

# DESTINS DIVERS DE L'ÉPOPÉE DE GESAR DE LING

HOMMAGE À ROLF A. STEIN

# THE MANY FACES OF LING GESAR

HOMAGE TO ROLF A. STEIN

27-28 octobre 2014

Collège de France

programme /  
program



Illustration de la couverture : *Thangka* de Gesar attribué à Trehor Nam-mkha'-rgyan, XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle. D'après Yangtar Lhamo, *Langkajie Tangka*. Avec nos remerciements à Jeff Watt, Himalayan Art Resources, New York.

Cover image: *Thangka* of Gesar attributed to Trehor Nam-mkha'-rgyan, 18<sup>th</sup> century. From Yangtar Lhamo, *Langkajie Tangka*. Courtesy of Jeff Watt, Himalayan Art Resources, New York.



Le Professeur Rolf A. Stein avec le Professeur Yu Daoquan (1901-1992), fondateur des études tibétologiques à l'Université centrale des Nationalités de Pékin. Parmi les autres personnes présentes, on reconnaît l'historien tibétain Dung-dkar Blo-bzang-phrin-las rin-po-che (1927-1997, immédiatement à gauche derrière M. Stein), le Professeur Wang Yao (premier à gauche), Mme le Professeur Yang Enhong (troisième à gauche au rang supérieur) et M. Geng Sheng (quatrième à droite au rang supérieur), qui a traduit les oeuvres du Professeur Stein en chinois. Nous remercions vivement Mme Yang pour cette précieuse photographie, prise à Pékin lors de la visite du Professeur Stein en 1981.

Prof. Rolf Stein with Prof. Yu Daoquan (1901-1992), the founder of the Tibetan Department of the Central University of Nationalities, Beijing. Among others present: the Tibetan historian Dung-dkar Blo-bzang-phrin-la rin-po-che (1927-1997, immediately behind Prof. Stein to the left), Prof. Wang Yao (extreme left), Prof. Yang Enhong (third from left above), and Mr. Geng Sheng (fourth from right above), the translator of Prof. Stein's works in Chinese.

We are grateful to Prof. Yang for this precious photograph, taken during Prof. Stein's visit to Beijing in 1981.

## INTRODUCTION

Né en Allemagne, Rolf Alfred Stein (1911-1999) se réfugia en France en 1933, où il poursuivit sa formation en études asiatiques auprès des principaux orientalistes de l'époque, notamment Marcel Granet et Henri Maspéro pour la sinologie, Paul Pelliot pour les études mongoles et centre-asiatiques, ainsi que Jacques Bacot et Marcelle Lalou pour les études tibétaines. Sa remarquable polyvalence lui permit de mettre à profit ses talents dans des domaines aussi divers que la religion taoïste en Chine et le Bön au Tibet ; l'analyse philologique et historique des manuscrits de Dunhuang rédigés en Chinois comme en Tibétain ; la signification religieuse de la miniaturisation dans les civilisations d'Asie orientale ; l'ethnohistoire des marches sino-tibétaines et bien plus encore. Dans le champ des études tibétaines en particulier, sa *Civilisation tibétaine* est considérée comme une synthèse fondamentale, de même que les deux volumes de ses contributions aux recherches sur l'épopée de Gesar (*L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar dans sa version lamaïque de Ling* (1956) et *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet* (1959)) apparaissent comme les pierres angulaires de ce domaine. Son intérêt jamais démenti pour les sujets aux confluences de la religion, de la littérature et de la culture populaire est également manifeste dans son ouvrage *Vie et chants de 'Brug-pa Kun-legs, le yogin*. Rolf Alfred Stein fut directeur d'études à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études de 1951 à 1970, ainsi que professeur au Collège de France de 1966 jusqu'à son départ à la retraite en 1981.

Bien que M. R.A. Stein ait consacré une partie considérable de sa carrière à l'étude de l'épopée tibétaine du héros Gesar, la recherche à ce sujet a peu progressé dans le demi-siècle qui a suivi la publication de ses contributions majeures. Ainsi, c'est afin de rendre hommage à la mémoire de M. Stein et de renouveler un domaine auquel il était très attaché que nous sommes heureux d'accueillir un colloque international sur « les destins divers de l'épopée de Gesar de Ling ». Dans l'esprit des travaux entrepris par M. Stein, nous souhaitons explorer ensemble pendant ces deux journées la variété des traditions liées à Gesar, telles qu'elles se sont développées dans les régions du Tibet Oriental, en Mongolie ou encore dans certains districts du Cachemire indien et pakistanais.

Nous sommes profondément reconnaissants à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, à la Fondation Hugot du Collège de France, ainsi qu'au Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale pour leur soutien généreux à l'élaboration du colloque *Destins divers de l'épopée de Gesar de Ling*. Nos remerciements chaleureux vont en particulier à M. Hubert Bost, président de l'ÉPHÉ, à Mme Anne Cheng, MM. Frantz Grenet, John Scheid et Pierre-Etienne Will, professeurs au Collège de France, et à MM. Nicolas Fiève et Ranier Lanselle, co-directeurs du CRCAO, ainsi qu'à leurs collègues chargés de l'administration de leurs institutions respectives, pour leurs encouragements bienveillants.

## INTRODUCTION

Rolf Alfred Stein (1911-1999), born in Germany, sought refuge in France in 1933, where his formation in Asian Studies was nurtured by the leading orientalist of the time, including Marcel Granet and Henri Maspéro in Sinology, Paul Pelliot in Mongol and Central Asian Studies, and Jacques Bacot and Marcelle Lalou in Tibetology. His remarkable versatility permitted him to dedicate his talents to areas as diverse as the Taoist religion of China and the Bön of Tibet; the philological and historical analysis of the Chinese and Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts; the religious significance of miniaturization in East Asian civilizations; the ethnohistory of the Sino-Tibetan marches; and much more. In Tibetan Studies, in particular, his *Tibetan Civilization* is regarded as a fundamental synthesis of the field, while the two volumes of his contributions to research on the Gesar Epic (*L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar dans sa version lamaïque de Ling* (1956) and *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet* (1959)) are esteemed as the touchstones in this domain. His sustained interest in the intersections of religion, literature and popular culture is in evidence, too, in his *Vie et chants de 'Brug-pa Kun-legs, le yogin*. Professor Stein was directeur d'études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études from 1951 to 1970, and Professor at the Collège de France from 1966 until his retirement in 1981.

Although Prof. Stein consecrated much of his career to the study of the Tibetan epic of the hero Gesar, research on this topic has made only modest progress during the half century following the publication of his major contributions. In order, therefore, to do homage to Prof. Stein's memory and to reinvigorate an area to which he was devoted, it is our honour to welcome an international conference on *The Many Faces of Ling Gesar*. In the spirit of the work undertaken by Prof. Stein, we hope to explore during these days together the variety of Gesar traditions, as they have developed in the eastern reaches of Tibet, in Mongolia or in certain parts of Indian and Pakistani Kashmir.

For extending their generous support to *The Many Faces of Ling Gesar*, we are profoundly grateful to the École Pratique des Hautes Études, the Fondation Hugot of the Collège de France, and the Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie-orientale. In particular, we express our heartfelt thanks to M. Hubert Bost, President of the ÉPHÉ, to Mme Anne Cheng, M. Frantz Grenet, M. John Scheid, and M. Pierre-Etienne Will, Professors at the Collège de France, and to M. Nicolas Fiève and M. Ranier Lanselle, co-directors of the CRCAO, together with their colleagues in the administration of their respective institutions, for their gracious encouragements of this undertaking.

Matthew T. Kapstein, ÉPHÉ, CRCAO  
Charles Ramble, ÉPHÉ, CRCAO  
Jean-Noël Robert, Collège de France, CRCAO

*Co-organisateurs*  
*/ co-conveners*

## PROGRAMME / PROGRAM

**Lundi 27 octobre 2014 / Monday 27 October 2014**

### **Salle 2, Collège de France, 11, place Marcelin-Berthelot**

*Welcome and Keynote Addresses*, chair: Matthew T. Kapstein

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- 9:00 Introduction by Jean-Noël Robert  
Opening discourse by John Scheid, Professor and Vice-Administrator,  
Collège de France
- 9:30 Anne-Marie Blondeau – The Gesar Epic in the Work of R.A. Stein
- 10:00 Siddiq Wahid – The Practice and Theory of the Ling Gesar

### **Salle Claude Lévi-Strauss, 52, rue du Cardinal Lemoine**

10:30 Pause café/Coffee Break

*An Epic Unfolding*, chair: Françoise Robin, INALCO

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- 11:00 Frantz Grenet – An Historical Figure at the Origin of Gesar of Phrom:  
*From Kesar, King of Kabul (738-745)—The State of Current Research*
- 11:30 Charles Ramble – Tibet's Other Epic: A Tentative Investigation of  
Common Features in the Gesar Cycle and the Bonpo *gZi brjid*
- 12:00 Norbu Wangdan – From Collective Memory to Individual Memory:  
Three Stages in the Evolution of the Gesar Epic
- 12:30 George FitzHerbert – Gesar's Familiars
- 13:00 Déjeuner/Lunch

### **Salle 2, Collège de France, 11, place Marcelin-Berthelot**

*The Epic in Space*, chair: Geoffrey Samuel

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- 14:30 Estelle Dryland – Can Culture Transcend Religion? The Muslim Bards  
of Baltistan
- 15:00 Wang Guoming – A Comparative Investigation of the Tu and Tibetan Epics
- 15:30 Matthew King – King Gesar in Real and Empty Time: Notes from the  
Oeuvres of Sumpa Khenpo, Palden Yéshé, and Zavaa Damdin
- 16:00 Pause café/Coffee Break
- 16:45 Film: Donagh Coleman – A Gesar Bard's Tale
- 18:30 Conclusion

## PROGRAMME / PROGRAM

**Mardi 28 octobre 2014 / Tuesday 28 October 2014**

**Salle 2, Collège de France, 11, place Marcelin-Berthelot**

- 9:30 Introduction by Charles Ramble  
Opening discourse by Hubert Bost, President, ÉPHÉ

*Orality and Literacy*, chair: Charles Ramble

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- 10:00 Mireille Helffer – The Epic of Gesar: Written Versions and Oral Tradition  
10:30 Yang Enhong – The Continuity and Development of the Gesar Oral Tradition in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Salle Claude Lévi-Strauss, 52, rue du Cardinal Lemoine**

- 11:00 Pause café/Coffee Break

*Epic and Ritual*, chair: George FitzHerbert

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- 11:30 Frances Garrett – Gesar’s Therapeutic Geographies  
12:00 Gregory Forgues – Gesar in the Rituals and Practices of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century *Ris med* Movement  
12:30 Geoffrey Samuel – Namkha Drimed Rinpoche and his Gesar Terchö: Gesar Ritual Practice in Western Buddhism  
13:00 Déjeuner/Lunch

**Salle 2, Collège de France, 11, place Marcelin-Berthelot**

*Twentieth and twenty-first century adaptations*, chair Frances Garrett

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- 14:30 Chopa Dondrup – Alexandra David-Neel’s *Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling*  
15:00 Matthew T. Kapstein – From Epic to Allegory: The Annihilation of Yama in Ü  
15:30 Lama Jabb – Currents of the Tibetan National Epic in Contemporary Writing  
16:00 Pause café/Coffee Break  
16:45 Film: Iffat Fatima – The Kesar Saga, introduced by Siddiq Wahid  
18:15 Thanks and conclusion

Anne-Marie BLONDEAU

### **The Gesar Epic in the Work of R.A. Stein**

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While the works of Rolf A. Stein on the Gesar Epic will certainly be familiar to the participants in this conference, the place they occupy in wider picture of his research may be less well known. Rolf Stein's scholarly career and the direction of his research were substantially determined by the historical events in which he was immersed from childhood, as well as the encounters that followed from these. This brief overview of his career will examine how he came to be interested in Gesar, before attempting to assess the contribution of this scholar to the study of the Epic.

Anne-Marie Blondeau succeeded Rolf A. Stein as directeur d'études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1975, and held this position until her retirement in 1998. From 1978 to 1995 she also taught at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales, and was director of the research team Langues et cultures de l'aire tibétaine. her numerous publications include studies of pilgrimage, hippiatry, ritual texts of the rNying ma pa and Bonpos, and, most recently, an annotated translation (with Anne Chayet) of a Bonpo version of the Gesar Epic, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar: manuscrit bonpo* (Paris 2014).

Donagh COLEMAN

### **Film: A Gesar Bard's Tale**

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2013. China/Finland. Directed by Donagh Coleman and Lharigtsso. As a boy, Dawa was an illiterate Tibetan nomad whose life revolved around herding yaks. At 13, his life changed: through a series of visions, Dawa acquired the gift of telling the epic story of Tibet's King Gesar. Now, at 35, Dawa receives a salary from the government as a guardian of national cultural heritage and is regarded as a holy man by his community. When an earthquake reduces his hometown to rubble, redevelopment of the region takes a giant leap forward. In the midst of such seismic shifts, Dawa seeks healing from King Gesar and other divine protectors of the land. In Tibetan; English subtitles. 82 min.

Finnish-Irish-American Donagh Coleman holds degrees in Philosophy and Psychology, as well as Music and Media Technologies from Trinity College Dublin. Donagh has studied Tibetan Buddhism, and has spent long periods in India and China, where many of his documentary subjects come from. Previous films include *Stone Pastures* (winner of the Grand Prix prize at the 2009 Cervino Cinemountain Festival in Italy) and *Une année sur le toit du monde* that was commissioned for ARTE's primetime Découverte-slot. *A Gesar Bard's Tale* was notably winner of best documentary film at the 2014 First Peoples' Festival in Montreal. Besides films, Donagh directs radio documentaries for the Finnish and Irish national broadcasters. His Radio Feature *Gesar!* on Tibet's epic bards was Finland's entry for the 2012 Prix Italia competition. Donagh also works as a TV and radio journalist and presenter for the Finnish broadcaster YLE News.

Chopa DONDRUP

### **Alexandra David-Neel and her Study of the Epic, *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling***

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Between 1910 and 1945 the French scholar Alexandra David-Neel made five trips to Tibet, where she collected manuscripts relating to the Epic of King Gesar of Ling. *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling*, which was written by her and her adoptive son Yongden Lama, was compiled on the basis of transcripts she had made of performances given by many bards in Khams, as well as from consulting handwritten texts of the Epic.

Her work, *La vie surhumaine de Guésar de Ling*, was first published in Paris in 1931, and the English translation appeared in 1933, to general acclaim. In 1940 the Chinese scholar Chenzong Xiang translated it into Chinese in Chengdu, with an introduction by the Chinese Tibetologist Rennei Qiang. This is probably the first time the Epic of Gesar was translated into Chinese. In 1960, the Qinghai Province Folk Literature Research Association (mTsho sngon zhing chen dmangs khrod rtsom rig zhib 'jug mthun tshogs) printed it as an internal resource, an undertaking that had considerable importance for the preservation of the work. In 1984, this Chinese translation was republished in an expanded and revised edition by Chenzong Xiang. There can be no doubt that this publication has had a considerable role in promoting the Gesar epic among Chinese as well as many other nationalities.

Chopa Dondrup, professor emeritus at the Qinghai Nationalities University (Xining), has occupied numerous positions in the educational and cultural affairs of Qinghai, including those of vice-director of Qinghai Cultural Affairs and director of the Qinghai

Gesar Research Institute, as well as in national organizations devoted to the literatures of China's minorities. His many publications on the Gesar traditions include a survey of sites associated with the Gesar cult (*Bod yul gyi ge sar rgyal po'i shul rten gyi nmam bshad rab gsal me long*) and a collection of essays on difficult points in the study of the epic (*Gling ge sar sgrung gi dka' gnad gsal ba'i sgron me*).

Estelle DRYLAND

### **Can Culture Transcend Religion? The Muslim Bards of Baltistan**

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This paper examines whether the conservative Muslims bards of Baltistan reinforce socio-cultural and religious distinctions or bring about their dissolution through recital of the Buddhist-oriented Tibetan epic King Kesar of Ling. In Shi'a majority Skardu, the major town, no objections were voiced when I edited, compiled and later taped a local rendition of this ancient Tibetan epic. However, this was not the case when compiling ancient Balti love songs. Nor was it the case in Hushe, located 150 kms from Skardu, where recitation of the Kesar epic is discouraged by the Nurbakhshi sufi majority. This paper explores the religio-cultural factors that underpin these differences and argues that cultural events occur in contested spaces. In the instance of recitation, disputes are conditioned by differing socio-political and religious expectations not only between inhabitants, but between internal and external religio-cultural influences. In the case of Baltistan, which has been administered by Pakistan since 1948, can imposition of the latter's post-independence adopted Arabo-Persian culture effectively impact upon Baltistan's literary culture, elements of which reflect nostalgic echoes of a distant Buddhist past? This paper argues (with particular reference to the Baltistan versions of King Kesar of Ling), that cultural forms can transcend religious strictures in specific socio-political milieux.

New Zealand-born Estelle Dryland graduated BA in Indian Studies and Religious Studies from Sydney University in 1988, and MA from Sydney University in 1991 (*The Life and Work of Punjabi Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz*). She graduated PhD from Macquarie University, Sydney in 1999 (*Poetry and Identity: Aspects of Cultural Dominance and Cultural Survival among the Muhajirs of Pakistan*). In 1999 she was invited to teach English to the hospital staff in Kharmang valley, Baltistan. She returned in 2000 to compile and edit the Stak valley version of King Kesar of Ling, and returned again in 2003 when she recorded the Sundus valley version of the epic. She is currently an Honorary Associate at Macquarie University.

Iffat FATIMA

**Film: The Kesar Saga**

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The Kesar Saga is an ancient Tibetan epic narrated in the entire Tibetan belt, extending into Mongolia, parts of central Asia and China. The story essentially revolves around the exploits of a super human hero, Kesar, and his efforts to establish peace and order in the world. The present documentary film is about the recitation of the Kesar Saga in the Ladakh region, a high altitude desert situated within the mighty Himalayas. Here, during long winter months when temperatures fall well below –30 degrees C, professional storytellers narrate the Kesar Saga. The film is a document of life in Ladakh, where Buddhism first arrived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and then Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. However, the ethos and influence of shamanism, which was prevalent here prior to the coming of Buddhism is still potent. Through the story and its telling the film attempts to explore the multi-layered cultural formation of this fascinating Himalayan region.

Iffat Fatima is an independent documentary filmmaker from Kashmir, based in Delhi. Her documentary films include: *Lanka, the other side of war and peace* (2005), on the history of overlapping conflicts in Sri Lanka; *The Kesar Saga* (2000), which explores the storytelling tradition in the Himalayan region of Ladakh; *In the Realm of the Visual* (1998), on one of India's most prolific and versatile artists and designers, Dashrath Patel; *Boojh Sakey to Boojh* (1996), on the contemporary understanding of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet and scholar Amir Khusro. Currently she is working on the issue of Enforced Involuntary Disappearances in Kashmir.

George FITZHERBERT

**Gesar's Familiars**

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The distinctive narrative and poetic fabric of the Gesar genre entwines a warp of clanic and chivalric concerns with a weft of shamanistic and Buddhist tantric themes. On the one hand we have the tale's worldly emplotment: its clanic, social and economic context, and the great wealth of personal names and toponyms that go along with it. On the other hand, is the epic's spirit-world orientation: the epic as a playing out in the human realm of the dualistic cosmic battle between forces of Light and Darkness (*dkar phyogs* vs. *nag phyogs*); the importance of the vertically-arraigned spirit-world cosmography of the *lha*, *klu* and *gnyan*; and the hero's central project of "liberating" and "arraigning in

peace” (*bde la bkod*) the Middle Realm’s unruly world of numina: *srin*, *’dre*, *the’u rang* and so on. The shamanistic quality of Gesar’s heroism is particularly evident in the important role played (in all versions) by the hero’s familiars spirit-helpers who are promised to the hero in the heavenly realms as a condition for his acceptance of the mission in the middle realm of humans (*bar mi’i yul*). This paper will explore the most prominent of these “familiars”, including: the zoomorphic *drala* and *werma* warrior spirits, headed by the “tiger spirit” Nyentak Marpo (“red tiger *nyen*”); the hero’s personal guiding goddess Manene (from the archaic *sman* class of female divinities); the hero’s “fathers” among the *lha*, *klu* and *gnyan*, especially his body-god (*sku lha*) *gnyan* ‘father’, Nyen Gerzdo, and his theriocephalic birth companions: the *khyung*-headed “elder brother” (*phu bo dung khyung dkar po*), the snake-headed “younger brother” (*nu bo klu sbrul ’od chung*), and the “sister” radiant essence-drop (*sring lam thig le ’od ’phro*)

George FitzHerbert is currently a Departmental Lecturer in Tibetan Studies at Oxford University. He has Masters degrees from London (SOAS) and Harvard Universities, and received his DPhil. from Oxford in 2008. Between periods of academic teaching, he works as a freelance researcher, editor and ghostwriter, based in Oxford. He has travelled to many parts of the Tibetan plateau over the past twenty years. His main area of academic research is the chivalric, shamanistic and tantric Gesar epic tradition.

Gregory FORGUES

### **Gesar in the Rituals and Practices of the 19th Century *Ris med* Movement**

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The Tibetan epic of Gesar narrates the life, adventures, and deeds of Gesar, a manifestation of Padmasambhava, who is sent to earth to destroy demons threatening the land of Gling in order to protect *buddhadharma*. A later religious development found in Mongolia and Tibet is the propitiation of Gesar as a *dharma* protector, and later, as a *yi dam* and even a manifestation of the guru. In the Eastern Tibetan region of Khams, rituals to propitiate Gesar—some of them being in fact full-fledged *sādhana*s—have been ‘retrieved’ as treasure-texts (*gter ma*) by lamas belonging to the *ris med* movement. The list of authors who have composed at least one work related to Gesar practices consists of the most prominent figures of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century *ris med* tradition: ’Jam mgon Kong sprul, ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po, mDo mkhyen brtse, mChog ’gyur gling pa, Nyag bla padma bdud ’dul, and ’Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho, among others. Their *gter mas* and related practice texts associated with Gesar constitute a

corpus of Vajrayāna literature that is distinct from the epic. Although most of these practices are Buddhist tantric propitiatory and apotropaic rituals aiming at increasing auspiciousness, happiness, and longevity, they cannot be reduced to this single function. In his *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet* (1959), Stein mentioned the close association between Gesar and rDzogs chen. A detailed examination of Gesar practices written by major figures of the early *ris med* movement shows that rDzogs chen terminology is in fact a distinctive feature of these texts.

Gregory Forgues lives in Vienna, Austria. He is a research fellow at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Documentation of Inner and South Asian Cultural History (CIRDIS - University of Vienna). He is currently completing his PhD dissertation on 'Ju Mipham's interpretation of the two truths and his MA thesis examined Gesar rituals in the early Ris med tradition. The main focus of his current research is Buddhist philosophy and logic (Śāntarakṣita's Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis and 'Ju Mi pham rGya mtsho's presentation of Madhyamaka as well as pramāṇa) in relation to Buddhist practice. Gregory serves as a member of the Khyentse Foundation Academic Development Committee and is a board member of the 84000 translation project.

Frances GARRETT

### **Gesar's Therapeutic Geographies**

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This paper will examine portions of Gesar stories that portray the natural landscape as possessing healing or therapeutic power. I will focus on landscape descriptions in four lesser-studied Gesar episodes, the *Tsari Mendzong*, the *Malaya Mendzong*, the *Lima Mendzong* and the *Shangshang Mendzong*, all of which have particular ties to Tibetan medical traditions. Scholars of sacred space and pilgrimage have examined how historical narratives are embedded in local landscapes, how morality is place-specific, and how ritual is used to interact with natural features of the environment. I will consider how these theoretical approaches may be combined with others from field of health geography, which examines the links between well-being and place, to help us think about how the *Mendzong* episodes construct landscape as a healing agent, and how interacting with nature is portrayed as an integration of both “place” and “history” with embodied experience.

Frances Garrett is Associate Professor of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies and Associate Chair of the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto, where she has taught since 2003. Her research considers the intersections between tantric practice, ritual and occult knowledge and medical theory, and what these tell us about

the processes of institutional and ideological change in Tibet. In progress are articles about the connections between the Gesar epic and medicine or healing and a book-length study of occult and alchemical technologies in early Tibetan literature with a focus on languages of consumption. She is also beginning a project on Himalayan mountain stories.

Frantz GRENET

### **An Historical Figure at the Origin of Gesar of Phrom: *From Kēsar, King of Kabul (738-745)*—The State of Current Research**

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In 1966 the German Iranist Helmut Humbach proposed, for the first time, to identify the prototype of Gesar of Phrom with a king of Kabul whose name he had deciphered on inscribed coins in Bactrian: *From Kēsar*, “Caesar of Rome.” Since then, research has advanced considerably, above all thanks to Nicholas Sims-William’s reading of other coin inscriptions proclaiming a victory over the Arabs and, more recently, to an article by Minoru Inaba reexamining the available sources in all languages. (“From Kesar the Kābulšāh and Central Asia,” in M. Alram, D. Klimburg-Salter, M. Inaba, M. Pfisterer (eds.), *Coins, art and chronology II*, Vienna 2010, pp. 443-455). The impact of this sovereign, despite his brief reign, may be explained by his being situated at the point of convergence of several historical phenomena: intensive diplomatic activity in both directions through the West Himalayan passes in opposition to Arab, Tibetan and Chinese expansion; the reassertion of the political heritage of Sassanian Iran; prophecies of an expected end to Arab domination at the end of a century; and the notion of four “Kings of the World,” which led this Turkic prince of Kabul to claim the title of co-ruler to the Byzantine emperor, the only other power at the time that seemed capable of defying the Arabs. It remains to be explained why it was that this king, who seems not to have been an ally of the Tibetan empire, reappeared some centuries later as a national hero in Tibet.

Frantz Grenet holds the chair in History and Culture of Pre-Islamic Central Asia at the Collège de France. By training an archeologist, he has worked extensively in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and elsewhere in Central Asia as researcher of the French National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS). His many publications, dealing with a broad range of topics in the archeology of Central Asian religions and related fields, include *Les pratiques funéraires dans l'Asie centrale sédentaire, de la conquête grecque à l'islamisation* and, as editor, *Histoire et cultes et monuments de l'Asie centrale préislamique*, he is also among the co-authors of the multi-volume *History of Zoroastrianism* initiated by the late Mary Boyce. His current projects include the publication of the results of the French archaeological missions in Samarkand and Sogdiana.

Mireille HELFFER

### **The Epic of Gesar: Written Versions and Oral Tradition**

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Although the Tibetan epic of Gesar was classified by UNESCO in 2009 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, and China has announced a preservation program for a period of nine years (2009-2018), it nevertheless seems useful to recall the interest of the first sound recordings that were collected by European researchers beginning in the 1950s, and that remain for the most part unpublished. The inventory and content analysis of these precious documents, which are conserved in the archives of different institutions and which include some that were certainly transmitted directly by Professor Rolf A. Stein, permit us to understand the modalities of epic chant in Tibet, as it was practiced prior to the political upheavals of the late twentieth century and as a number of elderly singers had conserved in memory. The transmission of this heritage to the Bibliothèque nationale de France is in the course of realization.

Mireille Helffer, born in 1928, is honorary director of research at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and member of the Center for Ethnomusicological Research (LESC/CREM). From the beginning of her career, she has devoted herself to the study of the musical traditions of the Himalayas, and has pursued this in the course of numerous fieldtrips to India and Nepal, and among Tibetan populations in exile. Her publications have touched varied fields including the musicians' castes of Nepal, the chants of the Tibetan Gesar epic, and the vocal and instrumental liturgical repertory of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, with reference to the study of Tibetan musical notation, texts concerning music, and recordings of ceremonies realised *in situ*. For over a quarter century, she has collected and analysed in particular the repertory of Zhechen monastery, to which she has devoted many articles.

Lama JABB

### **Currents of the Tibetan National Epic in Contemporary Writing**

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The immeasurably long narrative poem centred on the legendary deeds of King Gesar is epic not just because of its sheer poetic length and its theme of heroic exploits, but also because it reflects Tibetan culture and society in their diversity and permeates the speech, conduct and psyche of the Tibetan people in a variety of ways. Moreover, it provides national cohesion: although the action of the Gesar epic takes place on a grand scale incorporating earth, heaven and other supernatural realms it originates and returns to a Tibetan world radiating out of Ling. Therefore, it is not surprising to detect the presence of the Gesar

epic in contemporary Tibetan writing. While acknowledging the endurance of it as a living epic tradition my paper will explore its influence on contemporary Tibetan fiction writers and poets. I will demonstrate its abiding impact by drawing attention to the ways in which they embrace the Gesar epic as a narrative of national survival and receive it as a source of poetic inspiration. The currents of its lyricism, proverb-crammed language and vernacularism flow within today's fictional work and poetry. The Tibetan national epic continues to be a unifying force as it remains a rich source of shared ideas, understandings and poetic images for a new generation.

Lama Jabb is the Junior Research Fellow in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Wolfson College, University of Oxford. He achieved a BA Honours degree in Political Science and MSc in International Relations from the University of London, and completed his DPhil in modern Tibetan literature at Oxford University with a dissertation entitled *Modern Tibetan Literature and the Inescapable Nation*. With Wim Van Spengen he co-edited *Studies in the History of Eastern Tibet* (2009).

Matthew T. KAPSTEIN

### **From Epic to Allegory: The Annihilation of Yama in Ü**

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The well-known Buddhist teacher Kalu Rinpoche (Karma Rang-byung-kun-khyab, 1905-1989) is widely remembered for his tireless efforts to promote the Dharma, above all through the numerous centers—some intended for urban laypersons and others for the traditional program of the three years in intensive retreat—that he created in many parts of Asia, Europe and North America. He was most closely associated with the rare Shangs-pa bka'-brgyud lineage, but, in the spirit of the Ris-med master 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas (1813-1899), whose incarnation he was believed to have been, he taught impartially, though with an emphasis on the Bka'-brgyud and Rnying-ma-pa traditions. What is less appreciated is that he was also the author of an extensive new chapter of the Gesar epic, entitled "The Annihilation of Yama in Ü" (*dbus 'chi bdag cham la phab pa*), which was by far his most considerable written work. The chapter, as I will show here, is representative of a broad trend in Khams whereby the epic was in effect transformed into a Buddhist tantric allegory. The ritual counterpart of this development is found in the liturgies of the Gesar cult composed above all by Mi-pham rnam-rgyal (1846-1912), and widely promulgated in connection with the so-called Ris-med movement. For

comparative purposes we may turn to certain of the Rāmāyaṇa traditions, including the Thai national epic, the Ramakien, in which Rāma’s battle with Rāvaṇa retraces a cosmic struggle, much as does the confrontation of Gesar with Yama in Ü, while at the same time expressing an allegory of the individual’s struggle for spiritual perfection.

Matthew T. Kapstein is directeur d’études in the division of religious studies of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris and Numata Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago. He is also director of the Tibetan Studies research team of the CRCAO. His publications include *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation and Memory*, *The Tibetans*, and the edited volumes *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience* and *Buddhism Between Tibet and China*.

Matthew KING

### **King Gesar in Real and Empty Time: Notes from the Oeuvres of Sumpa Khenpo, Palden Yéshé, and Zavaa Damdin**

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Sumpa Khenpo Yéshé Peljor (1704–1788) was a celebrated Inner Asian exemplar of Qing cosmopolitanism. His occasionally heterodox works expanded the form and content of knowledge produced within Géluk monasteries at the Sino-Tibeto-Mongolian interface. Whether charting the night sky, surveying linguistic diversity in his Amdo homeland, or treating infectious disease, Sumpa Khenpo’s turn to sensory evidence and experimentation continues to intrigue scholars eager to find modernity in Inner Asia. Here I will survey Sumpa Khenpo’s novel differentiation of historical and enlightened Gesars in conversation with the Sixth Panchen Lama, Palden Yéshé (1738–1780). I will then turn to the wide circulation of these Gesar histories over the following century, culminating in the work of Zavaa Damdin (1867–1937), a Khalkha monk writing against the coercion of state socialism in Mongolia. I conclude by reflecting on the allure of an indigenous “scientific” historiography of Gesar for religious revivalists and scholars alike.

Matthew King is Assistant Professor in Transnational Buddhism at the University of California, Riverside. His doctoral dissertation examined the (auto)biography and historiography of the Khalkha Mongol Zawa Damdin Luwsandamdin (1867-1937), written during the Qing-socialist transition. He is interested in Geluk monastic mediations of imperial collapse and modernist movements at the Tibet-Mongol interface, especially in relation to science, socialism, and economics. Since 2010, he has been a researcher for ‘Gesar and Healing Topographies in Inner Asia’, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded initiative to examine the intersection of medicine, ritual, and landscape in the Gesar epic.

### **From Collective Memory to Individual Memory: Three Stages in the Evolution of the Gesar Epic**

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The identity of Tibetan Gesar singers has passed through three stages: collective memory, individual memory and professionalism/semi-professionalism. A living epic is composed of three elements: singer, text and context, which interact with one another to affect the rise and decline of the epic, such as Gesar. At the stage of collective memory, the context consisted of myth and irrational thought, with no professional individuals to perform the epic. There is saying: “the mouth of each of person in the Ling tribe holds a different version of Gesar.” The story of the epic reveals features of very ancient culture preceding the introduction of Buddhism, as seen in the lower Ladakhi version and Guide Version from Qinghai. The most distinctive feature of the second phase, that of Individual Memory, was the flourishing of pan-Buddhistic beliefs among the eastern nomadic areas of Tibet where the epic originated, and individual memory then became the vector of the epic tradition. The performance of the epic likely became the privilege of a small number of people, singers who were followers of Buddhism, and collective memory subsequently declined. Afterward, various types of singers, such as *'bab-sgrung* (through dreams and spirits), *gter-sgrung* (through excavating “hidden treasures”), *pramkhan* (through mirror divination), *dag-snang* (through “pure vision”), *rtogs-pa nyams-sher* (through “insight”), appeared one after another to begin to bring about Buddhistic texts. The stage of professionalism/semi-professionalism is a product of modern and post-modern culture. Since the 1980s, a number of singers who lived in remote nomadic areas have been accepted into relevant organizations of government as professional singers. Because of the transformation of social identity, the epic has undergone major structural changes, which has tended to bring about its decline as a living tradition in the following respects: a) standardized education and the increased use of written language have been challenging the purity of oral tradition, and encouraged adaptation to a literary style, as in the case of the bard Tenzin Drakpa; b) the urban environment has compromised the poetic thinking of singers, as in the case of the bard Yumen; and c) post-modern consumer culture has been had a negative impact on singers’ motives for performance.

Norbu Wangdan is a Tibetan from Guide, Qinghai Province. He received his Ph.D. in Chinese Literature from the graduate school of CASS in 2001. He is now Deputy Director of The National Leading Group for Epic Gesar Research, Secretary-General of the Association of Gesar studies, and Editor-in-chief of the China Tibet Information Center. His work focuses on Tibetan religions, literary and ethnological studies on epic Gesar, etc. He is the author of *Xizang Difang Yu Zhongyang Zhengfu Guanxi Shi* (History of Relationships between Tibet and Central Government, co-author, 1996), *Xizang Renquan Yanjiu* (A Study of Human Rights in Tibet, co-author, 1999), *Zangyu Shenbua yu Shisbi* (Tibetan Mythology and Epic Tradition, 2012), and *Zhibui de Lingguang: Zhongguo Xibu Zongjiao* (Haloes of Wisdom: Religions in Western China).

Charles RAMBLE

### **Tibet's Other Epic: A Tentative Investigation of Common Features in the Gesar Cycle and the Bonpo *gZi brjid***

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Numerous authors have pointed to the influence of Buddhist sources on the development of the biography of Shenrab Mibo, the legendary founder of the Bon religion. In the case of the main biographies – the *mDo 'dus*, the *gZer mig* and the *mDo dri med gZi brjid*, it has been persuasively argued that the single most influential source in all three cases has been the *Lalitavistara*, the composite Life of Shakyamuni that was probably written down in the first century of the Current Era. But the biography of Shenrab is more than a simple adaptation of a pious Buddhist narrative. In many ways, the figure of Shenrab is reminiscent less of Shakyamuni than of the hero of the Tibetan Epic, Gesar. The similarities are more than superficial, and they may not be coincidental. Especially in the case of the *gZi brjid*, the twelve-volume life of gShen rab, there are striking resemblances in terms of both particular motifs and more general structures. Gesar of Ling makes his literary debut as an epic figure in the *Rlangs po ti se ru*, though at this stage many of the later heroic (and especially religious) functions of Gesar are attributed to this work's protagonist, Byang chub 'dre bkol. The *Po ti se ru* was composed at the same time as the *gZi brjid*, which is said to have been “received” in curiously bardic fashion by the enigmatic Blo ldan snying po (1360–?) not far from the area that saw the development of the Gesar epic tradition. Without attempting to propose a direction of literary influence, this paper will highlight a number of features that are shared by the Gesar cycle and the *gZi brjid*, and will suggest, in the light of clues contained in the biographical fragments available for Blo ldan snying po, that certain strands in these works may share a common ancestry.

Charles Ramble is directeur d'études in the History and Philology Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, and a member of the Tibetan Studies research team of the CRCAO. From 2000 to 2010 he held the position of University Lecturer in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies that had recently been established at the University of Oxford, UK, with which he remains associated as a University Research Lecturer. From 2006 to 2013 he was President of the International Association for Tibetan Studies. He is currently co-director of the ANR/DFG-funded research project "The Social History of Tibetan Societies, 17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries". His publications include *The Navel of the Demoness: Tibetan Buddhism and Civil Religion in Highland Nepal* (2008); and *Tibetan Sources for a Social History of Mustang (Népal): volume 1, The Archive of Te* (2008).

Jean-Noël ROBERT

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Jean-Noël Robert, co-covenor of the colloquium, is Professor in Philology of Japanese Civilization at the Collège de France, directeur d'études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études and member of the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. His research has embraced many aspects of Japanese Buddhism and literature, and his publications include translations of the Lotus Sutra (*Sûtra du Lotus, suivi du Livre des sens innombrables et du Livre de la contemplation de Sage-Universel*) and of the classics of Tendai Buddhism (*Quatre courts traités sur la Terrasse Céleste*). Professor Robert is also editor-in-chief of the *Hôbôgirin*, the encyclopedic dictionary of Buddhism first launched by Sylvain Lévi et Takakusu Junjirô.

Geoffrey SAMUEL

### **Namkha Drimed Rinpoche and his Gesar Terchö: Gesar Ritual Practice in Western Buddhism**

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The lama Namkha Drimed Rinpoche, who comes from a mixed Kagyüd-Nyingma background in Eastern Tibet, has revealed a substantial body of rituals centring around Ling Gesar. Namkha Drimed settled in India in the 1960s, re-establishing his tradition of Buddhist practice, the Ripa Ladrang, at the Tibetan settlement of Chandragiri in Orissa. Along with Tashi Tsering, I visited and interviewed him and his family there in January and August 1990. Subsequently, Namkha Drimed, his son Gyetrul Jigme Rinpoche, and other members of this lineage began to visit Europe and North America, a development which led to the opening of a large retreat centre near Bern in Switzerland, which I visited shortly after its opening in 2012. In 2006, one of Namkha Drimed Rinpoche's daughters was married to Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, the son of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, so forming an alliance with a major North American-based

network of Buddhist centres which also had Gesar connections. This paper briefly explores the origins and development of the Ripa Ladrang and the story of Namkha Drimed's Gesar revelations, before examining the efforts of Namkha Drimed and his family to establish Gesar ritual practice in the Western Buddhist context.

Geoffrey Samuel is an Emeritus Professor at Cardiff University, Wales, UK, where he directs the Body, Health and Religion (BAHAR) Research Group, and is also an Hon. Associate at the University of Sydney, Australia. His academic career has been in social anthropology and religious studies. His writings include the books *Mind, Body and Culture* (1990), *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (1993), *Tantric Revisionings* (2005), *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra* (2008) and *Introducing Tibetan Buddhism* (2012), as well as many book chapters and journal articles. His most recent edited book (with Jay Johnston) is *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West* (2013). In addition to ongoing work on the Tibetan epic, his current research interests include Tibetan yogic health practices, Tibetan medicine, and the dialogue between Buddhism and science.

Siddiq WAHID

### **The Practice and Theory of the Ling Gesar**

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It has been well over a century and a half since the story of Ling Gesar first came to light through a summarized German translation of a Mongolian version of it. It was followed about half a century later by the documentation of an exclusively oral version from Ladakh by A. H. Francke, transcribed with summary translations of the episodes. In the 1930s, there appeared Alexandra David-Neel's retelling of an Eastern Tibetan version of it in French. R. A. Stein's study in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century brought home the importance the Ling Gesar to Tibetanists all over the world.

Several aspects, apart from the diversity in languages and dialects, of the Ling Gesar daunt the student of it. First is its sheer size. There are ready reports of how it often takes more than a week to hear the story told in full. Another is the various genres in which it is to be found. Three such that coincide with traditional convictions about its versions are readily identifiable. One of them has a pre-Buddhist "shamanic" sensibility to it and is recited in a trance, without texts to support the recitation. Another appears to resemble the Parry-Lord Theory of oral traditional narrative, and finally there is a version that is primarily textual, often memorized, with a Buddhist susceptibility to it. The paper will begin with a brief review of these varied versions and their implications for the future study of the Ling Gesar.

Following this, the paper will focus on a Ladakhi version of the Ling Kesar (the name of the protagonist is written, and pronounced, Kesar in Ladakh and Baltistan) which is chanted by both Buddhist and Muslim bards. We will briefly recount the content, or the “what”, of the Ladakhi oral versions of the Ling Kesar compared to the literary versions of it. The paper will then compare the Ladakhi storyteller’s method to that of the classic storyteller of oral traditional narrative as described in the Parry-Lord Theory. The paper will conclude by asking why the Ling Kesar is important for a fuller understanding of the Tibetan-speaking peoples in five countries along the Himalayan and Pamir massifs and examine its importance as a reservoir of “folk” wisdom by highlighting some of the life lessons, cloaked in the language of “primitive” thought, which it undoubtedly contains.

Siddiq Wahid was most recently Director of the UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute of Kashmir Studies at the University of Kashmir. Prior to that appointment he was the Founding Vice Chancellor of Islamic University of Science & Technology and prior to that the Maharaja Gulab Singh Chair Professor of History at the University of Jammu. He received his Masters and PhD in Inner Asian and Altaic Studies from Harvard University. He is currently completing a history of the composite State of Jammu & Kashmir between 1835 and 1947 (forthcoming 2015) and writing a monograph on Muslims in the Tibetan-speaking world (forthcoming 2014). Portions of his translation of the Lower Ladakhi Version of the *Gling Kesar*, which was first completed as part of his PhD dissertation, have appeared in several journals and anthologies over the years.

WANG Guoming (Gyeltsen Dorje)

### **A Comparative Investigation of the Tu and Tibetan Epics**

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The Gesar epic has been prevalent in large minority areas, and is of great length and grandiose structure. The epic was an encyclopedia which broadly described Tibetan life. In the course of its transmission, the epic absorbed elements from other minorities and gradually became full of multi-cultural content. Greatly influenced by the Tibetan prototypes, the Tu nationality’s version of Gesar has become a verse-prose epic of considerable length. The Tu nationality is undeveloped, with a population of less than 200,000. The Tu nationality has their own language, but it is unwritten, and most of the oral artists of the epic have already passed away. Wang Yongfu, the only living oral artist of Tu nationality, is frail, and the preservation and protection of the Tu Gesar epic is a matter of great importance. Through the comparison between Tu and the

Tibetan versions of the Gesar epic, this presentation will focus on the dissemination, transmission, oral procedure, form and content in the case of each of the two traditions.

Wang Guoming (b. 1968) is Professor at the Northwest University for Nationalities in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, and director there of the Gesar Research Institute. As the son of Wang Yongfu, the last living singer of the Tuzu (Monguor) version of the Gesar epic, his scholarship has been devoted to the careful recording, transcription and translation (in Tibetan and Chinese) of this extensive oral recension, which combines the Monguor and Amdo Tibetan languages in recitation. His ongoing publication series, *Tuzu Gesar*, is intended to preserve for future generations the linguistic features and narrative and poetic content of this unique bardic tradition.

YANG Enhong

### **The Continuity and Development of the Gesar Oral Tradition in the Early 21st Century: Investigations among Singers of the Younger Generation**

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The Gesar epic, as an orally-transmitted narrative, is a masterpiece created by the Tibetan people and handed down from generation to generation. Having integrated Tibetan ideas and beliefs over different periods, the Gesar epic bears the stamp of time-honored oral practice as well as vivid cultural elements. Although the singers live in different times and reside in different places, these oral performers have each contributed to the vitality of Gesar, making it a living and gigantic epic. Gesar singers have been playing a crucial role in the perpetuation of the epic, and research work on Gesar singers is therefore a key aspect of epic studies.

In the 1980s, the author interviewed more than 40 Gesar performers of the old generation. The majority of these have now, however, passed away, and the rest are too elderly to perform. After an interim of 20 years, thanks to funding from Chinese National Social Science Foundation in 2005, the author carried out field research on junior Gesar singers in a large Tibetan area. Based on these investigations, the present paper will deal with the following main points: 1. the general situation of junior Gesar singers; 2. continuity and creation: the characteristics of performance by young Gesar singers; 3. the particular times and cultural backgrounds from which these young Gesar singers have emerged.

Yang Enhong, a native of Beijing, graduated from the Department of Ethnic Minority Languages and Literatures, Central Institute for Nationalities in 1967 and spent twelve years in inner Tibet learning local language and culture. She is Senior Research Fellow Emeritus, Ph.D. Advisor, and former Director of the Division of Tibetan Literature, as well as Deputy Director of the Oral Traditions Research Center at the Institute of Ethnic Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Her works include: *Ge-sa-er yiren yanjiu* (Investigations and Researches on Singers of Epic Gesar, 1995) and *Zangzu junyu koushubi* (Oral History of Tibetan Women, 2006). She is also co-author of *Meng-zang wenhua guanxi shibua* (History of Cultural Exchanges between Mongolians and Tibetans, 2000).

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