

Letter from the Editors

Andrew Quintman & Kurtis R. Schaeffer

We are delighted to present the fall 2024 issue (3.2) of *The Journal of Tibetan Literature*, our fifth collection of contributions under the rubrics of research, translation, and criticism. While the topics represented in this issue are wide ranging, the social life of Tibetan literature features in each piece. Whether we look to sixteenth-century travel narratives, seventeenth-century philosophical textbooks, or twenty-first century secular prose and poetry, we find that literature—its content, style, authorship, and readership—is shaped by the social, economic, and political exigencies of its day.

The issue begins with three research essays. In “Strengths and Weaknesses of the Four Traditions of Tibetan Buddhism: A Satirical Counsel by Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso (1846–1912),” Dr. Karma Phuntsho offers a translation that reveals Tibetan Buddhism at its whitest. In this short piece, the famous Mipham Gyatso combines satire and seriousness in a roast of the four major Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Along the way, he notes their distinctive characters, their strengths, and, at times, their failings. “The Nyingmapa do their chanting through their noses,” Mipham remarks, “The Sakyapa utter through their lips / The Gendenpa stress the guttural tone of the throat / The Kagyüpa squeeze their throats and chant.” And while Mipham is quick to use humor to make a point, the overall tone of this brief advice is one of playful seriousness; here we find Mipham playing the role of social critic, much as did Drukpa Kuenley centuries before.

Ian Sinclair’s essay “The Indian Ocean Itinerary of Buddhaguptanātha’s *Namthar*” examines the extraordinary life and travels of the sixteenth-century Indian tantric master Buddhaguptanātha as recorded by his Tibetan disciple Tāranātha Kunga Nyingpo (1575–1634). Among the most fascinating features of this narrative are accounts of the master’s travels through Southeast Asia, across the Indian ocean and Arabian sea to the east coast of Africa. Sinclair offers new evidence for identifying toponyms of islands throughout this route, and thereby sheds new light on Tibetan travel writing that extends far beyond the Tibetan, Himalayan, and Indian worlds.

In “History of Monastic Textbooks at Gomang Monastic College II: From the Seventeenth-Century C.E. to Eighteenth-Century C.E.” Jongbok Yi presents the monastic textbooks of Jamyang Shepa (’jam dbyangs bzhad pa, 1648–1721/22) at Gomang Monastic College in Drepung Monastery, and sketches the history of their usage from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century. Yi highlights moments in which existing textbooks were dropped in favor of new compositions, and

with this example illustrates tradition in motion. Beyond the simple adoption of new textbooks, Yi tells the story of the shifting fate of curricular compositions throughout the tumultuous history of Amdo during the Qing Dynasty. Political change, economic instability, and war all played a role in the construction and reconstruction of philosophical learning materials in Gelukpa colleges. Yi's analysis of extant printed editions of Jamyang Shepa's work demonstrates how generations of scholars worked to maintain persistent pedagogical resources in the face of change all around them. Finally, Yi develops the interesting notion of "hypertext" to help better describe Tibetan writers' use of borrowing from existing writings to fashion texts for their particular contexts.

Under the heading of translation, we present Lucia Galli's English rendering of Lhashamgyal's "Drolma's Dream" (*sgrol ma'i mi lam*), a short story originally published in the 2010 collection titled *Sunlight on the Road* (*lam gyi nyi 'od*). Widely recognized as a leading voice of the contemporary Tibetan literary world, Lhashamgyal here narrates an emotionally arresting tale of the eponymous character Drolma, as she passes through stages of love and loss. As Galli notes, Lhashamgyal's writing is "a unique blend of intimism and magical realism, with forays into metaphysical symbolism." The present work introduces multiple narrative voices and these shifting perspectives "create a continuum between estrangement and intimacy."

In his critical essay "A Glimpse into the World of Buddhist Publishing: Shambhala Publications," Nikko Odiseos, President of Shambhala Publications, reflects on the role of a key publishing house in the production and dissemination of Buddhist and Tibetan literature to English reading audiences around the world. Odiseos surveys the landscape of Tibetan Buddhist publishing in the United States and highlights the formative contributions Shambhala has made in the categories of history and biography, canonical and philosophical literature, and the literary arts more broadly. He discusses the challenges publishing houses like Shambhala face in the post-pandemic landscape, and looks ahead to a future in which publishers "are not passive reflectors of what is happening in the culture but can in fact drive and influence the conversation and create... the market."

In this issue's interview we talk with author, translator, and publisher Bhuchung D. Sonam about his life in literature and his work in Dharamsala, where he is at the center of contemporary Tibetan writing and publishing. Sonam describes his early memories of Tibetan literature in Tibet: "I grew up in a very small village in Tibet where we had no access to books or other forms of entertainment. Our primary form of entertainment was through Ling Gesar Stories." And, crucially, he tells us why he has dedicated so much energy over the last several decades to facilitating spaces—in print, online, and in person—where Tibetans can use literary writing to explore and express their experience, particularly in twenty-first century India: "Ordinary Tibetan experience—how I, for example, as an ordinary refugee feel each day of my life—is kind of subsumed in a larger set of things which do not reflect me and my worldview. That's the reason why we started TibetWrites 20 years ago."

The issue concludes with an artist statement by Nyema Droma, whose photography adorns this issue's cover. Nyema Droma's rich, black-and-white photograph suggests the tensions in negotiating spaces between tradition, modernity, state, and statelessness.

Finally, please join us in welcoming Dr. Riga Shakya as Managing Editor of JTTL. This is the first issue produced under his management. We are thankful for the opportunity to work with Riga on this and future issues of the journal.

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