

# Letter from the Editors

Andrew Quintman & Kurtis R. Schaeffer

As we write this letter, preparations are underway for welcoming the Tibetan year of the water-hare, still several weeks away. But clearly, we have already entered the year of Tibetan women writers. Over the past months, we've seen a run of major international conferences, workshops, and symposia dedicated to writing by and about Tibetan women. This is likewise reflected by a spate of Tibetan-language publications, including major collections of Tibetan women's writing from the past as well as contemporary prose and poetry. This has led to what Lama Jabb, in the inaugural issue of *JTL*, referred to as “a refreshing yet long-overdue proliferation of Tibetan women's literary voices,” both present and past.

In the space of less than one year there have been four workshops, conferences, and symposia on Tibetan women's writing and Tibetan women writers. From April 8–10, 2022, the University of Virginia convened the “Tibetan Women Writing Symposium: A Celebration of Tibetan Women's Literature” (Tashi Dekyid Monet's report appeared in Volume 1.1 of *JTL*). In the same month, on April 21, the University of Colorado hosted “Emerging Voices: Tibetan Women Writers,” a workshop on contemporary Tibetan poetry and short fiction by Tibetan women writers from India and China (workshop organizer Holly Gayley collaborates with Somtso Bhum on a contribution in the present issue). In the Fall of 2022, Northwestern University hosted “Celebrating Buddhist Women's Voices in the Tibetan Tradition,” a workshop centered on translating Tibetan women's writing (conference organizer Sarah Jacoby contributes an essay of criticism in the present issue, where she says more about the workshop at Northwestern). And in January of 2023, INALCO in Paris hosted the conference “Charting the Uncharted World of Tibetan Women Writers Today,” organized by Françoise Robin, which aimed to continue the conversation about and by Tibetan women writers. These international events mark a watershed moment in the history of Tibetan women's writing, and scholarship on and appreciation of Tibetan women's voices, the currents of which will help to shape the contours of Tibetan literary studies for decades to come.

These conferences and workshops follow upon the most important decade in the history of Tibetan literature for the publication of Tibetan writing by and about Tibetan women, for the 2010s saw the publishing of three major collections. The first and the last were published by Larung Ārya Tārē Book Series Editorial Association (Larung Ārya Tārē Petsok Tsomdrik Khang ལཱུ་རྩུང་འཱུ་ཏཱེ་འི་དཔེ་ཚོགས་ཚུམ་སྒྲིག་ཁང་།) at Larung Gar Monastery in the Serta region of eastern Tibet in

Sichuan, China. In 2011 they published *Lives of Great Women of India and Tibet* (འཕགས་པོ་དྲི་རྒྱུས་ཆེན་མ་དག་གི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་བ་པར་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ཐོའི་ཐོང་བ།) (BDRC W1KG16649), a 16-volume collection of biography, autobiography, and other narrative literature by and about women. Several years later, editor Tsering Tashi compiled a 15-volume collection entitled *Collected Texts of Tibetan Women* (གངས་ཅན་རྒྱུས་མའི་དཔེ་ཚོགས།) (BDRC WAS3CN8396). The contents of these two collections overlap in places, though the 2011 publication incorporates many works about Indian women while the 2015 publication includes the collected works of the famous Sera Khandro. Both of these anthologies are now, it could be said, superseded by the fifty-three-volume collection, also produced through the hard work of the Larung Ārya Tārē Book Series Editorial Association, *The Dākinīs' Great Dharma Treasury* (མཁའ་འགྲོའི་ཆོས་མཛོད་ཆེན་མོ།) (BDRC WA3CN2459). This collection formed a centerpiece of Northwestern University's recent translation workshop. Together, these three multi-volume collections constitute a major step in our understanding and appreciation of Tibetan women's writing throughout the centuries. They should also serve as a call for current and future students of classical Tibetan literature to expand the search for writing by and about women from Tibet's long literary past.

The positions and voices of Tibetan women writers have likewise become an increasingly important focus for academic research, as witnessed, for instance, in recent publications by North American scholars including Sarah Jacoby's *Love and Liberation* (Columbia University Press, 2015), Suzanne Bessenger's *Echoes of Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press, 2016), Holly Gayley's *Inseparable Across Lifetimes* (Snow Lion, 2019) and *Love Letters from Golok* (Columbia University Press, 2016), Alison Melnick Dyer's *The Tibetan Nun Mingyur Peldrön* (University of Washington Press, 2022), and Elisabeth Benard's *The Sakya Jetsunmas* (Snow Lion Press, 2022), which retrieves the lives of a lineage of powerful women leaders whose stories were not typically set down in print. Likewise, Tibetan women themselves remain active in publishing their work in China and Tibet, with prominent examples including Palmo (དཔལ་མོ།), whose poem "I Am Who I Am" (ང་ནི་ང་ཡིན།) was published in Volume 1.1 of *JTL*, and Tsedrön Kyi (ཚེ་རྫོན་རྒྱུད།), whose novella "Lonely Soul" (ཁིང་རྒྱུང་གི་རྣམ་ཤེས།) is excerpted in English translation in the current issue. We are also witnessing an outburst of publications by Tibetan women living in exile communities in Asia, Europe, and North America, writing in Tibetan, Chinese, and English, including Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, a prominent Anglophone Tibetan author interviewed in this issue. There are so many women writers working today that it is impossible to note them all here. We hope their work highlighted in the first two issues of the journal will encourage readers to explore the distinctive features in Tibetan women's writing and—more importantly perhaps—to recognize that such writing is integral to any definition of Tibetan literature writ large.

In the current issue of *JTL*, we present three essays under the rubric of Research. In his essay "Praise, Shame, Patronage, and Genre-Blurring: Revisiting Two Vajra Songs of Lama Zhang Tsalpa," Carl Yamamoto examines the dynamics, aesthetic dimensions, and textual economies

of two poetic examples from Lama Zhang's oeuvre. Holly Gayley and Somtso Bhum introduce and contextualize the narrative entitled "Lonely Soul" by the Tibetan woman writer Tse-drön Kyi (translated by Somtso Bhum later in this issue). Finally, editors Andrew Quintman and Kurtis R. Schaeffer offer brief "Notes on the 'Song of Lhasa Memories'" as an introduction to Epstein and Nornang's translation in the next section.

This issue's section on Translation includes several different genres of Tibetan writing. In "The Fourth Karmapa Rolpé Dorjé, A Poet Out of Place," Ruth Gamble translates several songs (མགུར་ལྷན་པོ་ལྷན་པོ་ལྷན་པོ་) composed by the Fourth Karmapa Rolpai Dorjé (1340–1383), setting them within the context of his life, career, and broader literary output. Lawrence Epstein and Geshe N. L. Nornang translate Shelkar Lingpa's acclaimed early-twentieth-century poetic reflection "A Song of Lhasa Memories." In "The Yellow Book of Dzemé Rinpoché," Christopher Bell introduces and translates the well-known controversial record of the protective deity Dorjé Shukden composed in 1970. Finally, Somtso Bhum translates the first two chapters of Tse-drön Kyi's fictional tale "Lonely Soul," which narrates the story of a Tibetan nun, highlighting the mundane, and deeply human, aspects of a renunciant's life.

Sarah Jacoby contributes a work under the rubric Criticism with her "Women and Wit in Tibetan Literature," a survey of Tibetan women's writing with a particular focus on the early-twentieth-century master Sera Khandro Dewai Dorjé (1892–1940). This issue also includes the edited transcript of an interview with the prolific Anglophone Tibetan poet, essayist, and literature professor Tsering Wangmo Dhompa. Joshua Brallier reports on the workshop "Celebrating Buddhist Women's Voices in the Tibetan Tradition" held at Northwestern University in October 2022. Finally, artist Sonam Dolma Brauen, whose painting appears on the cover, contributes an artist statement about her work.

We wish *JTL*'s readers a happy and healthy water-hare year, and good reading for another year of Tibetan women writers.

Andy & Kurtis

