

A Comparative Study of the Singing Styles of Mongolian and Tibetan *Geser/Gesar* Artists

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The epic *King Geser* has been in wide circulation in Chinese Inner Mongolian and Tibetan areas thanks to its continuous singing by generations of local artists. Because artists have brought their individual cultural contexts into it, the epic exhibits distinctive ethnic qualities in different places. Variations are most apparent in singing styles, learning styles, and religious associations. This article compares the singing styles of Mongolian and Tibetan artists and also explores the morphology of the epic and the cultural causes of that morphology.

In recent years we have conducted extensive surveys of Mongolian and Tibetan epic singers within the Chinese border and have successfully identified most of them. The survey found 56 Mongolian and 134 Tibetan artists who were actively performing in the 1980s and 1990s. Each of the 56 Mongolian performers could sing one or more chapters of epic: 13 reside in Qinghai, 28 in Xinjiang, ten in Inner Mongolia, three in Liaoning, and two in Gansu province. Of the 134 Tibetan artists, 45 reside in Tibet, 73 in Qinghai, four in Gansu, six in Sichuan, and six in Yunan province.

Famous Mongolian Singers (*Geserqi*)

Pajai was born in 1902 and died in 1962. He lived in Zhalut, Inner Mongolia. His performances of *The Story of Geser* (60,000 lines, published by the Beijing Nationalities Publishing House, 1989), adapted from the Beijing Wood Engraved Version of *Geser*, reveal strong ethnic and individual characteristics and provide a great cultural heritage for posterity.

Tshanbulaorbu, born in 1924 and died in 1994, lived in BaiLin, Inner Mongolia. His recorded *Geser*, which has over 3 million words and lasts 81 hours, is intriguing, touching, and typical of the BaiLin district.

Sulufenga, born in 1923 and also a native of BaiLin, Inner Mongolia, can sing three chapters of *The Story of Geser*. His recorded performance was edited for internal circulation by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Blobsang, born in 1944 in Chayouzhongqi, can perform many chapters of *The Story of Geser*. His singing was recorded and partially edited for internal circulation by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Wuzer (1906-84) lived in DuLan county, Qinghai province. He could sing six volumes of *Geser*; his performance of the first volume was printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia in 1984.

Xuyaktu was born in 1933 in Kelutqi, Qinghai province. He can sing four volumes of *Geser*, and his performances were recorded and printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Norbu was born in 1931 in Niluke county, Xinjiang. He proved himself able to sing four volumes of *Geser*; his performances were recorded and printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Zhaodorji, born in Hejing county, Xinjiang, could sing five volumes of *Geser*; his performances were also recorded and printed by the Geser Office of Inner Mongolia.

Jiazhone was born in Hebukser Mongolian Autonomous county, Xinjiang. His performance of nine chapters of *Geser* was included in its entirety in the Complete Geser Readers of the Tacheng district.¹

Famous Tibetan Artists (*sgrungmkhan*):

Grag pa, one of the greatest Tibetan singing artists, was born in 1906 and died in 1986. He lived in Dbalvbar county, Chab mdo district, Tibet. Considered by many to be divinely inspired, he showed himself able to sing 34 large volumes and 12 smaller volumes of *Gesar*. His performances, recorded by Tibetan University, last 998 hours, consist of 26 volumes, and have all been transcribed, with five volumes published. The Nationality Publishing House has decided to print all 26 volumes of his performance.

Bsam grub was born in 1922 in Stengchen county, North Tibet. Also considered to be a divinely inspired singer, he knew 18 large volumes, 18 middle-sized volumes, and 18 smaller volumes of *Gesar*. He has recorded 52 volumes, a total of 2312 hours of performance.

¹ The part of this paper on Mongolian artists is based on Gereljab 1994. Geser is the form of the hero's name in Mongolian epic, Gesar in Tibetan epic.

A dar (1911-90) lived in Nagchu county, Tibet. As a divinely gifted artist and sorcerer (one who can draw out sickness from a patient by means of an auspicious scarf), he recorded seven volumes of his performances and was well known in his region.

Kha tsha pra pa nyang dbang rgyamtsho was born in 1913 and died in 1992. He spent his life in Chab mdo ri bo che county, Tibet. As a *bra-sgrung* artist, he copied 11 volumes from a bronze mirror.² One of them, entitled *Tidkar*, has been published by the Tibetan People's Publishing House.

Tshe ring dbang vdus was born in 1929 in Amdo, Tibet. He claims that he can perform 148 volumes of the epic under divine inspiration. He has recorded his performances in the Geser Research Institute in Qinghai, where he is an associate professor. He has completed nine volumes, 620 hours of recording, and has published two volumes.

Guy sman was born in 1957 in Sog county, Nag chu district, Tibet. She can sing 74 volumes of the epic. She is now a middle-level staff member of the Tibetan Social Sciences Academy, where she is recording her performances. She has completed 23 volumes and 859 hours of recording.

Nyag ri was born in 1938 in Sgar sde county, Mgolog, Qinghai province. He is regarded both as a living Buddha and as a divinely inspired artist. He can sing 20 volumes of the epic and is very well-known locally.

Gu ru rgyalmtshan was born in 1967 in Sgar sde county, Mgolog, Qinghai province. As a *gter sgrung* artist (one who draws out Gesar epic from either the material or spiritual world by means of special Tibetan sayings), he claims that he can write 120 volumes of the epic. Now a staff member of the People's Arts House in Mgolog, he has transcribed 11 volumes.

Tshe dbang vgyur med (1915-93) lived in Spra chen county, Nagchu district, Tibet. He could sing 23 volumes of *Gesar* and recorded 13 volumes of the epic.

Tshe ring dgra vdus was born in 1969 in Shan rtsa county, Nagchu district, Tibet. He claims that he can sing 34 volumes of the epic and has recorded three volumes.

Rig vdzin rdo rje was born in 1925 in Gsertha county, Sichuan province. He can sing 29 volumes of the epic and has recorded one volume.

² *Bra-sgrung* artists are said to be able to "see" Gesar epic by looking into a bronze mirror. Such individuals may also tell fortunes via this method.

These Mongolian and Tibetan artists lived in wide stretches of land and have sung epics that shared similar plots and the same protagonist—King Geser. However, ethnic and geographical variations have resulted in rather salient differences in their pre-performance rituals, melodies, language, accompaniment, and costumes.

Pre-performance Rituals

The Mongolian Ordos version of *Geser* contains a chapter entitled “Offer Incense.” According to this source, the performance must be preceded by such rituals as offering incense, lighting the offer lamp, and paying respects, all of which are meant to secure happiness and protection against evil. But such rituals are no longer common in the daily lives of Mongolian artists.

In most Tibetan areas, “Offer Incense” is a required ritual. Singers place their offerings within incense burners in the courtyard or in front of their houses; these consist of grains and drops of water on piles of cypress branches and leaves, as well as Chinese mugwort, Chinese photinia, and other plants, all of which they then burn.

There is a popular saying among Mongolians: any story is easier to tell than *Geser*. This is because they believe Geser to be a god, and therefore sublime and not to be spoken of casually. The Mongolian artist Blobsang has said that *Geser* is sacred and that only a highly skilled and devoted person can sing it. This particular epic is usually sung in areas where disasters have taken place with the aim of summoning Geser to lend his help and protection. During festivals, Geser epic can also be sung to bring about happiness and confer blessings. Outside of these specific performance contexts Blobsang tells only assorted anecdotes related to the epic. When he does sing the epic, he must sit straight, covering his legs with his Mongolian robe, and must not cross his legs, smoke, or drink alcohol. Usually, he dares not even mention the name of Geser lest the King overhear him and grow angry.

Mongolian artist Sulufenga recalled how he first heard *Geser*: when he was 16 years of age, there was a plague that killed many cows and sheep in his hometown, BaiLin. The residents invited to their village the verbal

artist Purung, who impressed Sulufenga to such an extent that he then took up the *huqin* and learned to sing the epic.³

Every Mongolian artist says a silent prayer in order to receive King Geser's permission for his performance. In the prayer, they announce the volumes or chapters they wish to perform and ask Geser to pardon them if they sing anything incorrectly.

Some artists practice certain unique rituals: Sulufenga says that before he sings of Geser's expeditions he calculates the timing and the direction of these expeditions. Only when the direction of the traditional Eight Diagrams matches the direction of the expedition will he begin singing. If the two directions do not match, he will have to change the expedition in order for Geser to achieve victories. His calculation follows certain prompts, such as "Calculations on the chart of Eight Diagrams tell the precise direction of Geser's expedition; the Heavenly, Stems, Earthly, Branches must coordinate well." Allegedly, anyone who is able to memorize these lines can discover the right timing and directions.

Prior to their performance, Tibetan artists must sit for a while in order to relax and concentrate; this preliminary enables them to play their roles and begin singing. Some Tibetan artists pour a glass of wine, dip their ring finger into it, and then flick drops of wine toward the sky, earth, and human realm in order to win protection from these three levels. They then sip a bit of wine and begin to sing. Most of the artists living in Mgolog, in Qinghai province, and the Nagchu district in Tibet observe this ritual.

Many performers count beads, close their eyes, and sit for a while before praying. There are two kinds of prayers: one is meditation, in which the performer seeks the Buddha and King Gesar to bless his performance; the other requires the performer to say aloud the prayers that serve as the prelude for the singing of epic. As the Gesar epic began to circulate and be recorded, pre-performance rituals blended into the performance itself and have consequently become part of written versions. In current notebooks, hand-copied versions, and wood-engraved versions, many chapters and volumes begin with prayers that pay respect to the gods and seek their protection and blessing. Such prayers previously served as preparations for the performance and were standard rituals unrelated to the epic. Since prayers gradually appeared at the beginning of epic performances, they in time became the opening of the poem itself.

³ *Huqin* is a general term applied to certain two-stringed instruments played with a bow during traditional performances. The *choor* (mentioned below) is similar to a *huqin* but is further defined by the decorative horse head adorning it.

The Language of Singing

In provinces and regions inhabited by Mongolians, including Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Hebei, Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, *Geser* epic has circulated in both oral and written versions. Comparatively speaking, the written version is more widespread, but oral circulation is currently the more favored medium in Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia, with each region supporting a distinct, identifiable local version. Because each region has its own dialect, *Geser* has a variety of sources in addition to the general tradition; consequently, each version has developed different language characteristics. The Xinjiang and Inner Mongolian versions are based on the Beijing Wood Engraved Version of *Geser* and hence share structural similarities. But the Xinjiang version has also been influenced by the local epic *Jianggar* and other indigenous epics, thereby giving it strong Xinjiang characteristics, such as the Vilad dialect. The Inner Mongolian version has also been affected by indigenous epics and therefore bears strong Mongolian features, including the eastern dialect. The Qinghai version has taken its influence directly from the Tibetan *Gesar* and is thus closer to the oral version of the Tibetan epic. The regions of Qinghai shared by Tibetans and Mongolians have likewise made the language of *Geser* performances different from those of Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia. Some artists even perform a bilingual *Geser* by singing a section in Tibetan and then paraphrasing the same section in Mongolian.⁴

The Mongolian versions of *Geser* show a great deal of poetic variation; some sections have the same rhyme scheme while others differ. In ancient times, the epic used to be strictly poetic and included no spoken narrations, but due to the influence of storytelling from the Han nationality, spoken narrations began to appear in the epic (Yun 1997). Over time, the epic also incorporated many spoken expressions from the vernacular, thus making it more vivid and easily understandable. Its narratives and dialogues have adopted many idioms, slang expressions, words of praise, and rhetorical devices such as metaphor, exaggeration, and personification, all of which give the epic distinctive ethnic qualities.

The Tibetan version of *Cesar* is in wide circulation in the Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces where Tibetans live, as well as in Tibet itself, and it flourishes especially in the pastoral areas where the Amdo dialect and the Kham dialect are spoken. In the tradition of Tibetan

⁴ The bilingual Tibetan-Mongolian version of *Geser* is very similar to that which is in wide circulation among the Tu nationality in Qinghai. These indigenous people use two languages in their performance, singing in Tibetan and then elaborating in the Tu dialect.

storytelling, this version consists of both prose and verse. The prose narrates the plot while the verse serves as the medium for dialogues and expresses emotional content. Generally speaking, the verse sections are proportionally larger than the prose. When the artists do relate prose narratives, their voices rise and fall, they often vary their speed of delivery, and the narration gives the impression of rhyme. The words are taken from the popular *glu* folk songs or the free style of folk songs. The prose consists of many sections, each having numerous lines of seven or eight syllables. The Tibetan style of *Gesar* is vivid in language and expression as well as in its collection of words of praise and idioms.

Method of Singing and Musical Accompaniment

High standards are required of the Mongolian artists who narrate and sing: they perform not only *Geser*, but also *Jianggar*, *Holbo*, and other stories of praise; some artists even tell stories from literary sources, such as “The Marsh Rebels” and “The Story of the Three Kingdoms” (which originated among the Han nationality). Unlike their Tibetan counterparts, they do not specialize in *Geser*: their performance of that epic is always related to other folk performances. The Mongolian artists play a musical instrument such as a *huqin* or *choor* while singing a story. In the past, a *choor* was used only in singing epics and a *huqin* in telling stories or *ülger*, *Holbo*, and narrative poems. Under the Han influence of storytelling, however, the Geserqi have replaced the *huqin* with the *choor* (Yun 1997). Today the *choor* is used only in singing words of praise and in stage performance, whereas the *huqin* has become the portable musical instrument of the storyteller and the Geserqi. The reliance of the artists on the *huqin* is made explicit in a song by Pajai:

My beloved huqin,
As your elder brother I am old.
But I will never forget you;
For my life,
You will tell the words of my heart.

The artists singing *Geser* in Xinjiang and Qinghai generally do not employ any musical instruments. Their singing is similar to that of Tibetan artists, but their melodies have more Mongolian traits.

Likewise, the singing of *Gesar* in Tibetan areas is usually not accompanied by music. The melody of *Gesar* sung in the Tibetan Amdo

region is close to that of the local *glu* folk songs. In Kham, it is closely related to that of the regional folk music; Tibetan melodies “have common characteristics: they are simple, unsophisticated, highly narrative, and conducive to chanting” (Bkra shis dar rgyas 1988).

There are various melodies called *rda* in the epic sung by Tibetans. In the Tibetan region of Yulshul, Qinghai province, there is a rich variety of melodies that can be classified as choral melodies, person-specific melodies, and person-specific divertimenti. Artist Tshe ring dbang vdus even prepared a special melody for each of the 18 large volumes and 28 middle-sized volumes. In the Kham area, the mastery of many different melodies marks a high competence level, and people in Yulshul dislike an artist who “sings all the stories to the same melody,” as they say. Artist Mtharphyin in Vjomdav county could sing to 41 different tunes. The melodies in remote areas are more monotonous than in areas served by modern transportation and in touch with cultural life, such as Yulshul and Sdege. Thus we can chart the growth of the Gesar melodies geographically from the simple to the sophisticated.

Costumes and Tools

Tibetan artists wear very particular costumes and use specific tools while singing.⁵ In our fieldwork, we always observed the artists wearing traditional garments while in performance. But some singers recalled seeing their forebears wearing specially tailored sorcerer’s attire, an indication that they were acting both as artists singing *Gesar* and as sorcerers communicating to the gods. The garments in question are customarily made of red silk, with lions embroidered on the sleeves and dragons and large birds on the front and back. The late artist Tshe dbang vgyur med, of Nagchu, once saw the artist Pradpavbo, of Amdo stod ma, wearing this variety of garment when singing *Gesar*.

The most important tool for a Tibetan artist singing *Gesar* is the *sgrung-zhav* (artist’s hat), which provides the wearer access to a magic power. Before he or she starts, an artist holds the hat in the left hand, stretches out the right hand, and points around the hat in order to tell the origin, shape, and symbolic meanings of the hat (the practice is referred to as Paying Praise to the Hat). Only afterward will he or she begin singing.

⁵ Mongolian artists wear very simple costumes and use simple tools. Usually they wear ethnic robes and play the *huqin* as they sing.

The use of the hat is quite common among Tibetan artists. We find varying practices in three different areas:

1. The hats worn by Tibetan artists Bsam grub and Yong grub are square and tall in shape. They are about one foot in length and have a pointed top and two animal ears hanging from the sides with colored cloth on the front and back; on top stand peacock or other feathers. A ring of small shells adheres to the side. In the middle of the front are a bronze mirror and three wisdom eyes, on either side of which are miniature bows and arrows. The hats are generally made of gold or silver threads. When worn on the head they are square in shape, but they can be folded and are quite portable.

2. The hats found in the Bdechen district of Tibet and in the province of Yunnan are largely similar to those discussed above, but with different decorations. The front is embroidered with the sun, moon, and other patterns, while on the top stand flags of feathers similar to those worn in “The Story of the Three Kingdoms” from the Han tradition.

3. The Tibetan female artist Gyu sman inherited her hat from her father, a very influential monk artist in Nagchu. The hat, made from white woolen fabric, is not tall but very wide with a large animal ear on either side. It is decorated not only with the sun, the moon, and a mirror, but also with turquoise and other jewels.

Even a piece of paper can become a performance tool. Young artist Grags pa seng ge says that when he holds a piece of paper in his hand and looks into it, the epic appears in his head and smooths his performance. Since Grags pa seng ge is illiterate, the paper provides him no *aide-memoire*; indeed, a blank sheet or a newspaper will serve the purpose. It seems that the mere presence of the prop helps him to concentrate on the story of Gesar.

Another Tibetan artist, Kha tsha pra pa nyag dbang rgya mtsho, uses many tools before beginning a song. First, he must set up a sacred altar, stand a bronze mirror in a bronze plate containing barley, place a crystal in front of the mirror, light incense on the side, place a butter lamp in front of the plate and two tall bronze glasses on each side of the plate, position seven small bronze cups in front of the butter lamp, and wrap the altar with a *Kha btags* (a white piece of silk used as a traditional offering, especially to Buddha).

To sum up, the Mongolian and Tibetan artists use different performance rituals, languages, melodies, costumes, and tools because they belong to different nationalities and geographical areas. The Tibetans also demonstrate differences among themselves, owing to the variety of their ancient ethnic cultural traditions (Yang 1995:72-83).

The Geserqi have learned the epic from older generations, whereas *Geser sgrungmkhan* claim that their epic is a result of divine acquisition rather than learning. These Geserqi have completed apprenticeships, most of them having learned from famous storytellers at a young age. They respect their teachers and are proud to have been students of famous artists.

From an early age, the well-known Mongolian artist Pajai learned from the celebrated storyteller Chudbang (1856-1928). Pajai's grandfather was also an avid storyteller and used to carry the young Pajai in his arms to visit Chudbang, who lived nearby. After a good drink, they would tell some folk tales; Chudbang was a versatile artist and could sing not only folk tales, but also *Holbo*, the story of Geser, and ancient Han Chinese stories including "The Story of the Three Kingdoms" and "The Marsh Rebels." Under his instruction, Pajai became a singing artist. Chudbang himself learned from artist Dge vdun, who was adept at singing "The Story of the Suppressing Mangus," and he had benefited greatly from his master.

Artist Tshanbulaorbu learned from the epic artist Togtohv. The latter was disabled and never left home, but there was always an endless line of visitors waiting to hear his performance. He was very learned and could sing "The Story of Three Kingdoms," "The Marsh Rebels," and *Geser*. He kept many handwritten notebooks at home and recalled that his teacher used to sing from them. The 120-volume books were taller than the master when he sat with legs crossed on his bed; the books now exist only in Tshanbulaorbu's memory.

Batunasun, father of the Mongolian artist Baotor, was a scholar of the Mongolian and Manchurian languages. The father often read *Geser* to his son and encouraged him to do research into the epic and to make extensive contacts with folk artists. Xinjiang artist Norbu was born into an artist family; his father was literate in Mongolian. His family owned a large collection of Geser notebooks and his father brought him up as a singer. Artist Sulufenga began learning the epic only after he saw a performance by the master artist Purung. While Sulufenga was between the ages of 5 and 14, the singer Blobsang was a lama in his hometown of Siziwangqi; this singer often paid master artists with his own food as tuition for lessons.

Mongolian artists take learning seriously and pay great respect to their teachers. In the presence of a teacher, a student must first have the teacher's permission before performing. In a Geser symposium held in 1985 in Chifeng, a number of Mongolian bards were invited to give performances. The organizers arranged for Blobsang to sing ahead of Sulufenga; Blobsang found this sequence to be inappropriate. Even though the elder man had never taught him directly, he was over sixty years of age

and therefore commanded a certain respect by convention. Only after asking Sulufenga's permission did he begin to sing.

Among the Tibetan singers, those who can sing multiple volumes of epic often claim to be *vbabsgrung* (divine artists). They all report that they had strange dreams in childhood and then automatically learned the epic and started a singing life. Because most of them are illiterate and cannot understand the complex physiological nature of dreams, they believe in the ancient explanation of dream-stories as divinely inspired. They believe that the gods have ordered them to sing stories and hence they call themselves divine artists.

According to the survey, there are 26 Tibetan divine artists, mostly living in Nagchu and Chab mdo in Tibet and in the Mgolog and Yulshul districts of Qinghai. They share the following characteristics:

1. They have an extraordinary memory; most of them, though illiterate, can sing one or two dozen, even several dozens or hundreds of volumes. By a conservative estimate, an average volume has five thousand lines; 20 volumes thus would contain 100,000 lines or a total of one to two million words if the prose is also taken into account. All of this material is memorized. The recording of Grags pa lasted 998 hours, that of Gyu sman 859 hours. Bsam grub has completed a recording of 2,312 hours and Tshe ring dbang vdus one of 620 hours. Thus we can say that the artists constitute a living library of the epic.

2. They all had dreams at a young age, after which they began singing the epic—Grags pa at 9, Gyu sman at 16, Bsamgrub at 15, Tshe dbang vgyur med at 13, and Tshe ring dbang vdus at 13. The plots of the dreams were often different. Some (for example, Tshe dbang vgyur med) dreamed of certain scenes of the epic as if they were present and ongoing. Other artists (Grags pa and Gyu sman) dreamed that God or a hero of the epic ordered them to spread Gesar's story by singing the epic. Still other artists (an illiterate, Bsarh grub, for instance) claimed to have read many handwritten volumes of the epic and learned to sing the epic this way, while some (Tshe ring dbang vdus) had a series of dreams from which they learned the epic.

3. Some of the singers were born into artistic families with fathers or grandfathers who knew the epic; most of them lived in areas where Gesar was well-known. As a rule, they were immersed in the families and the areas before taking their place as a new generation of artists.

4. They all had particular kinds of social experiences. Such artists used to have a very low social status, and most of them were forced to wander around the plateau, earning a living by singing the epic. As they traveled along, they were also able to enrich their performances by

interacting with other artists. The singers mentioned above are typical examples (Yang 1995:84-105).

Regarding their artistic development, Mongolian and Tibetan artists apply different standards to their art and have different cultural backgrounds. Most Mongolian singers are scholars, whereas Tibetan artists are shaman-sorcerers who are customarily more religious and mystical than their Mongolian counterparts. Mongolian artists have all learned from teachers and often sing not only epics but also other stories from literary sources; they are therefore not perceived as mystical by other people. Furthermore, although Buddhism has been in circulation for centuries in their country, Mongolians are usually not as dedicated to the religion as the Tibetans. This religious difference is reflected in their folk art. For example, we have heard several folk songs that satirize or criticize the evils of lamas. Chudbang, who was Pajai's teacher, created a doggerel entitled "Miseries of A Horse" that exposed the pretension of supposedly ascetic lamas who actually led a life of luxury and decadence.

The Tibetans, who are true believers in Buddhism, follow a different path. In their religious history there was a transition from indigenous to foreign religions. In order to maintain a following, foreign religions contended and mixed with their indigenous precursors. The families of artists who have lived for generations in this rather closed area are deeply and naturally religious: they embody not only Buddhism, but also indigenous religions, as evidenced by their costumes and tools.

We can study the status quo of the Tibetan singers in order to learn about their history. Many sorcerers were also artists; the ancient sorcerers used to be present on both religious occasions to act as messengers of God and on festive occasions to serve as carriers and propagators of ethnic culture and tradition. Social division of labor and the sophistication of the newer religion have deterred sorcerers from acting as folk singers. That is, ancient folk singers and sorcerers were once closely related; today very few sorcerers are also artists. On the other hand, however, many singers still propitiate God during summoning ceremonies in order to enhance the performance effect of the epic. This is the reason why the epic performance still retains many rituals, costumes, tools, and the mystical atmosphere of an indigenous religion.

The Mongolian and Tibetan versions of Geser stem from the same origin. They have, however, diverged in both style and performance over the course of their development. Distinctive cultural regulations are, the cause of the differentiation. For instance, a rich tradition in epic, a ready population of audiences, the considerable popularity of the artists, and a characteristic combination of prose and verse provide the foundation of the

Mongolian version. On the other hand, geographical closure, popular dedication to Buddhism and the indigenous religion, and the tradition of oral learning serve as the determining basis of the Tibetan version of Gesar.

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