

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

By Khashem Gyal

རིགས་དང་སྐད་དག་འགྱུར་ནས་ནི།  
རང་གི་སློག་ཁྱད་དེ་བཞིན་འཕོར།

*When no one listens, no one tells, and when no one tells, no one learns;  
and thus when the elders die, so do the traditions and language.*

This old Tibetan proverb sadly captures the current situation of Tibetan oral traditions and language. Each year sees the passing of precious aged people, and there is a decline in the number of children who speak Tibetan and understand their culture.

Tibetan civilization is characterized by a very strong oral and popular culture, combined with a sophisticated intellectual, religious, and philosophical literary production. Tibetan writing was created in the mid-7th century and is one of Asia's ancient scripts. The loss of ability to speak and read one's language would be a great disaster for Tibetans. Losing one's language is irretrievable and a huge threat to a culture. Once a language is lost, culture will also be jeopardized because the culture is richly embodied within its language.

With the development of modern society in Tibet, our lives have changed dramatically. We have witnessed shifts in the traditional social system, the transmission of culture, and the use of Tibetan language. In many Tibetan regions, government leaders think it is shameful to speak Tibetan during official meetings and in public places. Most schools use Chinese to teach while Tibetan is only used in Tibetan language class. Outside their home, people are often forced to speak Chinese because most businessmen are Chinese. Tibetans cannot even buy simple things from shops without using Chinese.

I first went to Hualong in 2009 as a volunteer teacher in the Local Education Aid Group from the Tibetan Studies College of Qinghai Nationalities University (LEAG). In my first class, I started teaching a Tibetan subject, and realized that three quarters of the students were unable to understand Tibetan at all. The other teachers and I had collected Tibetan folklore, riddles, songs, and dance to teach to the students. They were interested, but much of the time we had to explain in Chinese.

We wanted to have a good relationship with the community, so we decided to visit each family after class. We spoke with them about the language situation and made them aware of the serious consequences of losing a language. A number of the older people we talked to cried when we addressed them in Tibetan. Over the years, fewer people were able to understand them, and they were very excited about our effort to revive language and culture. This experience was deeply meaningful to me. I was so moved by the spirit of community in Hualong and inspired by my fellow teachers that I decided to make a film about the situation.

Tibetan language will soon become endangered in Hualong unless we do something for its preservation. We hope our film will create awareness of the problem of language loss among Tibetans, and also send a strong message to other ethnic minorities in China to preserve their language and strengthen local traditions and values. We also hope that the project itself can serve as a model for cultural preservation and be valuable to others who might want to follow our example.

China as a whole is transforming drastically. My hometown is facing unavoidable and unprecedented changes, which concern me a lot. I have been thinking about how to tell the stories of these changes. What way can I use? What form should it take? I hope I can help my people understand our home, and the outside world understand Tibet with empathy and rationality. To achieve this, I am searching for such a unity of reality and art.