

1 The Divine Feminine in Tibet's *Gesar of Ling*

The mere mention of the “Land of the Snows,” an appellation of Tibet, evokes a sense of mystery. The dramatic and indescribable beauty of the region, surrounded as it is by the Himalaya chain of mountains and glaciers, with its deep ravines and valleys, brilliant blue lakes, and desolate and solitary plains and grasslands, remains impressed in the psyches of those who have come to visit this region. Tibet's multiple colorations and ever altering hues, ranging from pale or somber blues to gray-blacks, light and shimmering lavenders, or emerald greens, depending upon the intensity of the rays cast by the sun and moon, add to its magic and luster.

Natural frontiers, high altitudes, and seemingly endless stretches of land account for Tibet's past and present isolation from the world. Even after China's invasion of the region in 1950 and the Dalai Lama's exodus in 1959, foreigners have gained little knowledge of Tibet's history, religious ideations, and written texts. Understandably it remains a land of wonderment and magic—a Shangri-la—for most people.

In contrast to other cultures, religious rather than profane literature predominates in Tibet. Fictional works, such as novels, were virtually unknown until recent times. Not that imagination had been suppressed. Quite to the contrary, writes Alexandra David-Neel, this faculty was allowed “the fullest possible scope, and the fantastic element flourishes in so exuberant and candid a fashion in their writings, that its equal is only to be found in our fairy tales” (David-Neel 1981, 13–14). What distinguishes Tibetan fantasy and wonderment from that of other lands is the manner in which events were and are depicted. In *Gesar of Ling*, for example, they “were held to have happened, the heroes of the tales to have really lived, and the stories themselves to be authentic from beginning to end” (2).

Like other myths, *Gesar of Ling* supplied an empirical need: had not a

solar hero sprung into action, ideological disaster would have struck many Tibetans. Not only had the “true Religion” of the time declined toward superstition, but rival groups from foreign lands as well as within Tibet itself attempted to downgrade its “purity.” A strong leader, therefore, had to come into being to combat religious persecution and spiritual contamination. Motifs of Tibet’s autochthonous and imported religions—Bön, Shamanism, Lamaism, and Buddhism—are, then, implicit in the epic’s every word.

Even more distressing were the ever-present health problems among Tibetans due to all types of disease, including plagues. Gesar of Ling—defender of the “true religion,” avenger of evil, ejector of foreign invaders, restorer of order and justice, transformer of arid into fertile lands—also came to be known as the annihilator of dreaded sicknesses. He accomplished his missions thanks to the help of a historical figure who, in time, was divinized: Padma Sambhava (755–97 C.E.), one of the founders of Tantric Buddhism.

Inherent in *Gesar of Ling* is the principle of warriorship: the realization of self-dignity through the exertion of power over oneself. So important was warriorship to the ancient Tibetans that continuous *wakefulness*, or *awareness* of one’s thoughts, speech, and actions, was stressed, and difficult, frequently harrowing physical and psychological rites of passage were required. Thus could strength of mind and human potential—one’s individual resources—be developed. The practitioner would be able to step beyond the terrestrial realm, overcoming fear of death. An acolyte was made to look fearlessly, directly, and openly *at* or *into* her- or himself. The very power it took to meet such a challenge could, under specific circumstances, liberate the person from the pain of *samsara*, the cycle of rebirths.

Gesar met the above requirements of warriorship. He faced problems with “unwavering wakefulness” and with profound understanding of their ramifications. He called upon feminine divinities and semidivinities to enlighten him in his ordeals. Always present when needed, the feminine principle appeared to him in a ray of light—as visitation or apparition—in dreams, or in daylight hours near trees, on mountains, in rooms, or elsewhere. He saw these manifestations, heard them, related to them through projection.

To project, psychologically, is to thrust or throw forward ideas or impulses that belong to some extent to the subject. It is a “process whereby an unconscious quality of one’s own is perceived and reacted to in an outer object” (Edinger 1978, 147–50). Each time divine apparitions presented themselves to Gesar he was, in effect, drawing on his own sustenance, on his own reserves. The energy inhering in his being succeeded in motivating him to rectify an evil by overcoming whatever obstacles had been set in his path.

What is of extreme interest to us is Gesar's close relationship to the feminine principle and perhaps continuous dependency on her for guidance. He experienced her as an iconization of the Great Mother (known to Tibetans as Dölma and also referred to by her Hindu name, Tara), a symbol of compassion; as a *dakini*, a celestial inspirational force whose mission was to integrate the powers released into the psyche during meditation; and as a *tulku*, the visualization of a "mental formation" or a manifestation of supreme reality in the form of woman (or man) or as a reincarnation of a dead master. Generally the concretization of feminine figures answered a profound psychological need not only in the individual bringing them to mind but, by extension, in the culture as well (David-Neel 1931, 147).

Ectypal Analysis

The ancient Tibetans were nomads. Although some natives built houses and even cities to protect themselves from the treacherous icy snows and other climatic rigors of their wild highlands, most felt the urge to move on and set up their tents in new grazing ground. Animal sacrifices (sheep, dogs, monkeys) were offered yearly; and oblations (horses, oxen, asses, and even men) every three years. Because Tibetans could neither read nor write, they recorded important information by notching pieces of wood and by knotting cords. A written language and literature came into being only in the seventh century, with the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet.

Tibet was first mentioned in Chinese texts during the reign of Emperor Shun, in 2255 B.C.E. Herodotus, seemingly, was the earliest Western historian to write about this remote area of the world (Shen and Liu 1953, 3). Documents dating to the sixth century C.E. describe it as a conglomerate of independent feudal states in the process of centralization. Its ultracomplex autochthonous Bön religion underwent radical transformation due to the inroads of a form of Mahayana Buddhism known as Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism.

The Bön Religion

Bön was an animist-shamanist religion related in many ways to that of Siberia; Inner Asia, Mongolia, Manchuria, East and West Turkestan, and China. Because of the lack of extant documents, few details concerning Bön are known with certainty.

The most important figure in Bön was the priest or shaman.¹ Looked upon as a sorcerer or a spiritual guide, the priest or shaman functioned as healer, psychiatrist, guide, and comforter. Having the power to communicate with deities, he could ask for their help on behalf of an individual or the people as a whole. His unusually powerful status in the community was gained in part through completion of a period of arduous initiation rituals, such as meditation, fasting, purification, the imbibing of specific alcoholic beverages and/or natural drugs, the ingestion of certain mushrooms, and dancing. During the course of his training, the shaman learned to enter into trance states, to communicate with spirits, and to attain superconscious levels and transcendence of terrestrial spheres. Unlike ordinary mortals, who made contact with heavenly beings through prayer, incantation, and offerings, the shaman was endowed with magico-religious powers enabling him to levitate or to “fly,” as such a condition is termed, in order to reach the “Plain of High Heaven.”

Because it was believed that an elemental force existed in all objects, the shaman, whose knowledge of magic was profound, had been granted a very special power: that of subduing and dominating whatever forces he considered detrimental to him and his people. To prevent disasters, for example, he not only pronounced conjurations and incantations, but by entering into a trance state, he gave credence to the notion that he was possessed by his tutelary deity. Dreams, visitations, apparitions, and hallucinations were therefore frequent experiences for shamans (and for individual meditators as well). Since the prognostications emerging into the shaman’s consciousness were considered to be “signs” sent by his deity, life was made difficult for shamans who failed to alleviate the suffering of the people.

Little difference existed between Bön priests and shamans in ancient times. Both, for example, availed themselves of the drum in the performance of their religious rituals. Drums were looked upon as vehicles able to convey shamans through the air, and “flying” in this way allowed them to communicate with the gods (Eliade 1972, 632ff.).

The practice of animal and human sacrifice during the highly solemn Bön’s ceremonies was designed to placate ever-present evil powers. If a prince fell ill, it was not infrequent for one of his subjects to offer himself as a sacrifice to assuage the demon that was believed to have caused the illness:

The soothsayer seized the man by the feet whilst the Bön-Po took his hands. The black Handha then cut open the life orifice and tore out the heart. The two, the soothsayer and the Bon-po, then scattered the blood

and flesh of the victim to the four corners of the heaven. (Hoffmann 1961, 22)

After Buddhism gained ground in Tibet, such violation of life, human or animal, was strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, even today, the practice is carried on, albeit in mitigated form by substituting animals in the form of drawings or carvings as sacrifice to the deity (22).

The terrors and joys preoccupying Tibetans were personified in their gods, *dakinis*, *tulkus*, and demons. As is implicit in other religions, the worshipper intent upon appeasing a god or an evil power evoked the deity or demon in the hope of winning his or her favor.

Three spheres existed in the Bön cosmos, each of which plays a part in *Gesar of Ling*. Heaven was inhabited by the deeply revered King of Heaven, who was surrounded by supernatural spirits and gods, and by the White Goddess of Heaven (gNam-lha dkarmo) who lived near Mount Everest together with the five Sisters of Long Life, each having her own different-colored pool (18ff.).

The other two spheres were air and earth, the latter sometimes referred to as the underworld. Each sphere had its own inhabitants. Residents of the lower domain, in rivers, lakes, and wells, the kLu are reminiscent of Westerners' water sprites. Because they could transform themselves into serpents, they were said to be guardians of secret treasures and were identified with the Indian Nagas. The gNyan, who populated trees, rocks, valleys, and mountains, were believed to be related to mountain gods. Easily disturbed by humans, the gNyan set upon them plagues, disease, and death. The Sabdag, or Masters of the Earth, lived aboveground. The fearful Sri, who resembled vampires, lusted after small children (17ff.).

The kLu kings are in all streams,
The gNyan kings are in trees and stones,
The Masters of the Earth are in the five kinds of earth:
There, it is said, are the Masters of the Earth,
the kLu and the gNyan.

What kind of company is theirs?
Scorpions with long stings,
Ants with notched waists,
Golden frogs,
Turquoise-coloured tadpoles,

Mussel-white butterflies,

These are their company.

(Hoffmann 1961, 18)

The Bön Creation Myth

From the void was born a remarkable egg, which after five months burst open, yielding space, heat, fire, oceans, and mountains. There emerged, in the form of a snake or dragon, a man or woman (depending upon the text) who was declared to be the ancestor of the Tibetan race. In other documents, whose authors were apparently influenced by Buddhism, the claim was made that the Tibetans were the offspring of a monkey and a mountain ogress. The monkey, a disciple of Avalokiteshvara (the Compassionate: a principal bodhisattva of the Mahayana Buddhists and Tibet's patron deity), was sent to the Land of Snows to meditate. No sooner had he arrived at his destination than a mountain ogress, in the guise of a gorgeous woman, sought to couple with him. Determined in his spiritual mission, he resisted her temptations until she threatened to copulate with a demon and populate the land with nefarious creatures. Returning to his master for counsel, the monkey was advised to marry the mountain ogress. The six children they bore multiplied so rapidly that they soon faced starvation. Again the monkey returned to Avalokiteshvara for advice. Pitying these "victims of desire," the master picked five kinds of grain growing on Mount Sumeru and had them sown in a field, where they took root and grew. When the apes ate the grain, their tails became smaller, their body hair vanished, and they grew shorter. It was believed they inherited their virtues from their father and their vices from their mother (Shen and Liu 1953, 19).

Other versions of the creation myth exist: one, dating from the fourteenth century, tells of an unnamed Indian prince who, disguised as a woman, had fled his homeland during the great war between the Kauravas and Pandavas (described in the *Mahabharata*). Twelve herdsmen (evidently offspring of the original monkey population), standing in a circle, saw him descend the sacred mountain (Yar-lha-sham-po). Upon asking him whence he came, and misunderstanding his answer, they concluded that he had descended from the top of the sky by means of a sky cord (Shen and Liu 1953, 20).

The sky cord, in keeping with rope symbolism, is an *axis mundi*, a miraculous stairway enabling not only humankind to communicate with heavenly spheres but gods to descend and ascend from celestial to earthly domains.

From mid-sky seven stages high,
Heavenly sphere, azure blue,
Came our king, lord of men,
Son divine, to Tibet.
Land so high, made so pure,
Without equal, without peer,
Land indeed! Best of all!
Religion too surpassing all!

(Snellgrove and Richardson 1968, 23)

Having decided that the unnamed Indian prince should be proclaimed king of their land, they named him Nya-Khri bTsan-Po (Neck-Enthroned Mighty One) and carried him down the mountain on their shoulders in a palanquin (Shen and Liu 1953, 19).

He came as lord of all under heaven.
This centre of heaven,
This core of the earth,
This heart of the world,

Fenced round by snow,
The headland of all rivers,
Where the mountains are high and the land is pure.

(Snellgrove and Richardson 1968, 24)

Although texts vary, scholars apparently agree that twenty-seven kings reigned after Nya-Khri bTsan-Po. The title bTsan-po (Mighty One) was awarded to most future kings of Tibet, thus endowing their persons with sacrality and lending a mystical cast to their rule. After the kings' earthly sojourn, they ascended to heaven by means of the sky rope, indicating in so doing a "recollection" of, and a need to recapture, a "lost paradise." Following their departure, no trace of their physical being was left on earth. Understandably Bön priests considered the heavenly rope to be the "rope of divination," identifying it with the shaman's "soul-guiding" power (Eliade 1972, 431).

The physical ascent of kings to heaven ceased after the reign of Grigum (Slain by Pollution). Arrogant, argumentative, and vicious, he sought to challenge all those around him to a fight. According to one text, his master of the horse, Longam, after much cajoling, finally agreed to Grigum's demand

to fight, if he, in turn, would give up his magical weapons. When the contenders met, Longam indulged in subterfuge and killed the monarch, but not before the latter cut the ladder, thus making a return to heaven impossible (Snellgrove and Richardson 1968, 25).² Because he was the first king to leave his body on earth, so the legend goes, people henceforth not only buried their monarchs' mortal remains in royal tombs but began to concern themselves with earthly matters (Hoffmann 1961, 19, 20).

The Advent of Buddhism in Tibet

Because Buddhism, founded by Siddhartha Gautama (566–483 B.C.E.), is so complex a religion, we can, unfortunately, only get a glimpse of its extraordinary spiritual message. Tibetans uphold that in the Buddhist doctrine happiness and salvation result from inwardness, and are not dependent upon transitory exterior phenomena; life on earth is the product of imperfection and sorrow; the annihilation of desire leads to salvation and “perpetual enlightenment” (nirvana).

Although a group of monks allegedly brought some Buddhist texts from India to Tibet in the fifth century, these remained unknown to the mostly illiterate nomadic population. Only under the reign of the powerful conqueror Srong-btsan sgam-po (609–50) did Buddhism become a significant force in Tibet. Of his five wives, two played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism in that country: Wen-ch'eng, a T'ang princess from the Chinese imperial house, and Bhrikuti, the daughter of the king of Nepal. Both fervent Buddhists, they converted the Tibetan king to their faith. By the eleventh century, they were deified, worshipped as two forms or incarnations of Supreme Wisdom (Prajnaparamita), honored by metaphysicians and ascetics under the Tibetan name of Dölma and known more popularly by the Indian name Tara (Savioress or Goddess of Mercy), Tibet's protective divinity. Bhrikuti was identified as the Green Dölma; Princess Wen-ch'eng, as the White Dölma (Davy 1972, 4).

The amalgamation of Buddhism and Tibet's shamanist-animist Bön produced a unique religion: Lamaism, so named for its lamas (superior ones). The lama (equivalent to the Indian guru) enjoyed such importance that certain exceptional spiritual values were attributed to him: as a moral authority, he became the director of monasteries and performed rituals. But he was also endowed with the qualities of the *tulku* (a person who, after undergoing specific tests, was considered to be the reincarnation of a god or a dead

master). Some Tibetans believed a lama to be the incarnation of a bodhisattva, a person hoping to attain Buddhahood but refraining from entering nirvana until all humans have been saved. Because the lama was considered the defender of the faith and protector of his people against ever-present evil powers, through the ritual of the "dance of the lamas" and the recitation of the *Bardo Thödol* (The Tibetan book of the dead), he could effect a diminution of noxious forces.

The fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism were established by the Indian sage Padma Sambhava during the reign of Khri-srong Ide-btsan in the eighth century. The rising power of Buddhism and the alliance of the kings of Tibet with the new faith threatened the privileges of the old Bön aristocracy, understandably provoking their resentment. Indeed, the king was using Buddhism to affirm his political power, as the Bön priests had in former times to strengthen theirs. Although the Buddhist/Bön struggle was intense and did not preclude bloodshed, it nevertheless had its positive sides: Tibetan religion and culture were further enriched by the construction of the first monastery, the bSamyas, completed in 787. It was laid out according to Buddhist cosmography (Hoffmann 1961, 47).

Padma Sambhava—as his name, the Lotus Born, indicates—was not the offspring of earthly parents, but was born miraculously, out of the heart of a lotus in the middle of a lake. An Indian Tantric and cofounder of Lamaism, Padma is also known as Guru Rinpoche (the Precious Teacher). After having been summoned to Tibet in 747, his reputation grew as a wise and deeply committed man, but also as a sorcerer and exorcist. Having been initiated into the secrets of Tantric necromancy by some *dakinis*, his ability to destroy demonic forces was believed to be overwhelming.

Miracles or feats of magic, such as transforming barren into fertile land by diverting rivers and conjuring waterways, dematerializing rocks and other hard matter, and restoring life to the dead, were attributed to Guru Padma. One ceremony, called the *rolang* rite (rite of the rising corpse) is described as follows:

The celebrant is shut up alone with a corpse in a dark room. To animate the body, he lies on it, mouth to mouth, and while holding it in his arms, he must continually repeat mentally the same magic formula, excluding all other thoughts.

After a certain time the corpse begins to move. It stands up and tries to escape; the sorcerer, firmly clinging to it, prevents it from freeing itself. Now the body struggles more fiercely. It leaps and bounds to extraordinary heights, dragging with it the man who must hold on, keeping his lips

upon the mouth of the monster, and continue mentally repeating the magic words.

At last the tongue of the corpse protrudes from its mouth. The critical moment has arrived. The sorcerer seizes the tongue with his teeth and bites it off. The corpse at once collapses. . . .

The tongue carefully dried becomes a powerful magic weapon which is treasured. (David-Neel 1931, 135)

A student of cosmology, "triple yoga," levitation, philosophy, logic, and secret sciences, Guru Padma was awarded the immortal "Vajra" body. Let us note in this connection that within Buddhism there existed such divisions as Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle). The former and more ancient emphasized individual redemption; the latter preached salvation for all. About the eleventh century, Mahayana Buddhism branched out to emphasize a doctrine answering the Tibetans' fundamental need for magic: Vajrayana (the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt). Although constituted around the guru (master) and his disciple(s), Vajrayana stressed the importance of Tantra ("threads woven on a loom," or scriptures), of mantra (repetition of the mystical syllables or phrases *Om mani padme hum*: "Ah! The jewel is indeed in the lotus!"), and of mudra (symbolic signs, gestures).

The Vehicle of the Thunderbolt, esoteric in essence, amalgamated in its corpus yoga, animism, the symbolic power of light, and the cult of sexuality. It also stressed the importance of the feminine element, namely, the power of the wives, helpers, and/or disciples of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. For the Vajrayana Buddhist, a knowledge of the *Prajnaparamita* (the sutra of "Perfection of Wisdom") was essential. In time, this concept was personified and transformed into the Goddess Prajnaparamita, and worshiped in the shape of an icon. She is depicted as follows:

Perfect Wisdom spreads her radiance, . . . and is worthy of worship. Spotless, the whole world cannot stain her. . . . In her we may find refuge; her works are most excellent; she brings us to safety under sheltering wings of enlightenment. She brings light to the blind, that all fears and calamities may be dispelled, . . . and she scatters the gloom and darkness of delusion. She leads those who have gone astray to the right path. She is omniscience; without beginning or end is Perfect Wisdom, who has Emptiness as her characteristic mark; she is the mother of the Bodhisattvas. . . . She cannot be struck down, the protector of the unprotected, . . . the Perfect Wisdom of the Buddhas, she turns the Wheel of the Law. (De Bary 1958a, 180)

The Great Mother in Tantrism

Tibetan Tantrism is fourfold: the Tantra of action, the Tantra of practice, Yoga Tantra, and supreme Yoga Tantra. The progression from a lower to a higher mystical state depends on the adept's evolution or knowledge of a previously hidden teaching: the understanding, for example, of the vacuity of all things experienced as illumination. During the training period, when the practitioner's most terrifying and violent sides are unleashed, he must become cognizant of the pulsations or energies inherent in his physical, sexual, and passionate nature. Replications of one's darker, or shadowy latent, or hidden character traits, these frequently negative forces not only must be dominated and channeled but must be transformed into positive powers or systems. To attain the Vajrayana state in Tantrism is fraught with obstacles, since it requires the actual transformation of evil characteristics or life courses into good ones (Davy 1972, 30ff.).

Shocking to many a Westerner is the fact that divine feminine beings or forms iconographically or metaphorically in sexual union are frequently conveyed to Tantric meditators. What the Westerner fails to understand is the fact that these feminine beings are personifications of feminine aspects of Buddha's own energy: his maleness is *upaya* (skillfulness), while his femaleness is *prajna*, (wisdom and knowledge in a static and passive state). Each personification, in his (active) or her (passive) way during sexual union, is, in fact, engaged in transmitting the Buddha's teaching (36; Hoffmann 1961, 124).³ Although demarcations between male and female are implicit in the empirical domain, male and female are considered fused—as *one*—in transpersonal spheres. Not sexual experience alone, however, can lead to unity: the act must be performed within an esoteric framework. For the Tibetan, the coupling of the Buddha's dual aspects on earth—as Divine Father and Divine Mother—is looked upon as the highest form of mudra: the hand gesture and/or position representing the nondualist concept of Oneness. To consider the posture of sexual union as obscene is to misconstrue the teachings of Tantrism.

Tibetans venerate the Great Mother (Shakti Sa-trig er-sangs), not as "subordinate to the life circle of development," but as participant in the sacred Tetrad (Hoffmann 1961, 102). In the incantation formula of the *gZermyig*, a polemical lamaist text, "the trinity is extended by the addition of the Shakti Sa-trig er-sangs," who is depicted as follows:

Therefore first veneration for our great Mother!
 The Mother of space Sa-trig er-sangs
 Is like in colour to essence of gold.
 Her finery, her clothing, her Heavenly Palace
 Is golden and beautiful through golden light.
 In her right hand she holds the heroic letters of the "Five
 Seeds,"
 In her left hand she holds the Mirror of Shining Gold
 She sits on the throne of two strong lions, who shine like
 jewels.
 Through blessings she effects the well-being of creatures.
 Veneration to the great Sa-trig er-sangs!
 (Hoffmann 1961, 102)

Because an individual or a material object "is regarded as the accumulation of its parts and has no self-essence or soul," it is "void of self or ego." Because of its essential emptiness or voidness, it is considered "the primary matrix of existence" and is referred to as the "Mother of Creation." In that primordial space penetrates all matter "and undermines the ego and voidness," it is also considered an aspect of perceived space. "The principle of the Great Mother, is then, the space which gives birth to the phenomenal world. The permeating space and boundary, the fundamental form, is the Great Mother or the source of *dharmas*," of righteousness (Majupuria 1990, 26).

The Great Mother is referred to as the womb, the "cosmic cervix," or the "gate of all births"—that is, the primordial feminine of all creation. Trungpa Rinpoche depicted her as follows:

In the phenomenal experience, whether pleasure or pain, birth or death, sanity or insanity, good or bad, it is necessary to have a basic ground known in Buddhist literature as the mother principle. Prajnaparamita (the perfection of wisdom) is called the mother-consort of all the Buddhas. . . . As a principle of cosmic structure, the all-accommodating basic ground is neither male nor female. One might call it hermaphroditic but due to its quality of fertility or potentiality, it is regarded as feminine. (Majupuria 1990, 25)

Iconographically, she is depicted as a downward-pointing triangle, symbolizing the "outgrowing and reappearing quality of wisdom" (25). Within this divine feminine force exist the potentials for love and compassion, as well as for rage and destruction.

With the advent of Tantrism in Tibet, a whole erotic side of religion became manifest, which interrelated and diminished the distance between earthly and celestial worlds, and permitted access to Illumination. A fusion of the sacred and profane could be achieved through the love/sexual experience—earthly intercourse being a replication of a similar act between divine pairs.

Dölma/Tara

Dölma/Tara, who was born from the tears of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, was protector against natural catastrophes and grantor of fertility. Manifested in twenty-one different forms, Dölma assisted her male counterpart, Avalokiteshvara, in his work. Iconographically, each of Dölma's manifestations may be distinguished in terms of color, posture, and attributes. She expressed anger, for example, by displaying her terrifying, destructive side as Queen of the World (Srid-pa'i rgyal-mo), endowed with three eyes and six arms (Hoffmann 1961, 104).

A root mantra for Dölma's worship—"the twenty-one verses in praise of [Dölma] Tara"—consisted of Lord Buddha's words to Manjushri, the immortal bodhisattva of wisdom:

O Manjushri, this female form (Dölma) symbolises the source of Buddhas of the three times. Therefore, O Manjushri, as all Buddhas of the past, present and future sing this praise of hers, you also should do so in your mind." (Majupuria 1990, 21)

Excerpts from manuals devoted to Dölma worship read as follows:

If we worship this sublime and pure-souled goddess when we retire in the dusk and arise in the morning, then all our fears and worldly anxieties will disappear and our sins [be] forgiven. She the conqueror of myriad hosts will strengthen us. She will do more than this! She will convey us directly to the end of our transmigration—to Buddha and Nirvana!

She will expel the direst poisons, and relieve us from all anxieties as to food and drink, and all our wants will be satisfied; and all devils and plagues and poisons will be annihilated utterly; and the burden of all animals will be lightened! If you chant her hymn two or three or six or seven times, your desire for a son will be realized! Or should you wish wealth, you will obtain it, and all other wishes will be gratified, and every sort of demon will be wholly overcome. (Waddell 1967, 435)

The Bengali teacher Atisha (“The Nobleman,” 980/990–1055), consulted Dölma, his tutelary deity, as to the wisdom of embarking on a long and perilous journey to Tibet. Although she warned him that his life span would be diminished, his trip, she added, would benefit humanity. Upon his arrival in the Land of the Snows, he was received with supreme honor by King Od-Ide, after which he began his missionary work. As evidenced from his writings entitled *Lamp for the Way of Enlightenment*, he preached the most spiritual and inspirational form of Mahayana Buddhism (Majupuria 1990, 23; Hoffmann 1961, 121).

Dakini or Khadroma

A *dakini*—a being that takes on consistency in the supreme sphere of reality when invoked by an individual or a group—is called a *khadroma* in Tibetan. *Kha* represents celestial space, the void becoming image; *dro* is associated with walking or displacing oneself; and *ma* with the feminine gender. The concept of the *dakini* originated in the mystic land of Orgyen, the birthplace of Padma Sambhava and of Tantric credos.

In *Gesar of Ling*, the *dakini* represents a personal divinity whose mental and behavioral character traits correspond to those of the adept invoking her. Her manifestation—the visualizations formed by the inner eye of the meditator—can be beautiful or horrific, taking on peaceful or belligerent characteristics. As an aspect of the personality of the individual calling her into existence, she becomes a means of transforming a negative into a positive condition.

As emanations of the Great Mother’s energetic powers, *dakinis* not only are endowed with expertise in magic, but are the purveyors of mystic doctrines to earthly worshipers. For practitioners of Tantra, specific disciplines (for example, rituals involving nerves, breath, or essence) are able to conjure the dynamic feminine power sought for at the moment. If an adept understands the symbolism of a certain *dakini* (in terms of color, form, objects carried by her) and identifies with her, the energy inherent in the visualization may not only be channeled along definite paths and used for specific purposes but may also be directed to perceiving that which exists within matter. Thus, hidden treasures such as sacred texts or esoteric Tantric signs and codes may be revealed. It is believed that Padma Sambhava discovered crucial secret writings in unknown languages and succeeded in deciphering these thanks to the mystical inspiration of *dakinis* (Majupuria 1990, 37). Similarly, our hero, Gesar, will make discoveries of concealed treasures.

Tibetan rulers, wise men, and mystics have since time immemorial consulted *dakinis*—these natural apparitional beings—to gain greater understanding of magical arts, rituals, and eroticized positions. Apparitions of such *dakinis* or tutelary deities are psychological realizations, as previously mentioned, of the person evoking them (Evans-Wentz 1960, 122). The visualization of the deity is a means of thinking about or calling into being qualities for which the worshiper yearns. Thus she is not only instrumental in helping to find solutions but may also lead the meditator to eventual enlightenment.

In some meditations, the practitioner has been known to advance to such a profound state of consciousness or awareness that he reaches beyond the world of appearances into the domain of metaforms. Certain mystics, so it has been recorded, have observed their own bodies divested of flesh and contemplated their own skeletons. The *dakini* may ask the meditator to think of his body as a corpse and his mind as a manifestation of her angry side. In one sacred text, her hands hold a knife and a skull: "Think that she severeth the head from the corpse . . . and cutteth the corpse into bits and flingeth them inside the skull as offerings to the deities" (Eliade 1972, 436).

In another text, the yogin sees himself as "a radiant white skeleton of enormous size, whence issueth flames, so great that they fill the voidness, the Universe" (436).

In a third document, the yogin is asked to look upon himself as follows:

Visualize thyself as . . . that thou . . . spreadest it [the skin] out so that it covereth the Third-Void Universe, and upon it heapest up all thy bones and flesh. Then, when the malignant spirits are in the midst of enjoying the feast, imagine that the Wrathful *Dakini* taketh the hide and rolleth it up . . . and dasheth it down forcibly, reducing it and all its contents to a mass of bony and fleshy pulp, upon which many mentally-produced wild beasts feed. (437)

The sharp side of the blade in the cutting up of the corpse in the first quotation represents the yogin's ability to cut through matter; its crescent contour is associated with the moon and its monthly course; its hooked shape implies the instrument's ability "to pull living beings out of the cycles of transmigration." Thus are attempts made to transform humankind's ego-centered vision into cosmic consciousness, the above paradigms (skeleton, a severed head, and a hooked knife) symbolizing potential and enlightened masculine energy that the yogin projects onto the *dakini* (Majupuria 1990, 34).

The feminine principle in the form of Dölmas, *dakinis*, and *tulkus* intervenes in *Gesar of Ling*. As positive forces, these beings contribute to the success of the Tibetan hero. As negative powers, their function is to destroy those who would impede humankind's evolution. Each time a feminine power appears to Gesar in a dream, an apparition, and/or a visitation, she takes on the role of a guiding force, opening up his intuitive faculties to greater insights.

Archetypal Analysis

Only incomplete fragments of *Gesar of Ling* are extant. Some of these cycles, sung by bards in the Kahm country in eastern Tibet, Gesar's native land, or in Lhasa, Mongolia, Turkestan, or western China, date back to the eighth and ninth centuries. For purposes of our discussion, reference is made exclusively to Alexandra David-Neel's version of *Gesar of Ling*.⁴

Archetypal Mother/Ancestress/Catalyst

Appearing first as a personal mother, the ancestress or catalyst of *Gesar of Ling* later takes on collective or divine dimension in order to play her determining role as archetypal Mother. While the personal mother has only limited import, etiologically speaking, the collective (Divine Mother) is of crucial significance in our epic.⁵ Of such magnitude was her role that she would activate her daughter and grandsons to follow an evil course, subsequently transformed into a good one, which would invest her with both authority and numinosity (Jung 1968, par. 83).

As a personal mother, the ancestress spent her waking hours tending her herd of cattle on a mountainside. One day, she suddenly saw "a supernal light shine at the spot where the Bodhisattva [had once] lived at the foot of a tree." Immediately she sensed the presence of this saintly man who had practiced austerities continuously during his earthly trajectory. So deeply did she regret not having learned from him the Doctrine—the "Wheel of the Law"⁶—that she decided there and then, despite her advanced age, to go to India to listen to the preachings of him who was reborn as a Buddha (*Gesar*, 49).

The "light" that elicited a powerful mystical experience in the mother, interpreted psychologically as a projection, may at first appear antinomic in character. As a projection, however, the saintly man emerged from her own, long-dark subliminal spheres, and finally sought manifestation. The vision of

light may be understood as an unconscious attempt on her part to differentiate what may be termed an archaic and/or unredeemed mass within her—that is, she needed to experience the Bodhisattva's saintly qualities cognitively. This kind of transference suggests that the dark or unknown areas in the psyche seeking expulsion were instrumental in paving the way for her illumination. Aren't metaphysical assertions dependent upon an individual's and a collective's levels of consciousness? (Jung 1963, par. 833).

The personal mother in *Gesar of Ling* had been living in darkness until she suddenly saw the light shining at the foot of a tree. Why did she instinctively heed the message she had intuited? Trees not only were considered ascensional symbols, taking shamans skyward on a celestial journey, but they also possessed holy aspects in and of themselves. Their roots reaching deep into the earth and their branches high above it served to link terrestrial to heavenly spheres. Such communion between high and low gave Tibetans fluid access to heretofore inaccessible polarities. The tree came to symbolize a living and regenerating cosmos—death and rebirth.

By gaining enlightenment, the woman would die in her role of personal mother. The supernal light had become visible to her in response to her deep-seated need for sacrality. The birth of the archetypal Mother not only necessitated the shedding of her previous state; it would be the prelude to her cosmic experience.

Upon returning home with her flock, the personal mother apprised her daughter of her visitation and also informed her of her plans for both mother and daughter to travel to India. So completely had she been swept up in the dazzling light of her vision that all cognition had been blocked out. That her daughter might be unwilling to give up her comforts and material possessions—her herd, headdresses, amber beads, and necklaces—and refuse to endure the cold and starvation such a journey entailed never crossed the mother's mind. Much to her chagrin, the daughter did reject the idea of visiting sacred places and performing ascetic rituals in order to earn a possible future beatitude. Only here and now counted.

After intoning her mantra—*Om mani padme hum!* and “May I be reborn in Nub Dewachen!” (the Western Paradise of Great Bliss)—the aged mother left home alone to face her rite of passage. Suffering incredible difficulties, including intense cold, near drownings, and grave loneliness, she arrived in India years later. Her physical and spiritual travail, instrumental in the successful completion of her journey, had taken her from a condition of darkness or ignorance to one of illumination. The archetypal Mother was in the process of being born: she had “advanced to the entrance of the Path” (*Gesar*, 51).

As she listened to the preachings of the Buddha and heeded his principles of deep meditation and strict mind control, there appeared before her "the first ray of sunlight," as a trail of brilliant white light. Her spirit, unveiling "the red Amitab[h]a [Infinite Light] seated on his throne in the Western Paradise, surrounded by a thousand and twenty-two Buddhas," had begun its ascent. This was the moment when the mother's spirit escaped from its body and attained beatitude (52).

Even while the archetypal Mother successfully completed her rite of passage, her daughter was faced with adversity: her three sons died, disease killed her herd, and her material possessions were stolen. The daughter, ascribing these calamities to Buddha's desire for retribution because she refused to go to India, vowed to fight the master and his Doctrine (53).

Guru Padma Sambhava, having heard the daughter's oath from on high, had intervened unsuccessfully on her behalf. The spirits of the woman after her demise, and those of her dead sons were ordered to wander in *bardo* (limbo, between death and rebirth), after which they were to be reborn as demoniacal beings bent upon destroying the "true Religion" (55).

In his wisdom, Guru Padma knew that only *one* hero was capable of annihilating the evildoers. Calling a meeting of the gods, extraterrestrial beings, and magician-sages, he asked them to single out by divinatory means (*mo*) the one capable of destroying the demons. Thubpa Gawa, the son of two lama deities, was designated, but he resisted the challenge of earthly incarnation, preferring to remain in his blissful abode (56). Even after Guru Padma finally persuaded him of the importance of upholding "the true Doctrine," Thubpa Gawa, displaying a mind of his own, posed eighteen demands, including:

1. That the father of Thubpa Gawa's earthly incarnation be a God, and his mother a Nagi (in Tibetan, a *lu* or *klu*: a demi-goddess inhabiting the ocean, lakes, streams).
2. That he must be given a winged horse (Tulku) able to understand the language of humans and animals; a saddle studded with gems, a helmet, cuirass, sword, and bow and arrow, none of which must have been made by human hands.
3. That two companions (heroes) be made available to aid him.
4. That he must be awarded the most beautiful wife. She must know how to inflame men's passions, and thus "incite" them to fight for her.

5. He also asked that some Gods and Dakinis, now residing in paradise, be incarnated so that he could count on their help if necessary. (*Gesar*, 57)

Thubpa Gawa's conditions were met, and we will continue his story after observing that the personal mother's visitation and her quest for deeper knowledge of Buddha served as an irritant, or catalyst, precipitating events to come. The daughter's disdain of her mother's religious credo had, metaphorically speaking, given birth to demons who would contaminate the land. The demons may also be understood as latent characteristics within the daughter, which took form because of resentment of her mother's abandonment of her for "higher" matters. She may have transferred her anger to her sons, arousing negative characteristics in their psyches. The incarnation of a hero, then, became a dire necessity: change had to occur to rout the rapidly spreading scourge of evil and to restore goodness.

A Virgin Birth

Thubpa Gawa was born miraculously to the virgin Dzedden (a Nagi) after she drank a "chalice of consecrated water."

Dzedden was a woman who lived in harmony with her Nagi nature—that is, in a fluid relationship with all dimensions of her personality. Tibetans consider the Nagis (serpents) mystical water deities who make their habitat at the bottom of an ocean or lake. Like the serpent who sheds its skin yearly, a Nagi represents renewal and eternity. Within their richly furnished aquatic palaces, Nagis guard sacred Buddhist texts placed in their care until humanity is mature enough to receive them.

The Nagis, like all things in nature, are endowed with both healing powers and destructive powers, which involve them in the world of humans. The potency or importance attributed to the Nagis in *Gesar of Ling* stems from the Tibetan concept of redemption (Jung 1963, par. 768).

Better to understand the importance of redemptive power, let us note the disparity between the Easterner's and the Westerner's views of this concept. In the West, "man is incommensurably small and the grace of God is everything; but in the East, man is God and he redeems himself" (par. 768). Despite the fact that the gods "of Tibetan Buddhism belong to the sphere of illusory separateness and mind-created projections," *they exist*. For the Westerner, "an illusion remains an illusion." C. G. Jung writes:

With us a thought has no proper reality; we treat it as if it were a nothingness. Even though the thought be true in itself, we hold that it exists only by virtue of certain facts which it is said to formulate. We can produce a most devastating fact like the atom bomb with the help of this ever-changing phantasmagoria of virtually non-existent thoughts, but it seems wholly absurd to us that one could ever establish the reality of thought itself. (par. 768)

The East considers psychic reality, or the psyche, “as the main and unique condition of existence” (par. 770).

Guru Padma, using the great store of mind power at his disposal, succeeded in convincing Dzedeb’s Nagi family that his motives for extracting Dzedden from her watery bed and bringing her to earth were impersonal, transcendent, and “incomprehensible to the vulgar,” but not to those initiated into the domain of higher understanding (*Gesar*, 64). The pain she experienced upon leaving her family and her watery world for the vagaries and sufferings of life, however, was to be excoriating. Nevertheless, she understood that she had no choice but to comply with her destiny.

Arriving at the “peaceful and happy” country of Ling, most naturally Dzedden went in search of water, and so happened upon Gyasa, a married woman, who had brought her flock of animals to the same watering hole. Not overly surprised by the meeting inasmuch as her husband had had a premonitory dream about the passage of a young girl in the vicinity, Gyasa invited her to stay a few days with them in their yurt (67–69). Dzedden’s charm and amiability enabled her to get along well with the family until Gyasa’s husband, Singlen, grew increasingly fond of Dzedden, and she of him. Despite the Tibetan practices of polygamy and polyandry, Gyasa resented the presence of a rival. The climate of harmony in the household yielded to one of discord. Unwilling to hurt his wife, Singlen controlled his sexual desires by undertaking a pilgrimage. During his absence, Gyasa planned to rid herself of her rival by sending her to distant grazing lands that she knew to be replete with demons.

Although aware of the dangers facing her, Dzedden complied and left. On her way, she took stock of the magnitude of the demonic forces she would encounter and wept bitterly. Meanwhile, the deity called Kenzo, having been chosen to become *Gesar*’s father, believed it was time to involve himself in earthly matters. Descending on his gray courser together with six hundred gods “along a golden rainbow,” he moved “in dazzling light” (71). The supernal vision terrified Dzedden. Dismounting, Kenzo