

Bab Sgrung: Tibetan Epic Singers

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Like oral epics from countries around the world, the heroic epic of King Gesar found among Tibetans is mainly popularized in two ways: through oral song and through handwritten copies and woodcuts. However, the most common and the most important factor is reliance upon each singer to hand the tradition down from one generation to the next. Through the process of spreading King Gesar's story, singers and storytellers who are especially gifted play a very important role. They directly create, transmit, and propagate the epic. They are "the people's artists," the artists of the masses; they incarnate the ability and intelligence as well as the spirit of the common person. Those singers who naturally possess extraordinary talents have made contributions to the continuity and development of Tibetan culture. They will always be cherished and held in highest esteem by our children and our children's children. Without their exceptional skills, this great epic could quite possibly disappear from the mainstream of history and from all of Tibetan culture; future generations would lose a precious cultural treasure. In researching the *Gesar* tradition, careful consideration of singers and storytellers is essential.

Different Types of Singers and Storytellers of *Gesar* Epic

Inspired through dreams

Called *bab sgrung* in Tibetan, this type of performer is able to recite *Gesar* epic solely through the medium of dreams. Most of those who are gifted in this way say that when they were young they had a mysterious dream once or twice. Some say that it was so intense that they dreamed continuously and did not wake up for several days. During this time they experienced hallucinations that seemed like their own experiences, as if they had gone on all of King Gesar's expeditions themselves. When they woke up, most were seriously ill for a while. After recovering, they suddenly

changed into another person. They radiated buoyancy and had a quick, agile creativity; it was as if they were watching a film of Gesar playing in their minds. In their hearts they had an uninhibited passion and impetuosity; in the pit of their stomachs they felt extremely depressed. They had an overpowering urge to tell the story of Gesar: indeed, if they did not recite it they would feel unhappy and uncomfortable. Once they started, it was as if the narration were a mighty river flowing quickly—never exhausted, and neither deviating from nor hesitating to follow the storyline. This pace would be kept up for a few days, a few months, or a few years, to the point that even if they were to continue for a whole lifetime they still could not finish the story.

Some people are puzzled and not entirely convinced when encountering this type of phenomenon. Is it mysterious? Is it impossible to believe? Most of the singers and storytellers themselves have thought as much in the past and think as much presently. Thrapa, Samthrub, Ngangring, Gyumen, Tsering Wangdu, and Tsedon—all of these talented artists, perhaps unknown to readers of *Oral Tradition*—have lived among their own people. Is it believable for them? We do not have any scientific means or method of proving the phenomenon true.

Old Man Thrapa chanted 25 cantos in his lifetime. Due to the efforts of the Gesar Research Institute at the University of Tibet, a total of 600,000 lines of poetry and 6,000,000 words have been transcribed and acoustically recorded. What is the point of counting all these lines and words? His recorded repertoire corresponds to 25 times the length of Homer's epics, 15 times the length of the Indian epic *Ramayana*, three times the length of *Mahabharata*, and five times the length of the classic Chinese novel *The Dreams of the Red Chamber*. These numbers are remarkable. They enumerate the most systematic, most complete set of singing and storytelling that we have in writing today. It is a legacy and a brilliant tribute to the wisdom and talents of singer Old Man Thrapa.¹

Gyumen, a young female artist, has already told more than 20 cantos and an old performer, Samthrub, has recited more than 40—more than Old Man Thrapa—or approximately 700,000 lines and 7,000,000 words. Tsering

¹ The recordings of Thrapa are stored in the Gesar Research Institute of Tibet University. He sang *The Divine Celestial Kingdom* (Chinese: *Xian jie zhan bu*). There are also portions published by Beijing Minorities Publishing House and the People's Publishing House of Tibet.

Wangdu, from Zikanggula Mountain, is able to tell 120 cantos and has already performed seven of them. These are not rumors, but actual realities.²

Inspired through enlightenment

In Tibetan *dag snang sgrung* means to suddenly “see the light.” Since it is sudden enlightenment, the singer has only a very short recollection that quickly passes away. This sort of artist is not called *bab sgrung* (which implies one able to recite many cantos for long periods of time). Usually those who experience sudden awareness can tell only one or two cantos for a short period of time. While they are telling the story they do so vividly, dramatically, and passionately, and then after a while they simply stop speaking. If others ask them to tell the story, they are unable to do so and say that they do not have any knowledge. Sometimes some of them perform with true gusto and excitement, but at other times they are totally unable to perform at all. It is as if they changed into altogether different people. The example of this type of artist significantly increases the mysteriousness of the phenomenon of *Gesar* epic singing.

Inspired through hearing

Thos sgrung means listening or hearing in Tibetan. Those who are skilled in this way listen to others tell the story and then themselves are able to tell it. Usually, however, they are able to perform only one or two cantos or a portion of one, such as the “Ode to the horse,” “Ode to the mountain,” “Ode to the hat,” and so on. Most of these bards recognize that their abilities are not supernatural or exceptional; they simply learned by listening to others.

Inspired to chant

In Tibetan the term is *don sgrung*, which simply means to chant. These performers have two characteristics: (1) they are literate and are able to chant from a book, and (2) their vocal quality is fairly good and their

² The recordings of Gyumen and Samthrub are presently stored at the Gesar Office of the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, and are being prepared for publication.

chanting is magnificent. Most of those who appear on radio and TV and as part of other public media performances are of this type.

Inspired through discovering “Hidden treasure”

A literal translation of the Tibetan *dgongs gten* is “a treasure hidden in the heart.” This means that within the heart of this type of performer is concealed a valuable treasure, namely *Gesar*, which they are able to excavate in the same way that a miner digs treasure out of the dark recesses of a mountain. The methodology involved in this excavation is dependence on their own ideas; as a result they are able to perform a lengthy epic that eventually becomes a book of *Gesar* narrative.

This style of propagation is similar to Bon’s “Oral Dissemination of the Scriptures” and Buddhism’s “Hearing Secrets Hidden in the Heart.” According to the translation, Buddha or Xian gave the Buddhist scriptures to certain predestined people for the purpose of the next generation’s fate. Some of these hid the scriptures in their heart (“virtue”) and were grasped at once by the master. Next the Door of Wisdom (*rtsa sgo phye ba*) began to open, and they were able to write books from their continuous inner sources.

As regards this type of storyteller or singer, there is an example that will explain the uniqueness of “artists with hidden secrets.” In the Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Qinghai Province, there is a young man by the name of Guru Jianzan who belongs to this particular class of artists. Guru’s hometown is located in Chunte region. He was orphaned at a very young age and grew up in his uncle’s home. He never attended school and eventually left home to become a lama. When he was in the temple, he studied a little Tibetan, but could only recite simple texts; he was unable even to write a letter in Tibetan. When he was eighteen he married a girl who was a year or two older than he. She very much liked to listen to people recite *Gesar*, and every time a singer came through her area she would rush out to listen to him.

Sometime in 1983, her husband suddenly said to her, “You like *Gesar* so much, I’ll write you a canto. You don’t need to go out to listen to it anymore.” His wife incredulously asked him, “You can tell *Gesar*? When did you study that?” He answered, “There’s no need to study. I’ve always been able to. If you don’t believe me, I will write it out for you to see.” And he actually wrote down a canto entitled *The Prophecy of Dongshi*, the clan from which *Gesar* traditionally descended. When Guru’s fellow villagers saw it, they thought it was well-written and remarkable, so they recommended it to the office that handled *Gesar* in the Golog Tibetan

Prefecture. When the experts saw what he had written, they thought that it really was a unique canto of *Gesar*. They also thought that it was very strange that a person who had never attended school, never written an article or even a letter, could create such an excellent piece of literature. They encouraged him to continue writing now and then, and recently he has completed six or seven additional cantos. The first was formally published by Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House in 1992 and consists of more than 200,000 words.

There are others who think this so-called “tribute to virtue” is strange and do not quite understand it. But Guru Jianzan looks at his ability as though it were perfectly ordinary; he says that perhaps he was one of *Gesar*’s generals wandering the world. In addition, he has claimed that he can write down all of *Gesar*, and has already committed about ten cantos to written form.³

Artists by “circular light”

Pra phab is a Bon technical term in Tibetan. When sorcerers are subduing gods or working divination, they are able to see good or ill luck by looking into a bronze mirror. The entire process is referred to as the “circular light.”

This particular method came to be used by artists telling the epic. Standing before the audience, the narrator places a bronze mirror on a pile of fragrant eucalyptus, and, after reading scripture and praying, begins to sing facing the bronze mirror. It is said that he can see all the exploits of *Gesar* in the mirror. These artists often say that they themselves do not understand *Gesar* at all, but are able to sing his story to the audience from the contents revealed to them. If they do not have the mirror to gaze into, they cannot tell any of the story. However, if any other person looks into it, all he or she will see is his or her own reflection. People explain this reality by maintaining that it is not their “predestination”; only those who are “fated” are able to view King *Gesar*’s exploits in the bronze mirror. There are three types of artists inspired by “circular light”: those able to recite but unable to write *Gesar* epic; those able to write, but unable to recite it; and those able to do both. The last type of artist usually writes the canto and then recites it while looking at what was written. In Leiwuqizong of Chamdo region in

³ The writings of Guru Jianzan are stored in the *Gesar* Institute office in the Golok Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and presently are being prepared for publication. He himself says that he is able to write down all of *Gesar*, a total of 120 books.

Tibet, Khacha Zhapa is a performer of this sort; he has so far written more than ten cantos.

Artists who “excavate treasure houses”

These “excavators” are called *gter don* in Tibetan, meaning “one who digs for the story of *Gesar*.” These storytellers who discover, excavate, and compile *Gesar* become known as “middle virtue.” The greatest distinction of these people is that they are educated and belong to the upper class; there are many who are monks and do not lead the poor lifestyle so typical of singers and storytellers. It could be added that these are a small group of people who come from within their own communities: they are warmhearted, cultured people who are able to organize and pass on *Gesar*.

Some of these excavators may really have found earlier transcripts that they themselves did not—in fact, could not—write. But most of them take notes and organize their story according to the structure and methodology used by singers and storytellers. Afterwards they literally bury these texts and later “excavate” them in the presence of other people, all on the pretense of discovering ancient texts and certifying themselves as authentic. *Gesar* versions as told by this class of artists reveal substantial differences from the original singers’ performances; any new performance will therefore require modifications in the form of additions, deletions, or substitutions.

The last four types of performers all belong to the oral tradition, *kha sgrung*; the fifth and sixth use both orality and literacy. Only the excavators are literate and able to arrange their stories according to the notes they take; most of the transcripts are a result of their own hard work.

If we look at the situation up to the present, more than 200 cantos exist in all China. In addition to the main texts, there are about 120 other cantos. Some of these have been started but not completed, while others include only a few very simple overviews; altogether the incomplete performances number about 40 cantos. Publishers believe that these may be worth examining or using for research, but do not have enough value to publish; at this point, none have appeared or are being considered for publication. Those that contain fairly complete stories, albeit simplistic plots and plain language, reveal that the level of the transcriptions was not that high, but they have enough merit to be published. Finally, there are about 40 cantos that contain complete stories, interesting plots, and rich language that are considered the best of this type. Over the last ten years Old Man Zhapa and more than ten other storytellers have produced about

60% of the total. If we look at the transcriptions of these cantos, the plot, character development, content, and language all are fairly complete, rich, and lively.

From this simple statistical overview, we can see that singers and storytellers still constitute one of the main cultural sources within the communities involved. Of all of the different types, *bab sgrung*, the “dream-induced” performances, are the most critical to *Gesar*; they are also the focal point of our research.

An Ancient Legend

There are many different kinds of storytellers, but in spite of differences in age, origin, life experiences, background, and so on, all of them tell the same story. Take *King Saimacheng* as an example. Old Man Zhapa, from Chamdo, told this canto more than 60 years ago. The bard Yumei Zhengzheng is 60 years younger than he and comes from Nagchu (Black Water), more than 1,000 kilometers away. Most of her life was spent around Kanggula Mountain, where she often tended sheep and yaks. Even farther away on the grasslands of Golok is Ngaring. There are also others whose situation is just as singular, yet when they tell the story of *King Saimacheng* the basic plot and the main characters are mostly the same. They all say that their gift of storytelling came to them via dreams rather than from instruction or influence by any teacher or master. How could such a long, complicated story be committed to memory? Even if it were taught, not every performer would be able to remember it. What do the artists themselves say about this phenomenon? Without prior consultation, they all told this ancient legend:

During the time when King Gesar’s mighty army practiced Buddhism, his concubine, Weisa, was stolen away by a black demon. In order to rescue her, Gesar went to the demon world. Once there, his precious horse happened to step on a frog and Gesar felt terrible. Even though he was the king of a great army, to kill a frog was still a sin. He jumped off his horse, picked up the frog, and began rubbing it gently; he blessed it and begged the gods to protect it. Then he asked that he himself be delivered to the evil demons and the frog be allowed to live among men, saying “May you become like the hairs on a horse of many colors.” But when the frog turned into a man, he became known as Zhongken, Gesar’s own singer. This was the first singer recorded in Tibetan history, and it was the frog incident that brought the two of them together. Later, he became the peripatetic singer for

the huge audience of this vast, snowy land. In fact, all singers are thought to be reincarnations of that frog.

What did Gesar mean in the story when he wished that the frog would be “just like the hairs on the horse of many colors”? Many singers say that there are two levels of meaning. One interpretation begins from the fact that horses have a great deal of hair. Just like the proverbial hairs on one’s head, or grains of sand on the seashore, this phrase implies that no matter how many times the story of *Gesar* is told there will always be more to tell. The other perspective holds that a “many-colored horse” means that horsehair is not just one color, but many and very diverse. If there are discrepancies among the artists who recite *Gesar*, that should not be considered strange; such variety was forecast by the invocation Gesar spoke many years ago.

The Skills of Memory

How can a totally illiterate person, an artist who cannot even write his or her own name, compose multiple cantos, thousands upon thousands of lines of poetry, millions of words? If all this were written down, it would be the equivalent of many very thick books. The world does not boast a poet, writer, or researcher who could recite the tomes of another person. How could these minstrels learn or remember so much? It was mentioned above that there are a few singers who belong to the *bab sgrung* group, the “dreamers.” All of them reported that when they were young they had a mysterious dream; afterwards, they were inexplicably able to recite *Gesar*. What are the ins and outs of the intrinsic relationship between the dream and the epic? Some people think that this explanation is not credible, or even that it is nonsense, superstition, or idealism. When singers discuss such dreams, some people consider what they say to be superstitious religious belief or propaganda; in the past that kind of speech was the subject of much criticism.

How can this confusion revolving around memorization be unraveled? Is it something that can be scientifically explained? We can analyze it from a few different perspectives as seen below.

Environmental factors

There are many ways in which a singer could have obtained the ability to recite *Gesar*. The most important one is environmental factors, including natural, social, cultural, and familial. It is necessary to consider the

interwoven relationships between the singer, his or her culture, and the epic itself. For example, concentrations of present-day *Gesar* singers are found in Ali, Hei He (Nagchu), Golok, and Yushu, as well as regions like Chamdo, Gannan, Gyantse, and Aba. Of these, half of Chamdo and Gyantse is agricultural and half is pastoral (nomadic); the other areas are all pastoral. In addition, all of them have an average elevation of above 4,000 meters. This is not to suggest that there are artists in all of these areas, but to say that the regions where the artists do live are fairly uniform.

Most of the artists are herdsmen; a few are farmers. They come from places with an underdeveloped economy and disadvantaged educational conditions. More than 80 percent of herdsman are illiterate, for example. They live scattered across a vast region where transportation is a major problem, and there is little communication among various communities. Many of them are nomadic, thus meeting a requirement for spreading *Gesar*. Children in these areas are nurtured in an ancient, traditional culture from birth, within which the story of *Gesar* becomes their daily textbook. From the epic they learn culture, astronomy, religion, and their own history; whatever they desire to study, they are able to study in *Gesar*. This kind of experience, from generation to generation, permeates their blood and their soul. On the other hand, Lhasa, Xigatse, or Yadong, powerful and prosperous areas with fairly strong economies and powerful religious structures, have not produced any outstanding singers.

The influence of the home is also a very important factor. Although *Gesar* singers have not had formal education, their families (including distant relatives) have a major influence on their upbringing. For example, Yumei's father, a famous chanter, no doubt had a great influence on her. When she was seventeen years old, he passed away and she took up the mantle. Of course, she did not simply memorize each line and each word, but she was deeply influenced by listening to his chanting from a very early age. Guru Jianzan was eighteen or nineteen when he began to write *Gesar*. Although he had previously neither written nor sung *Gesar* epic, his uncle, with whom he lived for most of his childhood, was also a famous chanter and no doubt heavily influenced Guru. Although Old Man Thrapa did not have any chanters among his immediate relatives, his hometown has several very famous ones. When he was younger, Old Man Thrapa often accompanied them and offered them his help.

Extraordinary art, innate intelligence, and ability

Although environmental and hereditary factors may be present, they do not guarantee that one will be a talented singer. Usually these artists also combine a natural talent and intelligence with an artistic temperament and rich creative skills. In addition, an artist's memory must be above average. Repeating from memory more than ten, not to mention scores of cantos, is extremely difficult for the average person, but for one who has the inborn ability it is possible. Modern science tells us that there is substantial unused storage capacity in the human brain. When we add the cultural atmosphere in which a child grows up, he or she has the potential to be deeply influenced by an adult who is telling a story, and in fact can subconsciously commit the whole mysterious story to memory just through the process of listening. From a scientific point of view, this is plausible and possible, and it means that it is people, not gods, who are creating and passing on the great epic.

Historically, Tibetan religious culture places much importance on reciting memorized texts. Both monks and lay scholars must memorize and recite numerous ancient books and records. Many scholars do not use books or notes to teach others; everything is committed to memory. In order for the listeners to understand the speaker or teacher, they too must memorize many classics and Buddhist scriptures.

Singers and storytellers who grow up in this type of culture can develop a great capacity for memorization as a matter of course. The most important factor is that they travel all around and are able to take in the vast plateau regions, tall mountains, and river valleys. This experience helps to broaden their thinking, open up their minds, and strengthen their memory skills.

Mysterious dreams that open the Door of Wisdom

What special stage must a gifted artist—one who possesses extraordinary innate talents and surpassing memory skills—reach in order to achieve the full development of his or her artistic abilities? According to traditional Tibetan thought, it must first be one's fate; then, one must depend on the gods to open the Door of Wisdom (*rtsa sgo phye ba*). Through dreams they obtain the skills to recite *Gesar* and so fulfill this fate. Then they ask a teacher or lama to read scriptures and pray for them in order to open the Door of Wisdom. Old Man Thrapa, Samthrup, Tsering Wangdu, and the others all went through this sort of process.

This ceremony of reading the scriptures and praying has a psychological as well as sociological benefit (recognition in the sight of the audience). Before this point, they have already acquired the ability to recite *Gesar*. But what exactly was the catalyst that opened that Door of Wisdom? It was the dream, that mysterious dream. In earlier times dreams were associated with gods, ghosts, and spirits (the most important being the association between dreaming and the spirits of the dead); it was thought that these spirits were either prophesying, giving direction, or trying to hurt somebody. The singers were the only avenue people had to try to understand dreams. With the rise of modern science, especially the development of psychology, medicine, and biology, there are of course other ways to understand such phenomena.

The results of modern scientific research tell us that the human brain is like a tape recorder: all previous experiences, even unconscious ones, are recorded and remembered. The human being is in fact characterized by the potential ability to remember all information, but there is also the phenomenon of forgetting (imperfect recall); the individual does not even know what it is that he or she is “recording.”

With this type of “recording” in mind, we can see that there are many different ways for memories to surface. Perhaps those who learn *Gesar* through dreaming or through other ways are really only recalling childhood recordings. This is a more scientific way to talk about the same phenomena that others would refer to in religious terms such as “enlightenment” or opening the Door of Wisdom.

Singers say that it is through these mysterious dreams that the Door of Wisdom was opened and that they are able to chant *Gesar*’s story without stopping and without deviating. One could also describe this phenomenon as a “dream-induced method.” If this point of view is tenable, it could help us to fully understand the uniqueness of these singers and the phenomena of dream-induced epics from a traditional philosophical stance.

The structure of Gesar lends itself to memorization

The structure of Tibetan *Gesar* epic is fairly simple and holds to a consistent pattern that is easy to grasp and commit to memory. First, the structure is a syllogism. In *Gesar*, with a few exceptions, the stories are about a war; each story breaks down into the following three parts: the genesis of war, the narrative of the war (the main portion of the story), and the end of the war. The participants come from three areas: the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of men, or the kingdom of dragons. Each country

involved in the war also regularly focuses on three aspects: King Gesar, thirty heroes representing all the high-ranking officers, and the ordinary people. Regardless of what canto is recited, three groups of names must be memorized: those of characters (including gods), places, and things (e.g., weapons of warfare, horses, and so on). Some of the specific details can be forgotten or changed. But the main characters, place-names, and names of important things cannot be forgotten, changed, or mistaken. The literary form of the epic likewise has three features: rhyme or verse, prose, or a combination of prose and rhyme. The main canto consists of the beginning, the body (the main content), and the conclusion. There are many other examples that could further illustrate this structure, but these exemplify the main structure and content necessary for reciting *Gesar*. Without these basic ingredients it is impossible to give a correct rendering.

Impromptu creations are also a common characteristic of folk literature. Because the structure of an epic is grand in scale, involving many different characters and stretching over a long period of time, it is important that it have an extemporaneous element. This becomes especially clear during performances. Since it is not possible for singers to recite the epic completely in one performance (they usually are able to chant only one passage or incident), they remain flexible as to what they perform and how they recite it. Usually they take cues from what they think the audience desires, adding their own individual style. The story may be long or short, involving many or few characters, adding to or subtracting from the customary content—this is all typical of the way the singer “creates” as he or she goes, sensing the mood of the audience.

Looking at this audience-inspired medium, it is important to understand that no telling is identical to another. Performances are not simple repetitions, but dynamic re-creations that spring from the singer-audience interaction. For this reason the singer’s artistic skills, natural talents, and intelligence are crucial, as are the contributions of generations and generations of previous audiences. Without the cooperation of many audiences, the whole energy and vitality of the transmission process would be lost.

Repetition

The repetition of one style or form of chanting is also an important way for the singer to enhance his memory. A distinct characteristic of folk oral literature is that it does not allow the audience the opportunity to see and read the written production, but only to hear it. Written literature can be

pored over, researched, and examined repeatedly, but oral performance provides only the actual instance of chanting or reciting for the audience to understand or take in the story. In order to bring the audience along, the singers or chanters use repetition; in an exciting way they build to the main part and then repeat it. In a story as complex and as vast as *Gesar*, this recurrent style plays an important role both in keeping the audience involved and in helping the singer to recall the storyline. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and other ancient epics, though much shorter than *Gesar*, also make use of this sort of repetition.

Singers and their Tradition

The story about the frog illustrates that the spirit of the singers has not been destroyed, but is changed and wanders the earth. Not a few of these artists believe that they are roaming the earth in the form of the frog that Gesar encountered or that they have some sort of predestined link to Gesar. Old Man Thrapa also believed that men have spirits that can wander the world, but that he was not fortunate enough to be the descendant of a famous general of Gesar; instead, he saw himself as descended from that famous frog who moved through the world. He always told his friends: "After I die, please take my body to Balasehou Mountain; that mountain has much energy and it is only there that my spirit can return to wander the earth." According to his relatives and the sky burial attendant, there was a very obvious horse trail ribbon painted on the top of his skull when he passed away. The idea of the spirits communicating with one another also reflects the attitude towards the artist's creative process. One of the deepest feelings of those who sing *Gesar* is that they are not creating or telling a story, but narrating history. To tell the story of *Gesar* is thus the same as rehearsing the history of Tibetans. For this reason, they want to be a little less entertaining and a little more mysterious.

In the process of contacting *Gesar* performers, I discovered that they are as a rule open-minded, intelligent, and emotional. They have not pursued much in the way of material gain, and are content with a simple, unpretentious lifestyle. They have a philosophy that advocates "never too full and never too hungry," meaning simply that if they were "too full" they would begin to be lazy and indulgent, and if they were "too hungry" they would be too concerned with their next meal to be able to tell *Gesar*. In this world there are not many who are able to achieve this sort of balance. These singers are both subconsciously and self-consciously aware of their responsibility as links in the generations of storytelling. They also have a

profound belief that this ancient epic can be handed down for generations to come. Some performers, when beginning to recite the “Ode to Ballads,” often declare with pride:

Even if one day
A wild, racing horse could change into a withered tree,
A herd of spotless sheep could change into a rock,
A mighty snow mountain disappear without a trace,
If streams and rivers should cease to flow,
If the stars in the heaven should lose their twinkle,
Even if the sun would not rise in the morning,
The telling of *Gesar* will still go on
From generation to generation.

Through researching these outstanding singers of *Gesar*, we can understand the greatness of the epic itself. It is the creation not of just a few people, but of whole generations of Tibetans throughout history. Tibetans have a saying: “In every person’s mountains there is a canto of *Gesar*.” That is, *Gesar* lives in the memory and oral traditions of the people themselves. The existence of such artists is a priceless contribution toward research on the origins and development of literature; all of them offer immeasurable insights. The great heroic epic of *Gesar* created by Tibetans reflects their brilliance, their wisdom, and the treasure of their knowledge.

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