

# WANDERING BETWEEN TWO BLOGS

BY WOESER

One of Tibet's best-known writers and poets, Woesser was forced out of her job at the Tibetan Cultural Association and now lives in Beijing. She gained a large following on two blogs before they were shut down in July 2006.

A lot of people call their blogs Bo, like a good friend or a pet or even part of themselves. I started my blog on Feb. 1, 2005. Wow, a year and three months ago already—I hadn't even noticed! I remember Tseten<sup>1</sup> raising the idea of a Tibetan blog, and I agreed to start one. I never thought it would become the most intractable one. Through all the hardships, the hours spent, I seem to have become immovable as a stone, or you might say, what made me into such an immovable stone?

Most people think of a blog as a sort of diary. But I've never been the kind of person who keeps a diary, even though, as a child, I did it as a hobby and in no time at all I had a dozen little diaries, but all of them had pages left blank (wasteful), and the passages I had written didn't really qualify as a diary in the sense of a daily record—it was more like a weekly. I remember the title of one “weekly”: “Those who fall behind will be beaten.” I was very impressed that year by the movie *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* (Yuanmingyuan) starring Liu Xiaoqing and Tony Leung Ka-Fai.<sup>2</sup>

I was the editor of *Tibetan Literature*<sup>3</sup> for many years. It began as a newspaper and later became a magazine. I was a pretty incompetent newspaper editor, because I didn't put my mind to it. To this day, I don't understand how to lay out a page. But as a magazine editor, I was quite up to the mark. I might be so bold as to say that I handled the six issues a year of *Tibetan Literature* virtually by myself, from soliciting contributions to editing. When I think back over my unremarkable years as an editor, an all-poetry issue I published in 1995 stands out. It included the most influential poets of the early 1990s, from Tibet and all over China. Tibetan poets writing in Chinese were included as well. Of course, I didn't do this all myself; the other half of the credit goes to my old friend, a good poet who also started as an editor, He Zhong.<sup>4</sup> There's another thing I'm proud of. The Chinese poet I most appreciate is Bai Hua.<sup>5</sup> The

200,000-word biography he couldn't get published anywhere, *Zuo Bian—A Lyric Poet in the Age of Mao*, I published in serial form in *Tibetan Literature* in 1996. He was deeply appreciative, and some poetry critics were astonished. Think about it—he mentioned Wang Dan and Wu'er Kaixi<sup>6</sup> in the book!

But what I most regret is that my most brilliant editorial plan eventually had to be aborted. In 1999, I went home to Kham<sup>7</sup> during my vacation. In my wanderings west and east, I went about soliciting manuscripts with a passion. I naturally solicited good manuscripts from many writers of talent in Khangba, more than enough for a special issue on “Kham Literature.” I thought I could do four special issues focusing on fine examples of literature from Kham, Amdo, Ü-Tsang<sup>8</sup> and other areas of Tibet. In fact, other Chinese magazines have similarly published issues featuring works from Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, Shaanxi and so on—it was no big deal. But my leader was afraid we'd be suspected of “Greater Tibet” leanings and axed the idea.

Okay, I've gone into all sorts of things that have nothing to do with my blog. I still have a complex about that magazine, so I immediately vented my feelings by calling my blog “Woesser Magazine.” It was a form of occupational therapy I administered to myself, or maybe more of a small testament. I say small because I used it as a subheading. As for the main title, as everyone who visits this Tibet blog probably knows, it was called “Maroon Map.” These two words refer to my favorite things. Like the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico (Ah, I bought an album of his paintings at Joint Publishing Bookstore yesterday; wonderful!), which are considered pursuits of the metaphysical.

A magazine has to have columns. A year before I bid farewell to *Tibetan Literature*, I designed several columns I was very pleased with, such as “Snow Story,” “Travels in Tibet,” “Folk Chronicles,” “My Memories,” “Tufan Poet”<sup>9</sup> and so on. Of course, these all vanished like the wind.<sup>10</sup> Now they've become part of my Woesser Magazine blog. I'm grateful to all those who have kept up with my blog, for every comment, whether complementary, questioning, critiquing, even hitting me over the head. Except for the occasional one who, yes, responded to several of my postings by writing, “If you stick your head out, you get what's coming to you” (Or in the classic phrase of Jampa Phuntsok, Chairman of the Tibetan Autonomous Region: “If the Dalai Lama is found to be involved in splittist activities, he'll get what's coming to him.”)<sup>11</sup>

A few days ago, Muzi over in Turkey came up with the far-fetched notion of setting up a blog for me on a blog Web site called “daq.com.” Ignorant and ill-informed as I am, I had never heard of daqi.com. Unable to deflect Muzi’s enthusiasm, I had a quick look at the other Daqi blogs, which seemed to be written mostly by media people, but I wasn’t familiar with any of them. Okay, set up a space first and then we’ll see: my second blog is called “Woeser Blog” (<http://blog.daqi.com/weise/>), retaining the subtitle “Maroon Map.” The arrangement of columns is much simpler, using the titles of my four books. There are just a few links, just those of some of my good friends and I especially included those from the wonderful

Tibet blog, Sonam’s<sup>12</sup> “New Tibet,” Tseten’s “Spiritual Pasture”<sup>13</sup> and Dongsai’s “There, Shepherd in Snowy Pasture.”<sup>14</sup>

Ah, the template of this blog is lovely—I chose a color I liked. There is one shortcoming: the space for photos is too small, so when I want to paste one in, I have to keep reducing the size, smaller and smaller, which is annoying.

Ah, but there was one micro-second of . . . how can I put it? I’m attaching here a comment left by the Web master as an example: “Woeser, I really like seeing the Tibet you write about, your photos; it’s a place I don’t know. I’d like to have you tell me more about the vast beauty of Tibet and the lives of the people there, a record of what you have gained from

## An Interview with He Zhong

BY XU LINLING, SOUTHERN PEOPLE’S WEEKLY

He Zhong, born in a village in Gansu’s Qilian Mountains, arrived in Tibet at the age of 21. Along with Ma Yuan<sup>1</sup> and Tashi Dawa,<sup>2</sup> he became part of the Lhasa School of literature in the 1980s. In the 1990s, Lhasa’s relatively freewheeling environment came under tighter control. Many of the Lhasa School writers left, but He Zhong remained in Tibet.

**Southern People’s Weekly (SPW):** You have Han, Tibetan and Mongolian blood—what affect has this had on your writing?

**He Zhong (HZ):** It definitely has an effect. I speak Chinese, Tibetan, the Amdo and Lhasa dialects and Mongolian. But in my personal writings I seldom set out to break through these regional or ethnic boundaries. I occasionally use regional expressions, but for the most part I write in Chinese because I already identify with it and I consider it the most enjoyable to work with.

**SPW:** What do you think of mainland poetry these days? Do you have much contact with mainland poets?

**HZ:** Mainland poetry has always come down one continuous line, but not at such high quality as in the past. I’ve maintained a more self-contained writing style. I was marginalized from the outset: they’ve always tried to pull me in, but I couldn’t be enlisted. I’ve stayed here the whole time, following my own inclinations.

**SPW:** What do you think of the modernization of Tibet? Lhasa is starting to resemble a mainland city more and more.

**HZ:** Modernization is inevitable. No one can or should direct it. Opposing modernization is a selfish attitude of mainland and foreign literati. There are so many people in Tibet who need to resolve basic survival issues; an affluent life requires material goods to sustain it.

Those so-called environmentalists living the good life in major urban areas are wasting more resources than any Tibetan. Their talk about of rivers and mountains is a farce.

**SPW:** The obsession with commerce scattered the “Lhasa School” to the winds. Do you feel bad about that? What do you see as the role of the poet in a materialistic age?

**HZ:** In the eyes of a thinker or poet, an era characterized by materialism will inevitably lead to degeneracy. But I believe a poet has no responsibility in this regard; poets after all are the weakest of groups. In fact, there’s no need to make poets take on this kind of responsibility; this is not an age of prophets, or even a time for a “voice of the people” like 20 or 30 years ago. This is an era of extreme diversity. Nowadays, a poet is just another kind of professional, no different from an ear cleaner, a pedicurist or a public servant. Changing the world should be left to the politicians and sociologists. In poetry, I believe the first thing is to provide people with a healthy and enjoyable reading experience and the beauty of words. I don’t like to pointlessly write sick stuff. The past will never return, and I feel I should calmly face the present.

Translated by Stacy Mosher

The original Chinese article from which this interview was excerpted can be read at <http://news.163.com/06/0711/15/2LOQJTBM00011E7T.html>.

### NOTES

1. Ma Yuan, born in 1953 in Liaoning Province, went to Tibet after graduating with a degree in Chinese from Liaoning University. His experimental novellas and short stories reflect the experiences of a Han national in Tibet and are imbued with religious mysticism.
2. Tashi Dawa, born in Kham in 1959 of mixed Chinese and Tibetan parentage, used magical realism to challenge official history with fictional genealogies. Some Tibetans feel his writings sustain the Chinese view of Tibet as backward and mystical. See Yangdon Dhondup, “In Search for Their Ancestors: Contemporary Writing from Tibet,” *TibetWrites.org*, [http://www.tibetwrites.org/articles/yangdon\\_dhondup/index.html](http://www.tibetwrites.org/articles/yangdon_dhondup/index.html).



A Web site where Woese's poetry and essays can still be read.

Tibetan culture and history that you can pass on to others. Pass on those wonderful eternal and majestic things you have discovered in life. The dregs will inevitably be spurned by time and history; these things are not worth defiling the beauty of your essays. The right to speak is precious, like treading on thin ice. I hope you'll be happy here and find even more friends."

Oh well, whatever, just let me wander between these two Web sites for as long as I can.

May 7, 2006, Beijing

Postscript: On July 28, 2006, Woese's blogs on both daqi.com and tibetcul.net were shut down. The webmaster at tibetcul.net reportedly told Woese that Central United Front officials had instructed the Gansu Web monitoring station to close her weblog sites. Woese Blog, which included articles on de-robed monks, the Amdo-Lhasa railways, HIV/AIDS in Tibet and other sensitive topics, was described by the webmaster as one of the most popular blogs on the site.<sup>15</sup>

Translated by a friend of HRIC

The original Chinese article is posted at [http://www.bowenpress.com/cn/2006/china/88\\_1.shtml](http://www.bowenpress.com/cn/2006/china/88_1.shtml)

#### NOTES

1. Wangchuk Tseten (Pinyin: Wangxiu Caidan) is the manager of tibetcul.net, which hosted Woese's blog.
2. Produced by the Taiwanese director Li Hanhsiang in 1983.

3. Woese became editor of *Tibetan Literature* (Xizhang Wenxue) in 1990 and was subsequently sent to Beijing's Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts as a visiting scholar.
4. See sidebar.
5. Bai Hua, born in Chongqing in 1956, published his first collection of poems, *Expressions*, in 1988. His political views during the 1989 Democracy Movement offended political hardliners, and he was unable to publish anything in China for several years.
6. Student leaders of the 1989 democracy movement, now both living in exile.
7. Woese's father was a soldier in the People's Liberation Army, and her mother was a civil servant. When Woese was four, her father was relocated to the Kham region, where Woese lived for 13 years.
8. Kham (pinyin: Kang), Amdo (pinyin: Anduo) and Ü-Tsang (pinyin: Weizang) are the three traditional Tibetan provinces, portions of which are now in Sichuan, northern Yunnan and Qinghai provinces, as well as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).
9. Tufan, or Tubo, was a Tibetan empire that controlled many cities along the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty.
10. Woese was dismissed from the Tibetan Cultural Association in 2004 after she published her book *Tibet Journal*, which reported on Tibetan's continued reverence for the Dalai Lama.
11. Quoted in the pro-Beijing Hong Kong newspaper *Takung Pao*. "Beijing yu Dalai yizhi you jiechu," *Takung Pao*, March 7, 2006, <http://www.takungpao.com/news/06/03/07/ZM-534409.htm>.
12. Pinyin: Suolang
13. These blogs were not located on the tibetcul.net Web site.
14. Dongsai's blog can be accessed at <http://dongsai.tibetcul.net/index.html>.
15. See "Blanned, Blocked Tibetan Writer Vows to Speak Out in China," Radio Free Asia, August 1, 2006, [http://www.rfa.org/english/news/arts/2006/08/01/tibet\\_author/](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/arts/2006/08/01/tibet_author/).