



# Ritual + Narrative + Kingship

÷

# Tibet + Surrounding Cultural Areas

17-19 July 2014  
IBZ, Amalienstr. 38, München

Hosted by  
the Kingship and Religion in Tibet group,  
Institute für Indologie und Tibetologie,  
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU)

Supported by  
The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

# Schedule

## Thursday, 17 July

9:30 Registration

10:00 Opening remarks

### Session 1 (Chair Peter Schwieger)

10:15 **Pierre Marsone** – The sovereign in the Khitan Empire (Liao dynasty, 907-1125)

11:15 Break

11:35 **David Pritzker** – Early historiography in Gu ge and its relationship with orality, kingship and Tibetan identity

12:35 Lunch

2:00 **Megan Bryson** – Bstan-po chung, Yunnan wang, Mahārāja

3:00 Break

3:20 **Johan Elverskog** – Sino-Mongol-Tibetan Kingship in the Ming Borderlands

4:20 Break for Banquet

7:00 Banquet

## Friday, 18 July

10:00 **Leonard van der Kuijp** – On Tibetan Notions of Kingship and Governance as Disclosed in Recently Discovered Sources

11:00 Break

11:20 **Respondent (Peter Schwieger) and Discussion**

12:20 Excursion to Schliersee

## Saturday, 19 July

### Session 2 Chaired by Franz-Karl Ehrhard

10:00 **Marie Lecomte-Tilouine** – The fictional king?

11:00 Break

11:20 **Brandon Dotson** – The Naming of Kings

12:20 Lunch

2:00 **Kalsang Norbu Gurung** – A Restricted and Secret Ritual of Tibet and Its Connection to the Great Fifth

3:00 Break

3:20 **Christian Jahoda** and **Christiane Kalantari** – Kingship in Western Tibet in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries

4:20 **Respondent (Da Col) and Discussion**

5:20 **Closing Remarks**

5:30 End

**Rituals** and **narratives** are two of the most important elements that underwrite sacred and political power. In the case of **kingship**, one can point to the coronation rite, the royal wedding, and the royal funeral as central rites of state during which ritual is deployed to performatively instantiate the monarch's legitimacy and augment his status. The monarch often takes a central part as well in state ceremonials attached to annual rites of the New Year or of harvest. Narrative, too, plays a key role in legitimizing a monarch. Praise poetry and epic are perhaps the best examples, but prophecy, *res gestae*, genealogy, and chronicle also play key roles. These sorts of representations, alongside iconography, architecture, and festival, express and impress the ideology of kingship. They construct a center that is both symbolic and real, and a sovereign who is simultaneously the embodiment of an ancestral ideal and an incumbent king with a specific agenda. This is a process in which narrative, ritual, and kingship interact to create productive synergies, but also occasional dissonances.

Examining the relationship between kingship, ritual, and narrative in a Tibetan context, these and other issues are pertinent from the imperial period (7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) through the regimes of the Dalai Lamas and up to the present. Throughout its history, **Tibet** has been open to the flow of rituals, stories, objects, and ideas from every direction. Eurasian motifs are found in Tibetan art, literature, and mythology. Tibetans also assimilated – to various degrees – Chinese models of historiography, administration, law, and astrology. Indian and Central Eurasian Buddhist traditions ranging from a centralized Ashokan model of kingship to tantric models born of more fractious polities each informed various Tibetan formulations of rulership during the course of its history. By placing Tibetan kingship in the (appropriately) wide areal context by considering its **surrounding cultural areas**, and examining the interactions of ritual, power, and narrative, this conference aims to examine various case studies based on focused research into specific historical moments, and also to draw connections between these in order to articulate a sound and pragmatic theoretical orientation to the roles of ritual and narrative in the expression and the performance of both sacred and secular power.

Brandon Dotson

**Organizing committee:** Emanuela Garatti and Daniel Hirshberg (“Kingship and Religion in Tibet” group, LMU)

**Graphic editor (poster, cover):** Hsin-Yi LIN, rob.roy.lin@gmail.com

# Abstracts

**Megan Bryson (University of Tennessee)**

**Bstan-po chung, Yunnan wang, Mahārāja:  
Narratives of Nanzhao Buddhist Kingship between Tibet and Tang**

As rulers of the Nanzhao kingdom (649-903) consolidated their power in the eighth century, they formed strategic alliances with the neighboring empires of Tibet and Tang. Records from all three polities show that Tibet and Tang conferred titles upon Nanzhao rulers, such as the Tibetan *bstan-po chung*, “junior *bstan-po*,” and “eastern emperor”; and the Tang *Yunnan wang*, “Prince of Yunnan,” and *Yueguo gong*, “Duke of Yue Principality.” These Tibetan and Tang titles appear prominently in the 766 *Dehua bei* (Stele of Transforming through Virtue), but the 899 *Nanzhao tuzhuan* (Illustrated History of Nanzhao) instead emphasizes the Nanzhao rulers’ Buddhist authority in its use of the titles Mahārāja and *cakravartin*. This paper compares the use of Buddhist, Tibetan, and Tang titles in the *Dehua bei* and *Nanzhao tuzhuan* to examine how Nanzhao rulers strategically positioned themselves in relation to the more powerful regimes to the north and east.

**Brandon Dotson (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität)**

**The Naming of Kings**

Names and naming are vital in Tibetan traditions. Irksome gods are tamed and renamed as Buddhist guardians. Babies perceived to be in danger from demons are given temporary, repugnant names, and the deceased often receive a posthumous name. Religious initiands, or those receiving tantric empowerment, meet their new status with a new name. Naming also happens to be one of the only elements that we can clearly identify as central to the coronation of a new king in imperial Tibet. Significantly, such naming appears to have been performed by the king’s councilors. To be renamed might signify a form of rebirth, but to name something is also to take possession of it and to determine it. In this paper, I explore the implications of royal name-giving to our understanding of early Tibetan kingship. In addition, I consider how the “re-renaming” of these same kings, via shifting memories and textual corruption in Tibet’s religious histories of the 11<sup>th</sup> century onward, constitutes another form of taking possession of the Tibetan kingship.

**Johan Elverskog (Southern Methodist University)**

**Sino-Mongol-Tibetan Kingship in the Ming Borderlands**

During the course of the late sixteenth century the ostensible ruler of the Tümed Mongols forged a powerful new state on the northern borders of the Ming dynasty. And while much of Altan Khan’s success in creating this polity can be attributed to economic, military and political factors, another key component in this project was the formation of a new mode of kingship that drew upon the cultural resources of the peoples within his domains. In so doing Altan Khan therefore created a distinctive model of rule that had neither much precedent nor subsequent resonance in the post-Manchu world. The aim of this paper is thus to explore how Altan Khan’s distinctive tri-fold system of kingship was ritualized in both his coronation and funeral as evidenced in various narratives, but especially in the Tümed’s own history, the 1607 *Erdeni Tunumal Sudur*.

## **Kalsang Norbu Gurung (Bonn University)**

### **A Restricted and Secret Ritual of Tibet and Its Connection to the Great Fifth**

The present paper deals with a Tibetan tantric ritual known as *byad sgrol* ‘a rite to avert the effects of curse’ performed by a number of Tibetan masters even until today. For my presentation here, I will study one of the most restricted and secret liturgy titled *Byad sgrol chang khrus ma’i man ngag*, according to which this ritual is performed using *chang* ‘Tibetan wine’. According to its historical section, the instruction (*man ngag*) in the text was first presented to the Bonpo master Bla chen Dran pa nam mkha’ in a visionary dream one night during his retreat in Silver Castle of Garuda Valley. It was actually a Bonpo goddess, Thugs rje Kun sgrol ma who had appeared in his visionary dream and bestowed the instruction to defend against his enemy. Presently, it is a part of the larger collection titled *mKha’ ‘gro gsang ba ye shes kyi chos skor* (16 volumes, cf. TBRC W9209), the collection devoted to the *Ḍākini Guhyajñāna* preserved currently in the custody of Sle lung Bzhad pa’i rdo rje (1697–1740).

Traditionally, this type of ritual is performed on various occasions in order to defend against any obstacle like curse or any other attack that is anticipated from their enemies, rivals, and so on. In particular, it may be performed for those who possess higher status in a society, such as high lamas, wealthy and successful individual, powerful ruler and higher officials, because they are the ones who mostly anticipate obstacles. In terms of its contribution in the Kingship rituals, it is for the security and defence that my study will be based upon. The above text is a good example of a security and defence ritual, which seems to have performed or hosted by the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) possibly for his government affair. As indicated in one of the colophon, the Great Fifth in agreement with Panchen Blo bzang ye shes (1663–1737) had restricted this particular ritual from practising openly, as they have observed this liturgy being the only of its kind in the whole Tibet and China which has swift effect against any obstacles. In this paper, I will discuss the historical background of this ritual liturgy also investigating another source like the autobiography of the Great Fifth. As my main focus of the period is until this liturgy ended up in the collection of Sle lung Bzhad pa’i rdo rje, I shall also look into the biographies of two other important masters like Rdo rje ‘dzin pa Blo gsal rgya mtsho (1502–1567) and Chos rgyal Gter bdag gling pa (1646–1714). In this way, I will try to understand how the Great Fifth and the other prominent Tibetan Buddhist masters were connected to this unique liturgy, which is claimed to be a legacy of a Bonpo master Dran pa nam mkha’. I also hope to find if there is any other reason on which basis the Great Fifth and the Panchen Lama had restricted this liturgy for secrecy as mentioned above.

## **Christian Jahoda and Christiane Kalantari (Austrian Academy of Sciences)**

### **Kingship in Western Tibet in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

How was kingship defined and conceived in the area of the West Tibetan kingdom? How was it expressed and represented? The formative phase of this kingdom, in particular the period from the late tenth century onward when new religious centres were established under royal patronage, offers rich (and to a high degree contemporaneous) material. Key moments for the lasting expression of kingship during this time were provided for example by the foundation of Buddhist monasteries. As in the case of Tabo monastery, well-preserved paintings of deities of local and trans-local importance as well as of assemblies of prominent lay and religious personages (obviously present at the time of consecration) seem to have served as illustrations of valid contemporary socio-political and religious status. Studying these paintings (and accompanying inscriptions) in this regard against the backdrop of the overarching political framework of this kingdom, main elements of which are known through a code of law or a sort of legal constitution (that was transmitted in historical writings) and which are also visible for example in various spatial arrangements, allows to throw

new light on the integral concept of kingship in force in Western Tibet at this time.

**Leonard van der Kuijp (Harvard University)**

### **On Tibetan Notions of Kingship and Governance as Disclosed in Recently Discovered Sources**

Until very recently, Gu ge Paṅ chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po's (1415-86) 1480 *Life of Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od* (947-1019/24) was the only complete work by him that was known to be extant. In 2011, a manuscript of his undated *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs skye dgu'i cod pan nyi zla'i phreng mdzes*, a hitherto unknown, large study of the South Asian line of kings that issued from the sun, "the solar dynasty" (*nyi ma'i rigs, \*sūryavaṃśa*), saw the light of day. In the latter, he linked the Tibetan royal family to his line, which included the family in which the historical Buddha was born! These important fifteenth-century sources in which their author, Gu ge Paṅ chen, used much older archival material, can now be compared to and contrasted with the incomplete manuscript remains of a work on kingship and the royal chronology of the Tibetan rulers that were equally recently uncovered. In 2012, Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus published an edition of this fragmentary manuscript that was excavated from a ruined stupa that was located close to Mtho ling/gling/sding[s] monastery in Gu ge. The following year, Khyung bdag published a critical edition of this very same manuscript to which he added a number of detailed annotations. In this essay, I propose to study several aspects of this manuscript and in particular the way in which the author connects his work with Lha bla ma and his turn to governance, which is one of the features of his biography by Gu ge Paṅ chen. In so doing, I will pay special attention to notions of kingship and the significant lexical and thematic connections that exist with other Tibetan narratives that have to do with the imperial period.

**Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (CNRS)**

### **The fictional king?**

#### **An exploration in the constellation of the Himalayan kingdoms**

Fiction is at the heart of the relationship between narrative and reality. It also forms a possible conceptual framework to approach the ritual and its objectives instead of the "symbolic" of yesteryear and its rigid grammarian logic. The 'kings' that history retained are often made entirely of narratives and rituals. They are therefore fully inscribed in the fictional. Their fictional construction seems to follow an opposite direction to that of science fiction (which extrapolates from a present and a here to an elsewhere of all the possible), by operating reductions of the socio-political complexity into simplified, codified, albeit paradoxical figures, which are in constant connection with a point of origin. We will examine this issue in the Himalayan region where the multiplicity of kingdoms enables one to explore the nature of the royal characters made conspicuous by the rituals and by the narratives in their process of history simplification.

**Pierre Marsone (EPHE)**

### **The sovereign in the Khitan Empire (Liao dynasty, 907-1125)**

The Khitan Empire is an originally "turko-mongol" empire which gradually incorporated various elements of Chinese culture and administrative structures. This communication will focus on some unique features of the rulers of the Khitan Empire. Firstly, we will recall that the Yelü clan which ruled the empire for over two hundred years was not the first imperial lineage in the history of the Khitan, but it was preceded by the two lineages of the Dahe and Yaonian. Secondly, we will show the exceptional importance of the concept of "Heaven" in the imperial titles and era names of the dynasty. Thirdly, we will analyze the intriguing "prophecy" in which the founder of the dynasty, Yelü Abaoji, prophesied in 924 his death two years later and the conquests he had to realize in the meanwhile. This communication will insist on some terms of the prophecy which reflect an original

thought, tending to make the Khitan ruler an incarnation of the Divinity.

**David Pritzker (University of Oxford)**

**Early historiography in Gu ge and its relationship with orality, kingship, and Tibetan identity  
A close study of a recently uncovered historical manuscript from West Tibet**

In this paper I will explore the relationship of orality, kingship and Tibetan identity in a newly discovered twelfth-century historical manuscript from West Tibet. The narrative structure of the manuscript, with its use of rhythmical prose, similes, and archaic topoi, is emblematic of the liminal period in which the text was written. At this time, histories were transitioning from disperse and most likely largely oral transmission to predominantly formal organized written traditions. The oral-like nature of the text, together with its unusual physical features, raises questions of its purpose/function, with the possibility of its use as a ritual manuscript for royal legitimization. Through a close study of the manuscript, I hope to offer some insights on the formative nature of early Tibetan historiography in establishing the sacred and political power of the Gu ge kings.

