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**Book review of 'Lungta 14: Aspects of Tibetan History' edited by  
Tashi Tsering, Guest Editor: Roberto Vitali**

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*Lungta 14: Aspects of Tibetan History.*

Edited by Tashi Tsering. Guest Editor: Roberto Vitali. Published by Amnye Machen Institute, India, Spring 2001. 107 pages.

While it is standard editorial policy not to review individual editions of journals when they appear, *Lungta 14: Aspects of Tibetan History* warrants breaking this rule. By far the most mysterious feature of this generally intriguing journal are the ends to which one must go in order to get hold of a copy. *Lungta* has no ISBN number and the publisher's typographically beautiful website is hopelessly out of date (the last volume mentioned is No. 11, which appeared in 1999). No bookshop in Europe or America, online or otherwise, appears to stock *Lungta*. This is regrettable since the content of the journal is excellent and worth wider distribution.

Officially named *Journal of Tibetan History and Culture*, *Lungta* was first published in August 1989 by the Tibet Support Group in Switzerland. In 1993, at the request of the founding publishers, Amnye Machen Institute in Dharamsala, India, took on the responsibility of continuing publication. The present editorial board includes Jamyang Norbu and Tashi Tsering, two of the foremost Tibetan scholars. One of the strengths of *Lungta* continues to be the specific focus of each volume: No. 12 was devoted to contemporary Tibetan literature, No. 11. to Christian missionaries and Tibet, No. 10 to the lives of the Panchen Lama, and so on. The present volume, weighing in at 107 pages (perhaps the editors could have squeezed in another page so as to reach the auspicious total of 108?) is devoted to Tibetan historiography.

The corpus of this edition comprises five contributions by senior Tibetologists and historians of Tibet. In his editorial, Vitali notes that while each scholar touches upon different aspects of Tibetan history, all of them nevertheless build on the understanding that Tibetans have long been active in recording 'events of their lives and signs of their culture'. Western scholars, on the other hand, took some time to become interested in the history of Tibet, engaging with it only through their fascination with Tibetan Buddhism. 'When [Paul] Pelliot stepped inside the walled library of Tun-huang', writes Vitali, 'the insularity and provincialism of Tibetan historical research among westerners were over'.

Vitali's own article deals with *Sa skya pa* authors who showed an interest in West Tibet and he demonstrates how these early scholars became 'custodians of knowledge concerning the history of the ancient dynasty of *Gu ge* and *Pu hrang* and its religious exponents'. In particular, drawing on one of those 'little known subjects languishing at the periphery of scholarly knowledge', the author focuses on the flying mask that followed *Rin chen bzang po* as he returned to West Tibet in 1000-1001. Vitali's scholarship is intense, as evinced by the 25 pages of notes which accompany his 15-page article.

In his contribution, Dan Martin offers a thoughtful analysis of the life Zhang Rinpoche, a 12th century Tibetan activist. In 1123, Lama Zhang was born into a family whose ancestors had been ministers of state and belonged to the *Sna-nam* clan. Early in life, Zhang realised that rituals conducted without adherence to the 'proper procedures were nonetheless efficacious', resulting in his firm conviction that 'words spoken out of one's own realization of the truth' are what makes rituals work. His style was both unorthodox and experimental, and became increasingly so as he aged. Martin jokingly suggests that Lama Zhang may have been the 'first beat poet, or perhaps the first scat singer', and concludes that Zhang probably 'played an important role in Tibet's development into ... a 'theocracy''.

Leonard van der Kuijp offers a discussion of a 'truly monumental work' completed in 1447 by *Tshe dbang rgyal [po]* on the historical development of the *Mar pa* school of Tibetan Buddhism. Van der Kuijp shows the importance of this text for Tibetan political and religious history, and concludes that 'its careful reading should very much aid us in getting a more firm [sic] handle on the historical and textual developments that took place within the literature of the *Bka' brgyud* school itself'.

The following article, by Elliot Sperling, focuses on the early history of *Gro-tshang* monastery and its relations with the Ming court. For a short period in the 14th and 15th centuries, the monastery was a 'major element in Chinese dealings with Tibet' and its leaders played pivotal roles in the formation of Ming policy to the area. Sperling uses this monastery, located at the edge of the *A-mdo* frontier region, as a case study to understand the 'larger picture of Tibet's relations with imperial China following the collapse of Mongol rule in both countries'.

David Jackson contributes the final essay in this volume, on *Ngag-dbang-yon-tan-rgya-mstho*, one of the 'most powerful, dramatic, and in the end, quixotic abbots of Ngor'. Active in the first half of the 20th century, the monk in question came from the *Khams* region of Tibet to assume the abbacy of the monastic establishment at Ngor. Jackson traces his ancestry, early education, religious training and professional life. What emerges is a story of an 'exasperatingly dogged idealist' who died in a Chinese prison sometime in the early 1960s. Jackson demonstrates how his 'straightforward idealism' ended up provoking what can only be referred to as a 'palace revolt'.

In sum, this volume of *Lungta* gathers together five excellent studies by accomplished historians of Tibet into an attractively-produced collection supported by excellent photographic reproductions. Translated from Tibetan, *Lungta* (*rlung rta*) means 'wind horse', which describes the prayer flags seen fluttering outside many Tibetan Buddhist homes and buildings. Perhaps future volumes will capitalise on the name and learn to travel, somewhat like prayers, a little faster around the world into bookshops in the West.

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***Touching My Father's Soul: A Sherpa's Journey to the Top of Everest.***

By Jamling Tenzing Norgay with Broughton Coburn. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001. 336 pages.

Yes, this is a climbing book but it is much more than that.

Let us, however, start with the climbing, Jamling Tenzing Norgay is the son of Tenzing Norgay, who in 1953 with Sir Edmund Hillary was one of the first two people to set foot on the summit of Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain. When Jamling, who had not previously climbed a high mountain, reached the same summit in 1996, he was very much aware that he was climbing in his father's footsteps. Tenzing was on his mind throughout, and the book, with its constant flashbacks, is as much an account of the first ascent as it is of his own.

But these two are not the only climbing stories that Jamling has to tell. His expedition, which was organized by David Breashears with the goal of hauling a huge IMAX camera to the summit in order to make an Everest film that could be shown on a giant screen, happened to be on the mountain at the time of one of Everest's most publicized disasters. Most people will remember the harrowing story of members of two large commercial expeditions fighting their way down from the summit late in the day in a vicious storm, and how eight (counting three on the other side of the mountain) never made it back to camp. Jamling offers some first-hand impressions of these climbers and their leaders and provides a dramatic account of the unfolding disaster as participants called in on the radio to the Breashears group at Advanced Base Camp. The Breashears climbers were too far down the mountain to provide immediate aid, but they did what rescue work they could, including helping in the evacuation and helicopter rescue of Makalu Gau and Beck Weathers, a climber who had been given up for dead but miraculously rose from this snowy grave to fight his way to camp.

But, as promised, there is more to this book than climbing stories. There is Sherpa history, family history, and climbing history. Jamling teaches us something about the Buddhism of his people and throws light on a personal story in which an overpowering desire to climb had to be balanced against loyalty to wife and family.

We have already mentioned the importance to Jamling of his father. As might be supposed from the title *Touching My Father's Soul*, this is central to the book. Jamling was born after Tenzing climbed Mt. Everest. He grew up with a father who was a world celebrity and who spent more time travelling than at home. He describes him as "old-fashioned—he was strict and disciplined" and somewhat distant. Jamling had been eager to climb Everest from an early age but Tenzing discouraged him. "I climbed Everest so you wouldn't have to," he told him sternly when he sought permission to join an Everest group. But ten years after his father's death in 1986, Jamling was given an opportunity to prove himself worthy of his father's memory. Even then, he realized that, as promised, "he didn't have to climb Mt. Everest." When he reached the summit, he seemed to hear Tenzing's voice: "you didn't have to climb this mountain in order to speak with me and be with me." At that point, he thought he understood. "Perhaps I didn't really need to come so far to be near him and to understand him. But I had to make the trip in order to learn that his blessing was there all along."

As well as a personal story of a son's relationship with his father this book is remarkable in giving an almost unique Sherpa view of an activity that we have come to look at primarily from the point of view of Western sportsmen. As Jamling points out, only two out of the many books on Everest have been written by Sherpas: his own and his father's (*Tiger of the Snows*). Since many more Sherpas have been involved on Everest climbs than people from other nations and ethnic groups, theirs is a view that warrants attention.

Whatever reason others may have for tackling the world's highest mountain, Sherpas, for the most part, are there for the money. In today's world most Sherpas depend on trekkers and climbers for the means to feed their families. They do not mind if foreigners get the glory and credit for successful ascents. "Their principal desire is to provide for their families and bring improvements to their villages," says Jamling. That does not stop them from the kind of hard work and selfless loyalty to their climbing teams that have impressed foreign climbers through the many decades they have climbed with them.