

Editorial Introduction

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Tibetan contemporary literature (བོད་ཀྱི་དེང་རབས་ཚུམ་རིག) not only depicts the complexity of modern relationships – in this volume alone, we see an illicit love affair that ends with the couple finding refuge as mountain meditators, a loving father work day and night to stitch his daughter a chuba for school, and a polyandrous marriage unravel through a silent cell phone – but has become a relational site in itself. Depictions of Tibetan lives, both human and more-than-human, make the Tibetan experience legible to Tibetans themselves, and, increasingly, to readers around the world. These lives, ordinary and extraordinary, dynamic and elusive, have rarely been visible to dominant cultures. For far too long, the Euro-American and Chinese worlds have persisted in seeing Tibetans either as the source of an “exotic” religion or a political dilemma to be solved. We are deeply grateful and excited for the opportunity to curate this anthology of works by Tibetan women writers that we hope enriches such provincial perspectives.

Given that recent critical studies have shown the close relationship between social taxonomizing and political subjugation, one may question the utility and limitations of using the terms “Tibetan” and “women” to organize this anthology. Writers of non-dominant groups of genders or races have often been seen as inferior to mainstream or whitestream writers, with such delimiting labels supporting their continued marginalization. Why then continue to use

the category of “Tibetan women writers”? Although these are valid concerns, we believe that the categories of “Tibetan” and “woman” also have liberatory dimensions and can be used to critically challenge the liberal assumptions that erase other cultures and genders in favor of a “universal” literature that claims to transcend cultural and political categories. The lived contexts of the authors of these pieces are complex and diverse, and in their particularity represent a challenge to any attempt at universalization. Some are writing in Tibetan, some in Chinese, some in English. Many have lived in multiple countries or regions. The stories, essays, and poems offered here provide glimpses into lives of complex individuals inhabiting diverse worlds, from Himalayan retreats to exile schools, from a tailor’s sewing-machine to a mother’s tsampa box, belongings that the authors show are worlds unto themselves, each reality presenting its own problems, logic, and paradox.

And yet, for all these differences, when the authors represented in this anthology gathered at the first symposium of Tibetan women writers held at the University of Virginia in April 2022,¹ the writers celebrated their common aspirations, struggles, and hopes, and affirmed a commitment to bringing forth the voices of Tibetans from all walks of life, especially those who too often pass unheard. Moreover, it became clear that writing itself is a site of struggle and insight, but also of healing and friendship, particularly for writers who have endured displacement, patriarchies, and dispossession. As new friendships were forged and old ones renewed, the Symposium soon became known

1 “གངས་ནང་གླེས་མས་རྩོམ་རིག་ཁྲེང་པ། བོད་མིའི་རྩོམ་རིག་མངའ་རྒྱུ་གཤེད་མུ་ལ་སྟོད་པ།” (The Tibetan Women Writing Symposium: A Celebration of Tibetan Women’s Literature).” April 8-10, 2022. University of Virginia.

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starting to pay greater attention to their own biases in their selections of subjects, and studies of important women throughout Tibetan literary history have increased within the Tibetophone and Anglophone academies. We hope this anthology of pieces selected by the authors at the Celebration is a welcome addition to this burgeoning movement.

Readers can find brief introductions to each piece in Janet Gyatso's thoughtful preface and bios of each author below each piece and translation, including links to purchase their works when possible. Each piece is briefly introduced by its translator, wherein the translator calls attention to especially challenging or interesting dimensions of the piece that might have otherwise escaped the reader's attention, particularly when reading in a different language than the original. These introductions were provided only in English so that the translators could devote their resources to providing bilingual editions of each literary work. The original text is provided atop its translation. We have dispensed with Wylie in favor of Tibetan text where possible—a benefit of Yeshe's digital format—and have deliberately left Tibetan phonetics unstandardized, as many of the authors already have their own preferred phonetic renderings. Moreover, the works gathered here depict Tibetans from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, and so we have left phonetic choices up to each translator, as the same word might be pronounced quite differently across the Plateau.

in and on Tibetan Buddhist Nuns' Terms," *Religions*, vol. 11, no. 10, 2020, pp. 543-562, and Jacoby, Sarah, and Padma'tsho, "Lessons from Buddhist Foremothers: The Editors of the Ārya Tāre Book Series," *Voices from Larung Gar*, edited by Holly Gayley. Boulder, Colorado, Snow Lion, 2021, pp. 219-233. The collection also includes an eight-volume series of scholastic commentaries (འགྲེལ་པ་) penned by Khenmo Yonten, which are possibly the first commentaries published by a woman in Tibetan history. For more on Khenmo Yonten, see Liang, Jue, and Andrew S. Taylor, "Tilling the Fields of Merit: The Institutionalization of Feminine Enlightenment in Tibet's First Khenmo Program," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 27, 2020, pp. 231-262, at 252-253. Chelsea Hall also presented on Khenmo Yonten and her commentaries in a paper, "Khenmo Yönten's Quiet Commentaries: Publishing Female-Authored Buddhist Texts at Serta Larung Gar," at the 2017 American Academy of Religion conference on the panel "Voices from Larung Gar."

A few different motivations inspired the choice to make this edition bilingual: First, there is no such thing as an objective or perfect translation, and we hope that this volume will call attention to the process of translation too often left unacknowledged in hermeneutic encounters. Second, we hope to support the physical presence of the Tibetan language as it has been often absent in Euro-American Tibetan Studies publications, as previous translation efforts have been mostly unidirectional from Tibetan into European languages. Third, we hope that a bilingual edition will broaden the audience of each of the writers anthologized here. Those writing in Tibetan or Chinese have rarely received an Anglophone audience, while those writing in English may have received only a limited Tibetophone audience despite actively theorizing and engaging Tibetan themes and imagery in their works. Finally, the readership of *Yeshe* is cosmopolitan and multilingual, with varying levels of proficiency in the languages contained in this volume. We hope that readers will not simply accept our translations at face value, but actively reflect on the translators' choices: What is gained and lost in each translation?

Although we hope that the materials here read smoothly, or at least are challenging in deliberate ways, a number of obstacles had to be overcome for the Celebration and this volume to manifest, and we wish to thank some of our supporters: The Symposium was initially organized by Jue Liang and Tashi Dekyid Monet, and could not have gotten off the ground without the help of Lama Jabb and Janet Gyatso, who should be credited with its original inspiration and were indispensable in the initial planning and grant-writing. As a global pandemic delayed the Symposium for months and then years, Andrew

Taylor and Erin Burke joined the organizing team. As the on-site organizers, Erin and Tashi shouldered the lion's share of the work, shepherding the Symposium to its celebratory conclusion. We also must thank Dhondup Tashi Rekjong, who, on top of contributing his own translations and knowledge of Tibetan literature as a participant, tirelessly served as interpreter throughout the symposium. The process of securing funds and visas for the writers from Asia to travel during this period of restrictions and isolation was unimaginably complicated, and we wish to thank David Germano, Ariana Maki, Rongwo Lugyal, Eben Yonnetti, and the Tibetan community in Charlottesville for all their help. We are also most grateful to Shelly Bhoil, Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, and the entire Yeshe editorial team for enthusiastically offering their prestigious journal as a venue for these authors' writings. Their guidance has been invaluable.

We would like to encourage readers to support and reciprocate the gifts of creativity and insight that these writers have shared with us. For example, if one of the pieces in this collection speaks to you, please consider buying the author's book or inviting them to speak at your institution. We hope that Lungta or the vitality of Tibetan voices, languages, Land, and imaginations will flourish interdependently with the land and life of the places where we live.