The Epic of King Ling Gesar

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**King Gesar, an International Cultural Hero:**

**Ling Gesar Gyalpo**

(‘King Gesar of Ling’) is a legendary Tibetan king, a cultural and spiritual hero, and the central figure in the Gesar epic.

**Epic Tradition: 11th - 12th**

**Gesar** story-telling, performance and ritual traditions are found in Tibet (especially Eastern Tibet), Mongolia, Buryatia, Ladakh, and Bhutan.

Some believe the name Gesar is linked to the Latin Caesar. Gesar is also sometimes called the ‘Tibetan King Arthur’.

**The Gesar epic is the longest Epic poem in the world**
There are hundreds of different versions of the epic which have survived for centuries through oral recitation and preservation. From the 17th century, these oral stories start to be written down and published. Epic is recited and performed by special Gesar bards.

Bards often enter into trance, see visions of events and characters or become possessed by them as they recite. Bards’ recitation style is similar to that of Tibetan and Himalayan spirit mediums. New stories may be revealed to bards via past life visions in which they remember participating in events described.
Key Elements in the Epic:

An upper, middle and lower world cosmology

Gesar is a magical hero and warrior-king

Gesar represents karchok 'the light' or white sand fights against nakchok 'the dark or black side' forces of violence and disorder
Gesar’s Birth-place and childhood

Gesar sent from heaven to be born on earth, is known as Joru when he is a child.

Gesar has human and non-human relatives, in the upper, middle and lower worlds and was born into the Dong clan.

His birth-place is said to be in Derge county, Kham (Sichuan province).
Gesar’s Two Wives

Drukmo རྡུ་མོ ། (‘female dragon’): his first wife, gentle and compassionate

Atak Lhamo འཐག་ལྷ་མོ ། (‘tiger goddess’): Gesar’s more aggressive, warrioress partner
The Heroes of Ling

Gesar is surrounded and supported by a number of patul, pathul, loyal and brave warriors or knights.

Some Tibetan lamas have been recognized as reincarnations of Gesar’s relatives and heroes. The heroes also sometimes possess spirit mediums and bards.

Many of these heroes are related to Gesar by marriage or by blood, like with the phunusoomchu ‘The Thirty Older and Younger Brother Heroes’, who are Gesar’s right-hand men and supporters.
Epic Geography

- The epic has a big geographic scope - Gesar’s ‘empire’ and exploits extend across Tibet, China, Mongolia (hor), and Persia (taksik)

Gesar is a ‘spiritual Gengis Khan’, a great conqueror
Gesar’s Connection with Guru Padmasambhava and Status as a Dharma-Protector:
Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche is regarded as a ‘second Buddha’ and is the master who established Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet.

In some versions, Padmasambhava is said to be Gesar’s Guru. Gesar is also described as an emissary or emanation of Padmasambhava.

Institutional Buddhism is more or less important or central in different versions of the epic.

Gesar has three aspects: he is a legendary human or demi-god hero, a protector spirit, and is also recognized as an enlightened being.

He is often said to be an embodiment of Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, and Vajrapani.
• There are many Buddhist prayers, invocations and offering practices focused on Gesar. He also appears occasionally as a yidam or tantric meditational deity or Buddha

Tibetan Buddhist masters like Ju Mip’ham (1846 – 1912) and Khenpo Jikmé P’hunts’hok (1933 – 2004) considered Gesar to be an extremely powerful protector deity and enlightened being

Ju Mip’ham wrote dozens of Gesar ritual texts over his life, from when he was 13 to in his sixties. He created special cham or masked ritual dances connected with Gesar which are still performed at different monasteries today.

• Gesar has become more incorporated into institutional Tibetan Buddhism and Nyingma traditions in particular since around the 19th century. Even so, he is a non-sectarian figure who transcends any specific lineage
Gesar and the Drala—Gesar’s Connection with Warrior Gods and the Powers of Nature:

- Gesar’s roles as a spirit-tamer, linker of worlds, and god of wealth and fortune have many shamanic aspects.

- Gesar is connected with drala རྡལ་ལྷ རྗེ་རྒྱ་འབྲཞུ། and werma རྡུལ་ད་མེད་, pre-Buddhist warrior deities who protect against enemies and harmful forces.

- These deities are associated with wild animals like tigers, lions, garuda birds, dragons, wolves etc.

Gesar’s connection with animals and nature shows the importance of harmony between humans and animals, between humans and the natural world.
Thank you