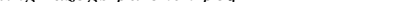


A horizontal number line starting at 0 and ending at 100. The line is divided into 100 equal segments by vertical tick marks. A comma is placed at the 95th segment, representing the decimal point in the number 95.

Taking as its case study the *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*, 

Despite these similarities, however, only one Gesar text explicitly identifies itself as a *gter ma* 

Concealed objects or teachings framed as revelations from the past for the benefit of the

forming what anthropologist Clifford Geertz has called a "web of significance."<sup>1</sup> *gter ston*, past and the means to (re-)connect to that past in the contemporary world. Listeners, readers, *gter ma* *gter ma* through making real its historically-oriented relationships in the contemporary world. By *gter ma*, *gter* *gter ma*

Through utilizing narrative and inspired revelation to tie together local traditions, *gter ma* *gter ston*, a Gesar bard will experience a moment of revelation — one *gter ston* — and then produce a new, but socially-significant, narrative. This narrative concerns a period that a timeless, culturally-bound past that speaks to and comments on the now. Like with a *gter* relationship to the epic. While from a Tibetan Buddhist institutional perspective *gter ma* the Gesar epic traditions are different — one representing unique knowledge hidden by buddhas fighting demonic forces in defense of Buddhism — the social functions of these traditions share

Despite these similarities, only one core Gesar episode explicitly identifies itself as a *gter* *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*. Gesar's descent into hell — popularly called the *Dmyal gling* — the most well-known and (.) In this text, the epic's hero, King Gesar, receives initiations from Padmasambhava to teach Rdzogs chen practice to the peoples of Gling. Most famously, he then descends to hell to fight Yama over the fate of his mother's rebirth, learning in the process that she suffers for his karmic

1 Geertz 1973: 5.

"religious" has come under question as an analytical category that transcends specific cultural environments. While the author acknowledges the validity of such arguments, the term "religion" has attained cross-cultural adoption,

"", Gesar tradition. As will be discussed below, the author is aware of at least one other text calling itself a *gter ma* — A yan 'dul ba'i rtogs brjod — but it has had only one known publication (2005) and seems to be considered minor,



Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po  
 an author — the 'Dan bla ma Chos kyi dbang phyug. Appearing as a character in the narrative  
 the local regent. His title may indicate that he is from the 'Dan region of Gling tshang, located  
 north of Sde dge, or that he personally serves the family of 'Dan ma, Gesar's most trusted  
 warrior. After Gesar dies and the narrative enters its final chapter, 'Dan ma endeavors to finish  
 the great work of Gling by charging everyone to remember Gling's final days:

Tomorrow, before the sun [rises], I, 'Dan ma, will go to India. The time of the  
 mandala of emanations of Gling is complete... May the nam thar of King Gesar and  
 my true words of aspirational prayer pervade all the lands of the southern world! May  
 it become the Dharma of the kingdom! May it be heard in the deathly land of hell!

From an intratextual perspective, therefore, Chos kyi dbang phyug's composition of the *Dmyal  
 gling* is a critical part of 'Dan ma's goal, ensuring future generations know of King Gesar and  
Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po  
 gter ma. After being hidden in Red Water Lake of Northern Mgo  
 log (Byang mgo log na dmar chu rdzing bu), it was recovered by Gling tshang gter ston Drag  
 rtsal rdo rje at the Hermitage of the Upper Northern Pool (chan stod chab kyi rdzing bu'i dben  
 )  
 identified as being authored or revealed by him: (1) a manual of Rdzogs chen teachings that  
 'bru grel (.) and (2) a little-

8 Chos kyi dbang phyug 1984: 354-356. sang nyin nyi ma'i snga rol la; nga 'dan me rgya gar phyogs la 'gro; gling  
 sprul pa'i dkyil 'khor de duds rdzogs; ... ge sar rgyal po'i nam thar dang; nga 'dan ma'i bden tshigs smon lam  
 'di; lho 'dzam gling yul kun phyab par shog; rgyal khams chos la 'gyur par shog; shi dmyal ba'i yul la thos par  
 shog. To arrive at the most reliable text, I have compared three versions of the *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*.  
 , ( ) , ( )

1986 Chengdu edition. Throughout the article, if any significant difference was found between the three texts, I

Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po

Pool as the text's hiding location, only the 1984 Thimpu edition notes that Drag rtsal rdo rje recovered the text  
 from the Red Water Lake of Golok. In the original Wa ra monastery blockprint, the name is obscured from where it  
 , " "

Si khron zhing chen ge sar zhib 'jug and Gser rta rdzong ge sar zhib 'jug gzhung 2005.

, ,  
 Dmyal gling unclear. The Rdzogs chen commentary is a small practice  
 . ,  
 ,

The second text is especially mysterious, having purportedly been revealed as a *gter ma*    
 Bsam yas Monastery at an unknown time by a *gter ston* named Rdo rje dbang drag rtsal. The  
 only publication is a 2005 text from the Serta Gesar Research Institute (Gser rta rdzong ge sar  
 gzhung). The introduction from the editor provides no identification of pre-modern publications  
 except to note that the original pecha was ruined and significant editorial work had to be done  
 . ,  
 yan is almost entirely unknown by Tibetans today, a fact supported by my own conversations  
 with Tibetan research partners. In light of such difficult and unclear information the details  
 about Drag rtsal rdo rje's life, his motivations or practices before revealing the *Dmyal gling*    
 .

The *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po* had only one blockprint publication in pre-modern  
 Tibet, at Wa ra monastery in Chab mdo prefecture. A Sa skya monastery that was heavily  
 involved in promoting ris med teachings, Wa ra monastery served as a center of Mah mudr  
 and Rdzogs chen practices in the region.   The monastery seems to have had a lengthy  
 association with the epic as Wa ra monastery's front courtyard featured a large-scale mural of  
 King Gesar and his warriors in battle in its original construction; the mural has since been fully  
 restored. The blockprint of the *Dmyal gling* does not give a specific date for the publication,  
 except that it was produced under the sponsorship of Dam chos bstan pa — a retreatant at Wa  
 .  
 . ,  
 produced a full canon of the Bka' 'gyur ca.1930,   *Dmyal gling*    
 . ,  
 the much larger Bka' 'gyur project.

  *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po* will be beneficial for  
 those readers unfamiliar. The text can be roughly divided into thirds, with the first third (Chapters  
 1-2) detailing Gesar's Rdzogs chen initiations and subsequent teachings in Gling, the second  
 third (Chapter 3-4) Gesar's journey to hell to confront King Yama after the death of his mother  
 'Gogs mo, and the final third (Chapters 5-18) relating the death of Gesar and all his warriors.  
 The text opens with Gesar in meditation at the Bsam 'grub stag rtse palace, before being

  Gruschke 2004: 59-62.

admonished by his aunt Ma ne ne to travel to the Copper-Colored Mountain and receive Rdzogs chen initiations from Guru Rinpoche himself. Gesar subsequently returns to Gling and retreat in India, during which his mother 'Gogs mo passes away and falls to hell, from which

Chapter 4 subsequently details Gesar's confrontation with King Yama and his journey mother to hell. This revelation represents a significant break with other episodes in the epic, which highlight Gesar's work as a tantric buddha defending Buddhist practice through violent ritual of 'pho ba transference, Gesar transports his mother and the men he previously killed to a to Gling, where he and all of his warriors pass away one by one. The final deaths are those of are well-protected, 'Dan ma journeys to India, signifying the end of Gling.

*Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*, bards tell numerous renditions of Gesar's descent to hell. Even more so than other episodes of the Gesar epic, these are remarkably diverse — many do not feature the early chapters on Rdzogs chen practice, some mitigate or eliminate entirely King Yama's critique of Gesar, and a few even portray him saving in hell a different female companion other than his mother.

*Dmyal gling* or if they reflect a secondary orality to the text. Regardless, these are all simultaneously *Dmyal gling* *Dmyal gling*. Colloquially, Tibetans refer to all of these variants as *Dmyal gling* *Dmyal gling* *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*. However, unlike the Wa ra monastery-published *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*, *gter ma* *gter ma*,

See further, Mikles 2016.

*Dmyal gling* *Dmyal gling mun pa rang gsal*.

## Narrative Lifeworlds as a Theoretical Tool

*Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po* experience of the text. This lived perspective is critical, however, to fully understanding any literary work — Gesar, *gter ma*, or otherwise. Texts are as much social phenomenon as literary sense of Tibetan Buddhist history and experience. Indeed, *gter ma* function through constructing narrative lifeworlds. The term "lifeworld" was originally coined (Husserl 1970) to emphasize religious traditions as fundamentally and inalienably embedded within a larger relationship between stories and individuals' understandings of themselves. Narrative literature an alternative world — be that world five minutes ago, five months ago, or five hundred years themselves within that narrative world as a variety of identities — participants, inheritors, rivals, and so forth. Crucially, once narratives enter a given community's semiotic lexicon, they can be re-told and re-imagined, allowing the process to begin again. In this way, narrative infinite semiotic depth that allows narratives to be powerful engines in the construction of both individual meaning and social significance.

As a story set centuries in the past, the Gesar epic perhaps most recognizably represents this process of using narratives of the past to read the present; however, *gter ma* function similarly, despite presenting themselves as a different type of text. *Gter ma* frame themselves as accounts of an immediate present found at a later time — a present-tense version of a narrative — and for the person of the *gter ston* *gter ma*

Husserl 1970: 108-109.

See further Jackson 1996: 1-50; Orsi 2010: xxxii; Knibbe and Kupari 2020.

the present — a past imperfect narrative. Caught between the past and the present, this narrative achieves timelessness via disassociation from a specific historical past. In this way, the narrative

This particular feature of narrative lifeworld that has the potential to affect society and construct identity.

*gter ma* has centered on their origins and efforts to secure authenticity. While this has largely taken the role of examining efforts to build internal authenticity — how

— other scholarship has begun examining how *gter ma*

historical is made real. A noted exception of this that has been influential on my own work

"

To summarize, while serving different purposes from the perspective of Buddhist lifeworlds that orient and render significant individual experience. They embed a contemporary individual into a past imperfect narrative rich with semiotically-significant persons and places;

This particular aspect of the *gter ma*'s relationship to the Indian Buddhist tradition.

*Dmyal gling*

similarly found in the Gesar tradition, where the bard has a first-hand experience of the text while the audience

Mayer, 2019.



 *gter ma* function socially to imbue the world with significance.

## Narrative Lifeworld and the

Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po  
 gter ma  
 lifeworld that invites Tibetans to build an identity. Holly Gayley proposes that *gter ma*  
 gter ston.  
 gter ston Dmyal gling

*Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*,  
 gter ma/epic tradition influenced individuals' self-  
 , *Dmyal gling*  
 ,  
 via two interrelated modes — reading a published version of the *Dmyal gling*  
 ,  
 ,  
*Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*,  
 ,

— wherein things indicated by a single term may be understood as the same, though be very different when compared side-by-side. Following the cue of my research informants, therefore,

Turning frst to the experience that most similarly reflects, and to a certain extent, recreates  
 gter ma ,  
 Dmyal gling. Dmyal gling ,  
 ,

Tsering Shakya (2004) has noted that this construction of a timeless past is actually foundational to the larger *gyer ston*, *gyer ma*'s "ontology of the past."

The center of these performances is the bard (*sgrung mkhan*) characters' motivations and moods. While some bards may study the epic to recite it, the most (bab sgrung) (sgrung 'bab), bab sgrung,

Reflecting this revelatory impulse, the performance space is a dynamic arena in which bards and audience have the potential to re-engage with past imperfect of the epic and use it to build significance in their contemporary lives. This fact is particularly evident in performances *Dmyal gling*, episodes. As discovered on a recent research trip to Qinghai province, popular belief among contemporary Tibetans is that a revelatory bard who receives the *Dmyal gling* emotional affairs and Tibetans may travel significant distances to personally witness a bard perform that specific episode. Much like popular folktales or so-called "urban legends" in American society, my Tibetan conversation partners demonstrated the truth of this belief to me by reciting second- and third-hand stories about bards in nearby towns who had died soon after *Dmyal gling*.

Many of my Tibetan conversation partners directly linked the bard's *Dmyal gling* with explained that their work was a special calling instituted by King Gesar himself — thus that they understand through narrative. In the words of contemporary bard 'Gyur med rab "This responsibility was refected in the words of Dkar ma lha mo, local scholar at the Yul shul O f ce of Cultural Preservation; when asked about *Dmyal gling* and the death of the bard, she answered, "The epic is finished, so now is their life." For these and other eastern Tibetans, the *Dmyal gling* *Dmyal gling*,

Yang Enhong 1993; Gcod pa Don 'grub 1989.

'Gyur med rab rten, Personal Interview, July 18, 2015.



song and through that develop a relationship with Gesar. The use of first-person and second-person grammar contributes to the past imperfect form of the narrative lifeworld, reflecting the

The emotive effects of this particular literary style are apparent when speaking with ma Thub btsan, a local elder in Rong bu village in Qinghai, he explained that when he reads the *Dmyal gling*, "The head of the Ka thog Monastery's monastic college expressed similar *Dmyal gling*, monks should read, because all others make them too aggressive and distracted. The *Dmyal gling*'s narrative lifeworld, therefore, encourages individuals to take on a specific identity as a karmically-sensitive Buddhist practitioner through building an emotional relationship with

Turning next to (2) — the living reality of King Gesar — the vast majority of eastern Tibetans I spoke with understood King Gesar as an active presence in Tibet, collapsing the

*Dmyal gling*

Reminders of King Gesar's mark on the land of Tibet are prevalent in the innumerable mountains, valleys, and other sites that Tibetan believe bear his mark. While the intersection

,

these spaces as sacred, living Tibetans simultaneously a f x the historic past of the epic narrative

.

is Zhidu county Sichuan; Tibetans living there have used white rocks to mark a mountain with

Pad ma Thub bstan, Personal Interview, July 28, 2015.

My conversation with local Zhidu county resident Bden grub was a notable exception to this generalization. While *Dmyal gling*, Gesar was a myth or legend based on a historical king that had been heavily embellished. This conversation was



The latter third of the text sees Gesar affirming that he will return in the future to defend Gling and the practice of Buddhism. As Gesar's death approaches, he declares his intention to

iron hook of compassion.... [My] cousins, all young princes of Ling, heroes of Ling, and finally medicine women, [I will be] inseparable to you all in this life and

This belief of Gesar's prophetic return first expressed in the *Dmyal gling* today among my Tibetan conversation partners. King Gesar was repeatedly identified as a buddha whose violence was an expression of his commitment to defend Buddhism in Tibet, and who continued to watch over the land of Tibet with compassion and love. Several repeated

Tibetans' live realities.

--	--	--	--

Gesar's prophetic presence as a living force that continues to affect the world today is further re-enforced by his perceived role in recovering contemporary *gter ma*. *Dmyal gling* *gter ma*, *gter ma* recovery in contemporary Tibetan regions. Most notably, the founder of the Larung Gar Buddhist community 'Jigs med phun tshogs (d.2004) has relied on Gesar as a tutelary deity *gter ma* recovery, had intricate visions of the warrior-king charging him to accomplish Buddhist work, and often credited the warrior-king as the source of his long life and . When having visions of Gesar, 'Jigs med phun tshogs would place detail the semi-mythical setting. These experiences then become the engine by which 'Jigs med *gter ma* filled with treasures and some remains of the warrior-king's physical palace. While certainly in need of further study, the treasure revelations of 'Jigs med phun tshogs further demonstrate the *Dmyal gling*'s narrative lifeworld in the lives of contemporary Tibetans.

Individuals' participation in the *Dmyal gling*'s narrative lifeworld was reinforced by the *Dmyal gling*. These various social taboos are part of what Timothy Thurston has and bardic performance, Tibetan participate in "Gesar culture" [Ge sar rig gnas 格萨尔文化, This "ecosystem" includes innumerable proverbs,





comparing different cultural traditions within Tibet at the point where they intersect — the  
[redacted] *gter ma* on the other — Tibet-specific forms of theory can  
[redacted]  
[redacted].  
[redacted] *gter ma* [redacted] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po* [redacted]  
dismissed as simply the product of a process of buddhicization, [redacted]  
[redacted] *gter ma* function as socially lived documents. Through the utilization

- Land of Yolmo, their Reception and Impact." In *Cultures of Eschatology, Volume 2*, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED], [REDACTED].
- Germano, David. 1998. "Re-memembering the Dismembered Body of Tibet, Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China." In *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet*, edited by Melvyn Goldstein. Berkeley: University of California [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- [REDACTED]. *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces: KHAM, vol. 1*. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- [REDACTED]. *Apparitions of the Self: the Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionaries*. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- [REDACTED]. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- Jackson, Michael. 1996. "Introduction: Phenomenology, Radical Empiricism, and [REDACTED]." [REDACTED] *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, edited by Michael Jackson, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Knibbe, Kim and Helena Kupari. 2020. "Theorizing Lived Religion: Introduction." *The Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35.2: 157-176.
- [REDACTED]. *Zab pa'i gnad gyi 'bru 'grel don gsal sgron me sogs bzhugs*. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- Mayer, Robert. 2019. "Rethinking Treasure (part one)." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 52: 119-184.
- Mikles, Natasha. 2016. "Buddhicizing the Warrior-King Gesar in the dMyal gling rDzogs pa [REDACTED]." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 37: 231-246.
- . 2019. "Tears Like Fluttering Leaves: Karmic Resentment and the Senses in Gesar's Trip to [REDACTED]." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 50: 212-234.
- Nourse, Benjamin. 2014. "Canons in Context: A History of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon in the [REDACTED]." [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. *Living and Dying in Modern Tibet*, ([REDACTED] Internet Archive)  
<https://archive.org/details/LivinAndDyinginModernTibet>.
- Orsi, Robert. 2010. *Madonna of 115 Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950, third edition*. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- Pomplun, Trent. 2009. *Jesuit on the Roof of the World: Ippolito Desideri's Mission to Tibet*. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- Raine, Roberta. 2014. "Translation and Appropriation of the World's Longest Epic, Tibet's [REDACTED]." *Forum* 12.2: 65-85.
- Shakya, Tsering, 2004. "The Emergence of Modern Tibetan Literature since 1950." PhD [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED].
- Shor, Thomas K. 2017. *A Step Away from Paradise: The True Story of a Tibetan Lama's*

*Journey to a Land of Immortality.* [REDACTED]

Si khron zhing chen ge sar zhib 'jug and Gser rta rdzong ge sar zhib 'jug gzhung. 2005. *A yan 'dul ba'i rtogs brjod*. Chengdu: Sichuan Minzu Chubanshe.

Smith, E. Gene. 2001. "The Autobiography of MKhan po Ngag dga'." In *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Tibetan Plateau*, edited by Kurtis R. Schaeffer. Boston: [REDACTED]

Terrone, Antonio. 2014. "The Earth as a Treasure in Tibetan Buddhism: Visionary Revelation [REDACTED]" *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 8.4: 460-482.

Thurston, Timothy. 2019. "The Tibetan Gesar Epic Beyond its Bards: An Ecosystem of Genres on the Roof of the World." *Journal of American Folklore* 132, no. 524: 115-136.

[REDACTED], [REDACTED]. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. [REDACTED]

Yang Enhong. 1993. "The Forms of Chanting Gesar and the Bon Religion in Tibet." *Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya*. edited by Charles Ramble and Martin Brauen, [REDACTED]