

## FILMMAKER: GU RU 'PHRINS LAS

*Please introduce yourself.*

I am Gu ru 'phrin las, born in 1993 in Smin thang Township, Gjig sgril County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. My family members are herders.



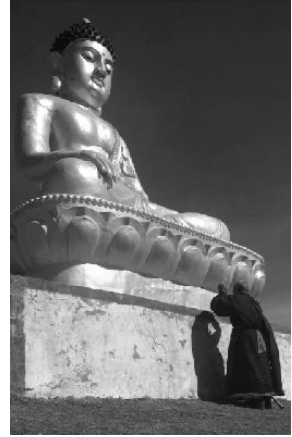
My paternal grandmother (Ngang rus, 1923-2008) raised me. My family had neither a radio nor television, so Grandmother's folktales and stories about her childhood were the main form of entertainment for me. When I was six years old, Father began to teach me basic Tibetan and mathematics. I started school when I was eight years old. I later studied at Mgo log High School in Rta bo (Dawu), at Northwest Nationalities University in Lan gru (Lanzhou), and in Zhi an (Xi'an).

My dream is to become a film director.

*What films have you made?*

In 2016, I made a short film, *Painful Transformation* (20'28") with an iPhone 6. The plot is based on the real life of a herder who is now in her sixties. I will call her Lha mo. She now lives for most of the year at a local monastery. I know her well and spent some time with her. This film is the outcome.

Lha mo experienced three great events in her life. Consequently, I chose three times - morning, noon, and evening - to illustrate this film: (1) She first lived with her two sons. Her youngest son was brave, good-looking, strong, and a very good fighter. Many of his peers were jealous. He was murdered during a gambling session. (2) This murder was followed by Lha mo's youngest son - a primary school headmaster - committing suicide. This is the most painful thing that has ever happened to Lha mo. She was gripped by despair after these two tragic events and, to make things worse, cruel rumors swirled about her and her family. The fires of hate burned in her heart. (3) Time passed. Lha mo thought about life and no longer hated those responsible for the death of her sons. She wanted a peaceful, simple life.



The beginning shot features Lha mo worshipping a deity image, carving a *ma Ni* stone, and a pigeon, suggesting that inner peace is possible with a disciplined mind, cultivation of feelings of compassion, and entirely relinquishing anger. Achieving this will allow you to move, in the same way a pigeon flies, to a peaceful place.

Lha mo first comes into the house using a walking stick. The act of entering the room is an invitation for us to share her inner world, a realm that has gained much value over the years. Leaving the door open suggests that she can confront whatever conflicts and problems that arise. She sits down.



Her inner world is as peaceful as her external life. Desire to stand up and be fully occupied in mundane activity is something she no longer feels. We see very little around her, only a metal bucket of fuel, a plastic bottle of water for making tea, and a box of *rtsam pa*. She makes a fire and cooks for herself. She has no companions. She is lonely, but we also realize that she can face loneliness.

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Lha mo sits in the center of a shape created by three doors and the stove. She faces the fire, indicative of the pain in her earlier life and the flames of hate that she lit in retaliation. She has *rtsam pa* with tea and butter for breakfast as do many herders, reminding us that her life with her two sons at one time was similar to that of other herders.

Lunch bustles with noise, reminding us how dramatic the middle period of her life was. She has wild yams for lunch, which herdsmen often give guests because it is considered the best food. She serves herself this food for she has no visitors after the miserable death of her two sons. The fire burns strongly in the stove, meaning that, at that time, she fed the fires of hate she felt for her enemies suggesting that she cared only for herself, totally absorbed in and by her own life.

The shots at lunch are narrower than breakfast and supper and, at times, the camera moves, evoking an uncertainty and a desire for revenge. The door to the adjoining room is open, hinting that those she considered her enemies disturbed her inner world.

Supper is a quiet time for a meal of *rtsam pa*. Her views are more enlightened and she has fewer desires as she leads a simple, tranquil life. She sits in the center of her world, caring little about the outside world. Her focus is on her interior world. The open doors intimate that she is unafraid of whatever may present itself. She sits very peacefully by the stove that no longer burns energetically.

I am critical of impulses that create conflict between herders and destroy their strong sense of unity. I encourage us all to control our minds and feel compassion as does Lha mo. If we live such a life, rather than only talking about such a life, conflict will be replaced by the peace that we all ultimately seek.

I also shot and edited an additional twenty short documentaries in 2016 that seek to make a visual record of a part of my home place's traditional cultures. For instance, how to pack a yak, how to saddle a horse, teaching children how to play traditional games, and so on. Sustaining traditional culture is difficult. What I can do is record and preserve a record of part of it and share it with others. I also

made a slideshow in 2016 that provides insight into my home place's culture, landscape, livestock, people, grassland, and wild flowers. It also provides images of the local township center and ongoing changes there.



*What films are you planning?*

I want my next film to focus on generational poverty with particular attention to an impoverished family in my community. All the members of that family have very little formal education. The family head is a monk whose mother is extremely devoted to *bla ma*. The way the family lives is determined by traditional Tibetan culture, Buddhist ideas, and suggestions from *bla ma*. This family system applies to many local families.

While much "intellectual" discussion swirls about the Tibetan economy and religious belief, these deliberations have little relevance to herders who live in isolated areas.

It is of great value to better understand the lives of real people and understand their life challenges from their own perspective, e.g., why do members of the focus family have very little to eat and rarely eat meat unless neighbors give it to them? This is despite owning about eighty yaks and twenty horses. Why does this family have a history of such poverty that they are unable to pay for higher education opportunities for their children?

I also want to make short films focusing on how to make leather shoes, process sheep skin, and make black yak-hair tents, including the terms locals use to refer to each part of the tent. There are fewer and fewer yak hair tents and I fear my children may never see a genuine black yak-hair tent again. I also want to film the daily lives of different people and follow them in their daily activities.

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*What explains your interest in film?*

One day when I was about eight or nine years old, I was playing with my siblings outside my home when my right ear began to feel warm and I could twitch it. I was astonished! Part of my astonishment came from having watched an action film the day before in a restaurant in the local township town. This film featured an actor whose ear would warn him if his enemies were near, giving him time to prepare. I decided that I could also be an actor and ran to my home and told my parents about my ear. They were shocked when I showed them how my ear could twitch. Several days later, however, I was disappointed when I found I could no longer twitch my right ear. Time passed and I felt my left ear become warm and then I could twitch my left ear.

When I was in senior middle school, I liked to read short stories. A favorite from that time was "Sdom pa srung ba" by Co ne yum tshe ring. After I graduated, I watched a lot of feature films and documentaries that exposed me to a wider world and enriched my life. I gradually realized that films about the culture and lives of the people in my home area could interest and bring happiness to others.

## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

co ne yum tshe ring ཅོ་ནེ་ཡུམ་ཚེ་རིང་།  
 Dawu 大武  
 gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།  
 gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།  
 Guolou 果洛  
 lan gru ལན་གུ།  
 Lanzhou 兰州  
 lha mo ལྷ་མོ།  
 ma Ni མ་ཎི།  
 mgo log མགོ་ལོག།  
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།  
 ngang rus ངང་རུས།  
 Qinghai 青海  
 rta bo རྟ་བོ།  
 rtsam pa རྩམ་པ།  
 sdom pa srung ba སྡོམ་པ་སྲུང་བ།  
 smin thang སླིན་ཐང།  
 Xi'an 西安  
 zhi an ཞི་ཨན།