This volume attests to the continued growth of Tibetan literary studies as a field that both complements and challenges existing areas of humanistic scholarship. For the Tibetan specialist, this expansion highlights the degree to which already existing literary studies—of religious texts or the Gesar epic, for example—are being joined by studies of contemporary literature to form a body of research as unique, challenging, and multilingual as Tibetan culture itself. For the non-specialist, including myself, Tibetan literature is simply bursting into the fields of comparative and world literature in ways that suggest unique opportunities for twenty-first-century literary scholarship. The essays in this volume, most of which were first presented in Oxford at the 10th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (2003), range from specialised studies in literary criticism and history to surveys of emerging Tibetan literature and individual readings of works. In this, the volume offers a glimpse of the rapidly expanding Tibetan literary world.

It was literature, more than a decade ago, that first drew me to the periphery of the Tibetan Studies circle, because it is the nature of literature to reach out to the non-specialist teacher, student, critic—as well as the often forgotten ordinary reader—around the world. Specialised Tibetological studies of history, culture, or religion circulate in valuable ways, to be sure, but when literature circulates, it draws people in by building its own bridges and creating new spaces for dialogue, challenge, appreciation, and possibility. In this way, contemporary Tibetan literary studies help to illuminate the always intermingling phenomena of artistic expression, history, politics, and the imagination.

In their 1996 volume, *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson describe a body of literature that spans some 1,300 years. From this broad perspective, Cabezón and Jackson identify three principal characteristics of development that have shaped Tibetan literature over the centuries, characteristics that
speak to matters of literary form, political representation, and cultural identity:

In short, the development of Tibetan literature is marked by the increasing dominance of written over oral forms, of Indian over indigenous influences, and of religious over secular concerns, but the dominant development never has entirely eclipsed its counterpart—and orality, native themes and styles, and non-religious concerns have continued to find an important place in the literary tradition.¹

While still near the beginning of a new era of Tibetan literature, we find contemporary Tibetan texts—by most accounts emerging only since the 1980s—prompting new, parallel questions. What are the current forces at work on Tibetan literature? How are written forms evolving in a world in which Tibetan writers compose not only in Tibetan, but in Chinese, English, and many other languages? How do Tibetan film and music influence oral forms of poetry and prose? Where the Indianisation of Tibetan culture is central to many studies of early periods of Tibetan history, we are now also invited to inquire into the more recent forces of globalisation, sinification, and Americanisation, and even into those types of ‘Indianisation’ owing more to Salman Rushdie or Bollywood than to Padmasambhava or the Kavyadarsa.

Moreover, contemporary Tibetan literature prompts us to reconsider the very notion of ‘indigenous’ versus ‘foreign’ influences. What is a ‘native’ Tibetan theme for a Tibetan literature emerging from Lanzhou, Beijing, London, or San Francisco? Of course, these are not rhetorical questions, but the very engines of literary art. Asking about the role of religion in contemporary Tibetan literature, for example, does not lead us to a cagey simplistic paradox or a single answer with regard to the movement toward or away from traditional modes of writing, but necessarily engages the reader as well as the writer in the varying and conflicting stands taken in depicting religion in narratives of national, cultural, or spiritual identity.

Approaches to contemporary Tibetan literature naturally intersect with existing approaches to other bodies of literature. For the Tibetan specialist who brings research in multiple languages together for new investigations, Tibetan literature significantly contributes to the field of comparative literature, which Mary Louise Pratt calls "the home for polyglots", where “multilingualism and polyglossia . . . remain its call-

¹ Cabezón and Jackson 1996: 16.