

Letter from the Editors

Andrew Quintman & Kurtis R. Schaeffer

With the changing of the seasons, and a solar eclipse visible from North America, comes the latest issue of *JTL*, which includes a diverse array of research articles, translations, and critical reflections on several different forms of Tibetan literary expression.

Leonard van der Kuijp and Chen Yilan detail two key episodes in the long history of Daṇḍin's (7th c.) *Kāvyaḍarśa*, the *Mirror of Poetics*, in Tibet. They chronicle the efforts of two famous scholars, Shalu Lotsāwa Chökyong Sangpo (zhwa lu lo tsā ba chos skyong bzang po, 1441–1528) and Situ Pañchen Chökyi Jungné (si tu pañ chen chos kyi 'byung gnas, 1699–1774), working two centuries apart, to produce bilingual Tibetan-Sanskrit editions of the fundamental treatise on poetics in Tibet. Van der Kuijp and Chen walk the reader through the careful studies of Sanskrit grammar, lexicography, metrics, and poetics that each scholar undertook in service of this work. The impact of their scholarship is perhaps best known today indirectly through the influence that Situ's multi-lingual scholarship in poetics had upon his student, the Fourth Khamtrul Tenzin Chökyi Nyima (khams sprul IV bstan 'dzin chos kyi nyi ma, 1730–1779), who completed his massive and justly famous commentary on the *Kāvyaḍarśa* in late 1770. In van der Kuijp's words, "there can be no doubt that it is the most accomplished study of the text to appear anywhere, whether in the Indian subcontinent or in the Tibetan area."

Daniel Wojahn turns his attention to the important performance traditions of Tibetan opera known as *Aché Lhamo* (*a lce lha mo*). Wojahn's essay "Inherited Stories, Timeless Wisdom: Intertextuality and Proverbs in the *Aché Lhamo Namthar*" focuses not on the libretti or performance manuals associated with the tradition but the literary versions known as *namthar* or biographies, which include the stories of numerous well-known characters such as Drowa Sangmo ('gro ba bzang mo), Nangsa Öbum (snang sa 'od 'bum), and Drimé Kunden (dri med kun ldan). This study clearly illustrates the ways in which these materials draw on Indian and Tibetan literary motifs "to reaffirm Buddhist norms and values" while also preserving uniquely Tibetan forms of vernacular expression such as proverbs to communicate highly localized social and cultural practices. The essay also sheds light on the blurred boundaries between oral and literary forms of literature.

Namgyal Tsetan's article, "Tibetan Translation Key: Imperial Decrees of the *Two Volume Lexicon*" makes use of recently available manuscripts to highlight the theory and methods of translation under imperial sponsorship in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. The *Two Volume*

Lexicon, a survey of the principles of translation and a collection of concrete translation examples drawn from scripture, provides a glimpse into the intensively productive teams of translators who produced Tibet's initial collections of South Asian Buddhist canonical literature. "The principle for translating the holy *dharma* is not to violate the meaning and to express Tibetan fluently." Namgyal Tsetan surveys some of the myriad ways that translators worked to enact this principle during the imperial period and beyond, and thereby provides us with a useful sense of the continuities and disjunctions in translation practice from the ninth through the twelfth centuries.

Featured in the translations section are four excerpts from Pema Bhum's new Tibetan-language novel *Jalam Tramo* (*'ja' lam khra mo*), or *The Rainbow Path of Many Hues*, rendered into English and introduced by Luran Hartley. The novel is a loosely self-reflective account that transports the reader, mirroring the author's own journey, from Rebkong in Amdo, to Lhasa, and eventually south into India. Unlike Pema Bhum's earlier, shorter-form, and more explicitly autobiographical writing, over some five-hundred pages of prose *Jalam Tramo* employs, in Hartley's words, "the verisimilitude of fiction...to recover vivid details and the textures of late 1980s Tibet, which strict historical accounts are inclined to omit." In doing so, the work "reveals the capacity of autofiction... to mediate between individual and collective forms of memory." The craft of storytelling shines in these excerpts, which are filled with the sort of dense narrative details that "bring a good story to life." Indeed, in his recent conversation with *JTL*, the author noted, "I have always thought that if Tibetan language is to survive, we need books, and people need to keep reading in Tibetan language. I wanted to write a novel that people would want to read." A complete transcript of *JTL*'s conversation with Pema Bhum about *Jalam Tramo*, the "heartbeat" of Tibetan poetry, and the status of contemporary literature more broadly appears later in this issue.

Annabella Pitkin's essay, "All the Wealth of Poets," discusses the famous long-form poem of Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen (*khu nu bla ma bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan*, 1895–1977), the *Jewel Lamp: In Praise of Bodhicitta* (*byang chub sems kyi bstod pa rin chen sgron ma*). Every day for one year, Khunu Lama wrote one verse on *bodhicitta*, the awakening mind. The resulting 365-verse work was first published in 1966 in India, and has remained popular ever since. The *Jewel Lamp* evokes the captivating power of the notion of the awakening mind in multiple dimensions throughout its verses. And, in addition to the poem's central theme, Khunu Lama also highlights the centrality of *kāvya* in Tibetan writing about classic themes. *Kāvya* holds the capacity to express the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual depth of fundamental Buddhist ideas and practices, bringing ideas such as *bodhicitta* to life on the page through deft use of imagery, suggestion, word-play and, most broadly, a delight in the power of poetic language. The *Jewel Lamp*, as Pitkin shows us, is a beautiful example of the synthesis of philosophy, ethics, and literary aesthetics in Tibetan Buddhist literature.

What is the place of the Tibetan Buddhist canon? What is the point of translating it? And what does the process of translation tell us about the rationale for undertaking such a project?

These pointed questions open John Canti's reflective essay "Eighty-Four Thousand Reasons to Translate the Canon." Canti helpfully summarizes the work of the century-long project known as 84,000: Translating the Words of the Buddha through a more manageable list of eleven broad rubrics: the canon as representing the Dharma, as vehicle of Buddhist culture, as structured and interconnected collection, as fruit of a project significant in medieval world history, as literary corpus, as textual history, as common ground, as undifferentiated primary source, as record of the Buddha's life and teachings, as basis of scriptural authority, and as transformative power of the Buddha's speech. These reflections highlight the multivocality of Tibetan canonical materials (here referring primarily to the Kangyur), and the vital role this collection plays not only in the transmission of the Dharma to the English-reading world, but also in affording a deeper understanding of Tibetan literary history, Tibetan cultural practices, and Tibetan religiosity writ large.

The issue includes a transcript of *JTL*'s conversation with author, editor, publisher, and scholar Pema Bhum, who reflects on his early encounters with Tibetan literature, his first attempts at writing verse, his process for writing and editing long-form fiction, and what he's currently reading. The issue concludes with an artist's statement, also by Pema Bhum, whose calligraphic illustration of a "Nga Maṇḍala" appears on the cover. And of course, Gen Pema's inscription of the *Journal's* Tibetan title *Bod kyi rtsom rig dus deb* has appeared on every cover since the inaugural issue.

Finally, we are sad to announce that this will be our Managing Editor Tenzin Dickie's last issue at *JTL*. She is a brilliant and accomplished author and editor in her own right. But Dickie-la has also been the *Journal's* nerve center since its inception as a somewhat outlandish idea nearly four years ago. Her input and influence can be witnessed everywhere, from the design of the logo and look of the website to the range of content and copyediting of the individual essays within. We spent countless hours together, debating seemingly endless lists of questions that arise when launching a new publishing venue, from grand issues of the *Journal's* scope (spanning research, translation, and criticism) to minutiae of the style sheet for authors. We are fortunate to have had her as a collaborator these past years and the *Journal* would be greatly impoverished without her keen eye and deft editorial touch. Thank you Dickie-la, for your formative and lasting contributions to the *Journal of Tibetan Literature*, and for your unwavering collegiality. We wish you all the best and many *tashi deleks* for what comes next.

At the same time, we are thrilled that Riga Shakya will be joining *JTL* as Managing Editor beginning with issue 3.2 (fall 2024). Riga-la is an exceptional scholar of Tibetan literature and history and, as our readers are no doubt aware, is the founder of the groundbreaking Tibetan literary journal *Waxing Moon*, published in conjunction with Columbia University. During this period of transition, all of us are already hard at work on the next issue. Thanks for reading.

Andy & Kurtis

