



The Culture of the Book in Tibet

By Kurtis R. Schaeffer

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The history of the book in Tibet involves more than literary trends and trade routes. Functioning as material, intellectual, and symbolic object, the book has been an instrumental tool in the construction of Tibetan power and authority, and its history opens a crucial window onto the cultural, intellectual, and economic life of an immensely influential Buddhist society.

Spanning the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Kurtis R. Schaeffer envisions the scholars and hermits, madmen and ministers, kings and queens who produced Tibet's massive canons. He describes how Tibetan scholars edited and printed works of religion, literature, art, and science and what this indicates about the interrelation of material and cultural practices. The Tibetan book is at once the embodiment of the Buddha's voice, a principal means of education, a source of tradition and authority, an economic product, a finely crafted aesthetic object, a medium of Buddhist written culture, and a symbol of the religion itself. Books stood at the center of debates on the role of libraries in religious institutions, the relative merits of oral and written teachings, and the economy of religion in Tibet.

A meticulous study that draws on more than 150 understudied Tibetan sources, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* is the first volume to trace this singular history. Through a single object, Schaeffer accesses a greater understanding of the Tibetan plateau.

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Editorial Review

Review

[A] brilliant study.

(Lauran R. Hartley *The Journal of Asian Studies*)

This elegant, readable work portrays the considerable traditional Tibetan enterprise of book production.

(Jonathan C. Gold *Religious Studies Review*)

This innovative and highly original exploration into the Tibetan culture of the book... is highly recommended reading for everybody interested in Tibetan Studies and cultural studies in general.

(*Journal of the American Oriental Society*)

Review

Written by one of the leading scholars of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in the country, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* is very timely, contributing to a lively field while drawing attention to the distinctive historical contribution of Tibetan texts and writing.

(Cynthia Brokaw, Ohio State University)

The Culture of the Book in Tibet is a fabulous introduction to the religious significance of books in the Tibetan cultural world. Kurtis R. Schaeffer not only tells us what Tibetan intellectuals have had to say about the practice of writing, he also explores the material and economic dimensions of literary production and explains the process that led to the compilation and organization of important collections, including the 'canons.' In the first broad treatment of 'the book' in Tibetan culture, Schaeffer sets the agenda for all future research on this important topic. A truly fascinating and groundbreaking work.

(José Ignacio Cabezón, XIVth Dalai Lama Endowed Chair in Tibetan Buddhism and Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara)

In recent decades we have seen illuminating new studies of literacy, scribal practice, and publication in many cultural spheres. Yet one of the most remarkable of book cultures, Tibet, has remained outside the purview of all but a narrow group of specialists. With this nuanced and graceful account, Kurtis R. Schaeffer introduces a broad readership to the scholars and monks, princes and poets who sustained for a millennium the publication and distribution of books across the length and breadth of the Tibetan high plateau. *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* is essential reading for all who are interested in the written word.

(Matthew T. Kapstein, École Pratique des Hautes Études and the University of Chicago, and author of *The Tibetans*)

This marks a big step forward for the cultural history of Tibet. The volume is rich with details and vignettes that in the end allow us to put together a history of Tibetan Buddhism in an altogether novel—and most revealing—way. Fascinating reading for anyone interested in Tibet, the Buddhist world, or the world of books.

(Janet Gyatso, Harvard University)

About the Author

Kurtis R. Schaeffer is a student of the cultural and intellectual history of Tibet. He is professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia and the author of *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun* and *Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Tibetan Traditions of an Indian Buddhist Poet-Saint*.

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