga ʰze:-reʔ/  
 [The name of Lhagang was principally Lhaga.]
20. /'te ʔtʰ tsʰoʔ ʔmā bo ʔpʰa rə ʰgɛ:tʰa ʰkaʔ-la/  
 [Then, after many years passed]
21. /'te ʔa ʱgɔ ʰze:-nə ʔpʰa rə ʱdʒu ʱdoʔ ʰtʰə-zə-reʔ ʔmə tsʰeʔ ʔma ʔə ʔa ʱga ʰze:-reʔ/  
 [it changed into Lhagang, but originally it was called Lhaga.]
22. /ʔa ʰga-ji ʔsʰa tɕʰa ʰjiʔ-kə ʰdʒu ʱtsʰɛ:tə ʰji-tɕɛ-tə ʔte ʔa ʱga ʔze:-reʔ-ta nə/  
 [Because of this reason, that is the meaning ‘the place loved by the Bodhisattva, it was called Lhaga,]
23. /kə tsa pʰa ʔa ʱgɔ ʰze:-nə ʔmǐ ʰdʒu-zə-reʔ/  
 [afterwards it changed into Lhagang.]

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