

Tibetan Oral Epic

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In the field of Tibetan oral epic studies there is concern over that fact that the tradition of *King Gesar*, which has been preserved among illiterate artists and audiences and handed down orally and aurally, has waned and could disappear from modern society. Like the Greek and Indian epics before it, *King Gesar* appears to be losing its status as a living oral tradition while being retained in written form. Oral tradition differs strongly from literary and artistic creation, serving as a dynamic repository for the wisdom belonging to an entire culture.

Because performers of *King Gesar* are gradually disappearing one by one, there is a pressing need for research among these singers. In Tibetan epic studies the types of areas being probed are as follows:

1. The best Tibetan *Gesar* performers, called divine singers, could recall the whole story, a feat requiring hundreds, even thousands, of hours. Because only a few singers are able to accomplish this feat, we would like to investigate this phenomenon from the perspectives of sociology, anthropology, oral-formulaic theory, and so on.

2. How could these singers learn such long versions of the story? Where and how did they acquire the whole story?

3. When the same episode is performed by a single artist, how does it change with respect to time, place, and various audiences?

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