

## Tibet

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**Holly Gayley and Andrew Quintman, eds.**

***Living Treasure: Buddhist and Tibetan Studies in Honor of Janet Gyatso***

Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2023. Xii+518 pages. Hardcover, \$59.95. ISBN 9781614297796.

Janet Gyatso, Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies at Harvard Divinity School, is a scholar who has made significant contributions to Tibetan studies as well as to Buddhist studies in general. Her publications range, among other topics, from gender studies to biographical literature, Tibetan medicine, and philosophical inquiry. This volume contains twenty-nine chapters and a substantial introduction in the form of an intellectual biography of Janet Gyatso by the editors, Holly Gayley and Andrew Quintman, and a bibliography of her major publications. Perhaps the best characterization of her research is that offered by Jacob P. Dalton (255): “Her work has been particularly remarkable for its focus on Tibetans as human beings—not just fonts of Buddhist doctrine, but people negotiating their places in the world . . . consulting regularly with native Tibetan readers.” The same

approach is reflected in many of the contributions in the volume, with the authors often acknowledging the influence of Gyatso as their mentor.

Given the limitations of a review, it is impossible to present every single contribution; the choice of chapters, briefly commented on here, has therefore been guided by a wish to show their overall diversity, in this mirroring Gyatso's own research over more than forty years. The first of the five sections into which the contributions are grouped, "Women, Gender, and Sexuality," consists of six chapters. Donald S. Lopez Jr., in "Sex, Part Two," focusing on Indian Buddhism, discusses elements in the Vinaya containing obscene narratives and sexual fixations side by side with misogynistic works in Buddhist literature. Holly Gayley in "The In/Visibility of Nuns and Yoginīs in Dudjom Lingpa's Songs of Advice" examines "how Tibetan women are rendered both visible and invisible as interlocutors to renowned male religious figures in dialogic literary works" (47). The second of the five sections, "Biography and Autobiography," corresponds to one of Gyatso's main interests, represented by her study, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiography of a Tibetan Visionary* (1998), where she focuses on the visionary experiences and subsequent activities of the Tibetan visionary Jigme Lingpa (1730–1798). This book has inspired Elizabeth Angowski to repeat the word "treasure" in "Auto/Biography for the End of the World: A Treasure Theory of Reading Revealed Life Stories," the reference here being to the Tibetan class of revealed texts, in Tibetan known as *terma*, treasures. The chapter discusses how life-stories that are at the same time *terma* engage with readers, and how "a revealed auto/biography can quickly become much more than a story of a single remarkable life" (141). Matthew T. Kapstein's chapter is remarkable for dealing with a highly unusual topic, namely the personal memoirs of a Tibetan *tulku*, a (re)incarnated lama born in the mid-19th century, who begins to doubt his "tulkuship," ultimately abandoning it.

This section is followed by "The Nyingma Imaginaire," of which two chapters deal directly with Jigme Lingpa, mentioned above, who belonged to the school of the "ancient [tantras]" (Tib. *rnying ma*). This section contains, together with other equally excellent contributions, a substantial chapter by David Germano, "Divine Creation and Pure Lands in Renaissance Tibet." It should be noted that by "renaissance" Germano (and other Tibetologists) refer to the renewed efflorescence of Buddhism in Tibet in the eleventh and following centuries.

The fourth section, "Literature, Art, and Poetry," comprises eight chapters, reflecting the importance of literature and poetry in Janet Gyatso's own work. Among these chapters, I would like to point to that of Sonam Kachru, "What Did Śāntideva Learn from Lovers?," one of the few contributions to the volume dealing entirely with a topic related to Indian Buddhism, the other one being that of Lopez mentioned above. In "A Sad Song of Jonang," Andrew Quintman recalls his three visits to Jonang, an illustrious religious establishment founded in the fourteenth century, briefly reactivated in the early 1990s after the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, only to be forcibly abandoned a few years later. Visiting the site in 1998, by then completely deserted, one of his students found a tattered booklet in a pile of destroyed wooden printing blocks. This turned out to be a Communist re-education booklet, on a blank page of which was written a lament in verse by a Tibetan monk. Quintman translates the poem and places it in its contemporary context as well in the context of the theme of religious sadness in Tibetan religious literature.

Finally, the section “Early Modernity: Human and Nonhuman Worlds,” gathers a range of chapters on topics so varied that the singling out of any of them must inevitably be somewhat haphazard. In “My Life as a Parakeet: A Bönpo Version of the Conference of the Birds,” Charles Ramble presents a delightful Tibetan version of the widely diffused idea of a conference of birds, found as early as in Aristophanes (c. 446–386 BCE) and later in the writings of the Sufi Farid ud-Din Attar (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) and Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400). The chapter contains an outline of a Tibetan fourteenth-century version, paraphrasing parts of the texts and translating the final passage in which all the birds are listed, each being assigned its place in the natural world and its appropriate task. Heather Stoddard, “From the Blue Lake to the Emerald Isle via the Kingdom of Sikkim,” presents several aspects of the life of the Tibetan monk and “dissident” (before the word) Gedun Chopel (1903–1951), a unique personality on whom she is the foremost specialist. She discusses his repeated, but little-known, visits to Sri Lanka, at the same time providing information on several Sikkimese who were ordained as Theravāda monks on the Emerald Isle in the early decades of the twentieth century and with whom Gedun Chopel was in touch.

*Living Treasure* illustrates the flourishing state of Tibetan studies in North America; of the twenty-nine contributors, twenty-four are either American or are based in the United States. Of the remaining five, three live in the United Kingdom, one in China, and one in France. Perhaps the chapters, broadly speaking, reflect certain characteristics of Tibetan studies in the United States. It would be a risky enterprise to try to define these characteristics, but perhaps one could note, at least in the present volume, the near absence of contributions with a distinct historical focus, the only clear exceptions being the chapters of Samten G. Karmay and Amy Heller, both dealing with the Fifth Dalai Lama (and both authors, incidentally, living in Europe).

Be that as it may, *Living Treasure* is an attractively produced volume from any point of view. The layout and editing are excellent. I have only found one little slip: in a reference on page 330, the archaeologist (Sir) Aurel Stein is confused with the French Tibetologist Rolf Alfred Stein, the author of the book *Tibetan Civilization* (1972), correctly entered in the bibliography of the relevant chapter.

Leaving that trifle aside, *Living Treasure*, fascinating in its manifold contents, is a treasure trove—not surprisingly, as Gyatso herself is, as the editors put it, “herself a living treasure within the fields of Tibetan and Buddhist studies” (xii). The volume’s call was, as one contributor points out, “to be creative, broadly accessible, and theoretically oriented” (139). It certainly fulfills this ambition, and studying it will richly reward anyone interested in these fields of scholarship.

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#### REFERENCES

- Stein, Rolf Alfred. 1972. *Tibetan Civilization*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gyatso, Janet, and Jigme Lingpa. 1998. *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiography of a Tibetan Visionary*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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