

[11 Aug \(Online talk\) Tibetan typewriters: from promotional stunt to handy educational tool | Jo De Baerdemaeker](#)

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Join us on 11 August 2021 for the next talk in our online lecture series [Typewriters around the world: machines, practices, cultures](#), with Jo De Baerdemaeker.

18:00 BST | 13:00 EDT | 10:00 PDT | 22:30 IST

(Time-zone conflicts? No problem! Links to recordings will be sent to registered participants unable to attend on the day.)

Please register here to attend: <https://www.contextualternate.com/event02>

Tibetan typewriters: from promotional stunt to handy educational tool

Jo De Baerdemaeker

In this talk Jo will examine the history of three different kinds of Tibetan typewriters, explore the design styles of their typefaces, and discuss the intricacies of typesetting text on these machines.

Although the earliest typewriter for the Tibetan script (a Tibetan version of the VariTyper) was hardly ever used, its legacy has meant that we are still more or less using its input system for keying-in Tibetan text on present-day computer keyboards, with contemporary digital fonts.

The second Tibetan typewriter was merely a personal academic tool of a University professor at his office in Hamburg (Germany), and it was the desktop device invented by Tibetan scholar Nagwang Thondup Narkyid in Dharamsala (McLeod Ganj, India) that became instrumental for typesetting educational works used in the teaching of the Tibetan language and script to beginners and higher-level students.

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While in theory the development of typewriters made Tibetan typesetting available to the public, its use was not widespread. By the beginning of the 1990s most publishing houses working with Tibetan texts had shifted to using the first digital Tibetan typefaces on personal computers as the standard for typesetting their publications, and the Tibetan typewriter soon became redundant. However, the quest for a mechanical device to typeset Tibetan before the digital age offers insights into several interesting aspects of the history of design, technology, and typographic experimentation.

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Jo De Baerdemaeker is an independent Belgian typeface designer and researcher. He holds an MA in Typeface Design as well as a PhD from the University of Reading. He is the author of the book 'Tibetan typeforms: an historical and visual analysis of Tibetan typefaces' (2020). He currently teaches at LUCA School of Arts (campus Sint-Lucas Gent), is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Royal Asiatic Society (London), and is a guest professor at various international art programmes and universities. In 2012 he founded Studio Type in Antwerp (Belgium), a design studio collaborating with international design agencies and type foundries. In 2020 Jo was elected Vice-President of ATypI (Association Typographique Internationale).

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Event host and organiser: Vaibhav Singh

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