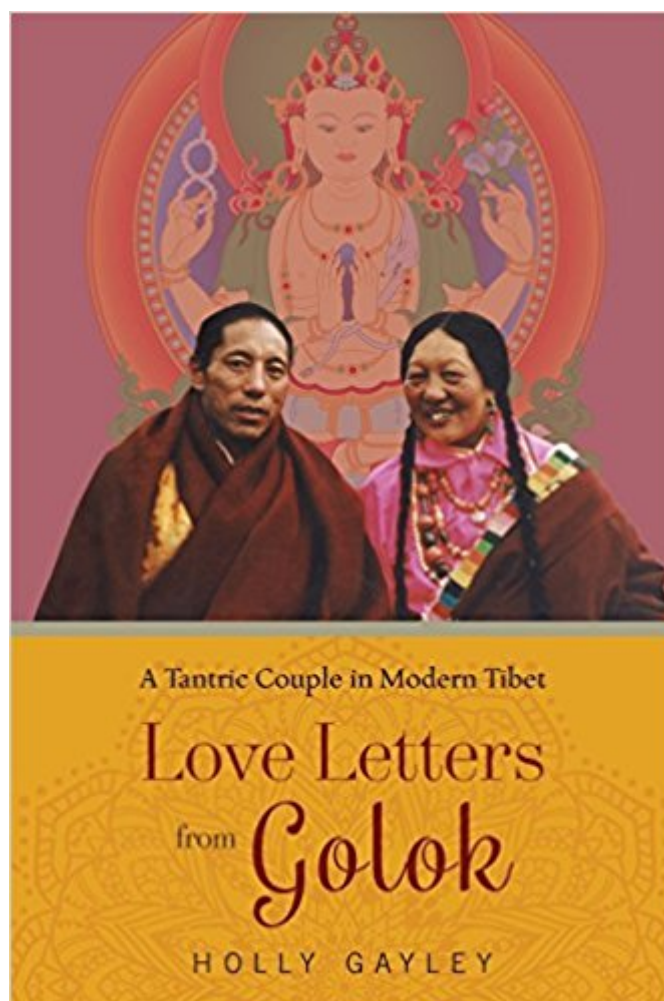


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Love Letters From Golok: A Tantric Couple In Modern Tibet



Synopsis

Love Letters from Golok chronicles the courtship between two Buddhist tantric masters, Tare Lhamo (1938–2002) and Namtrul Rinpoche (1944–2011), and their passion for reinvigorating Buddhism in eastern Tibet during the post-Mao era. In fifty-six letters exchanged from 1978 to 1980, Tare Lhamo and Namtrul Rinpoche envisioned a shared destiny to "heal the damage" done to Buddhism during the years leading up to and including the Cultural Revolution. Holly Gayley retrieves the personal and prophetic dimensions of their courtship and its consummation in a twenty-year religious career that informs issues of gender and agency in Buddhism, cultural preservation among Tibetan communities, and alternative histories for minorities in China. The correspondence between Tare Lhamo and Namtrul Rinpoche is the first collection of "love letters" to come to light in Tibetan literature. Blending tantric imagery with poetic and folk song styles, their letters have a fresh vernacular tone comparable to the love songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama, but with an eastern Tibetan flavor. Gayley reads these letters against hagiographic writings about the couple, supplemented by field research, to illuminate representational strategies that serve to narrate cultural trauma in a redemptive key, quite unlike Chinese scar literature or the testimonials of exile Tibetans. With special attention to Tare Lhamo's role as a tantric heroine and her hagiographic fusion with Namtrul Rinpoche, Gayley vividly shows how Buddhist masters have adapted Tibetan literary genres to share private intimacies and address contemporary social concerns.

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Customer Reviews

An extraordinary set of letters between a man and woman lie at the heart of this study of love, religious transcendence, and cultural trauma in post-Cultural Revolution Tibet. I know of no body of material that gives a more intricate picture of how Tibetan Tantric Buddhism could penetrate and transform worldly troubles and politics into the sublime aspirations of tantric vision. Gayley offers us an unparalleled view of 20th century Tibetan religion as it touched every aspect of human life. Plus an astonishing account of a female master whose romance with another master elevated them both into heroes for Eastern Tibet during most challenging times. (Janet Gyatso, Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies, Harvard University) Holly Gayley has that rarest of gifts, a scholar's eye and a story-teller's ear. Her book is filled with nuance and insight about the power of Tibetan cultural narratives of gendered spiritual prowess and the navigation of coded relationships. Never merely theoretical, Gayley grounds every observation in dynamic detail and a story-line compelling as any novel. (Anne C. Klein, Professor Rice University and co-Founder, Dawn Mountain Author of Meeting the Great Bliss Queen, translator of Khetsun Sangpo's Strand of Jewels) Gayley weaves together life writing, ethnography, and letters in an unprecedented fashion, and it pays off: her treatment of difficult primary sources is translated here for the first time and is inviting and engaging. Love Letters from Golok addresses issues of real and abiding concern in contemporary China. (Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Professor of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Virginia and Chair of the Religious Studies department)

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