Call for Papers: Tibetan Women in Public Life: Gender and Cultural Production in Contemporary China

Guest editors:

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In recent decades, Tibetologists have increasingly sought to understand women[1]. However, given that religion remains deeply embedded in everyday life in Tibet, academic research on Tibetan women focuses primarily on the religious dimension of their lives, encompassing daily practices, culture, and politics. But what, then, constitutes the secular dimension of their existence—not in the sense of secularisation, but as the everyday cultural and public lives beyond explicitly religious practices? To explore this question, this special issue shifts attention toward a different, and comparatively understudied domain: the secular lives of Tibetan women in contemporary China, particularly those who participate in public cultural life. By focusing on cultural actors such as artists, writers, and internet influencers, we foreground Tibetan women not primarily as religious subjects but as participants in creative and cultural life whose activities unfold across artistic, literary, digital, and professional arenas. Far from being politically neutral, these secular domains constitute sites in which Tibetan women negotiate visibility, belonging, aspiration, and gendered identity under conditions shaped by ethnic governance, cultural politics, and unequal forms of representation within the broader project of Chinese nation-making.

[1] See, for instance, Aziz (1987); Gyatso and Havnevik (2005); Fjeld and Hofer (2012); Schneider and Schrempf (2015); Gaylay (2016); Melnick (2020); UVA (2022); Brallier (2023); EPHE-CRCAO (2023); INALCO (2023); Deboos and Schneider (2025).

Within contemporary Tibetan societies and the field of Tibetan Studies, dominant narratives of identity and authenticity are produced by both internal and external elites of the community, which continue to shape how Tibet is discussed despite growing recognition of diversity (Norbu 1992; Lopez 1999; Kolås and Thowsen 2005; Jabb 2015; Elliott 2015; Hillman 2018). These narratives often frame Tibetans as being caught in a tension between the preservation of tradition and the imperatives of modernity, a widely circulated binary that not only describes but actively organises how Tibetan social life is represented and understood across scholarly, media, and policy domains.

Within this framing, the tension is often implicitly masculinised, insofar as men's experiences are positioned as the primary site through which social transformation and historical agency are recognised and represented. It is therefore men's narratives that are understood as those in which "individual achievements can stand for nation building" (Ebron and Tsing 1995, 396). As a result, even when scholarship focuses on Tibetan women, femininity is often excluded. Along with secularisation, globalisation, and decolonisation, the invisibility of Tibetan women is produced within broader nation–ethnicity discourses that hierarchize what counts as central to Tibet and Tibetan-ness. Tibetan women and their spatialized, embodied experiences are systematically marginalised, rendered as silhouettes within Orientalist imaginaries, reduced to footnotes in majority–minority debates, or simply left behind. In the meantime, despite growing scholarly attention to women's subjectivities across national, transnational, and diasporic contexts (Makley 1997; Butler 2003; Kaur 2025), as well as broader discussions of misogynistic discourse, nationalist affect, and platform infrastructures, relatively little research has examined these issues in relation to Tibetan women in China.

Artists, writers, internet influencers, and other cultural practitioners are often understood through the framework of creative labour, which highlights the tension between aspirations for creative autonomy and the commercial imperatives of cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), or through the concept of aspirational labour, which draws attention to the promise of creative fulfilment and professional success and to the gendered and classed inequalities embedded in it (Duffy 2016). These frameworks only partly fit the Tibetan women this issue addresses. Unlike professional creative workers whose primary occupations lie within cultural industries, many Tibetan women pursue artistic, literary, and digital practices alongside stable careers in government institutions and other sectors that provide financial security. Their creativity is therefore not simply labour oriented toward professional advancement or economic return. Therefore, we propose *creative becoming* as one way of

understanding these cultural practices, whether contemporary art, literature, film, digital content creation, or grassroots cultural and feminist initiatives. Drawing on cultural studies approaches to identity and representation and on feminist theories of subjectivity and affect (Hall [1990] 2021, 2011, 2012; Berlant 2011), we see creativity as an ongoing process through which subjects are shaped, experienced, and reimagined. This perspective guides the aim of the issue: to foreground Tibetan women as active agents in cultural production, knowledge-making, and the transformation of cultural landscapes and social possibilities.

We invite contributions that ask how Tibetan women in contemporary China sustain creative commitments within the demands of everyday life, and what forms of subjectivity, belonging, and cultural possibility emerge through these processes. We are especially interested in how creative engagements intersect with women's aspirations and social relationships, and with wider processes of nation-building, ethnic politics, and state governance, and in how cultural production both reflects and shapes the dynamics of gender, ethnicity, and power. Submissions should be empirically grounded and theoretically informed, drawing on original data or primary materials (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods). We welcome interdisciplinary approaches and scholars from diverse academic backgrounds.

Suggested topics (including but not limited to)

- Tibetan women working across traditional and digital cultural sectors, such as artists, filmmakers, influencers, and livestreamers
- Forms, narratives, and aesthetic practices in Tibetan women's cultural production
- Cultural entrepreneurship among Tibetan women, such as crafts, fashion, tourism, and e-commerce
- Digital and platform cultures shaping Tibetan women's experiences, such as algorithmic visibility, monetisation, and online misogyny
- Feminist initiatives among Tibetan women, such as grassroots, collective, and community-based projects
- Tibetan women's cultural participation in relation to state policies, ethnic governance, and nation-building
- Cultural spaces, networks, and audiences in Tibetan women's creative practices
- Theoretical and methodological approaches to cultural production, creative labour, subjectivity, and everyday life

Submission details

We invite interested authors to submit an abstract of 300-500 words, together with the paper's title and a brief biography (no more than 100 words) that includes institutional affiliation, contact details, and research interests, by **30 November 2026**. Authors will be notified by 7 December 2026. The first draft of the full paper is expected by **30 March 2027**.

If you are interested in contributing to this special feature of *China Perspectives*, abstracts and queries should be sent to LIU Chang at evekhalil1995@gmail.com.

All submitted papers will undergo a rigorous double-blind peer review process. Research articles (written in English) should be 9,000 words long, and follow the format of the article guidelines available here: https://www.cefc.com.hk/chinaperspectives/submissions/style-guide/.

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