



## Report of the Guest Lecture of the BuddhistRoad project

24 January 2024 Yuewei Wang (Paris)

### **MOUNTAIN GOD, CELESTIAL GOD, AND KINGSHIP: THE NON-BUDDHIST TRADITION IN DUNHUANG TIBETAN DOCUMENTS**

invited lecture at the BuddhistRoad project, CERES, Ruhr University Bochum

The team of the *BuddhistRoad* project invited Dr. Yuewei Wang, post-doctoral researcher at the Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale, Paris, to give an online BuddhistRoad Guest Lecture on the relationship between mountain god, celestial god, and divine kingship in Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts. In this lecture, Dr. Wang took the mountain god Tanglha yazhur (Tib. Thang lha ya bzhur) and Yarlha shampo (Tib. Yar lha sham po) as examples, to explore the core question: What was the possible identity, diversity, and evolution of mountain gods (known as a group of nine, Tib. *lha dgu*) in early Tibet?

The lecture began with an introduction to the local kings (Tib. *rgyal; rje*) and their mountain gods. Dr. Wang examined the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts IOL Tib J 734 (referred to as *Age of Decline*) and P.T. 1287 (known as *Old Tibetan Chronicle*). Through the analysis of the two manuscripts, Dr. Wang inferred that before the Tibetan Empire (ca. 7th c. to 842, Tib. Bod chen po) each local king had his own mountain god. These mountain deities provided protection to the local kings from disturbances by demons (Tib. *srin*), as seen in the IOL Tib J 734; and also symbolised their political power, as indicated in *Old Tibetan Chronicle*.

In the second part of the lecture, Dr. Wang examined the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscript IOL Tib J 740, including a divination with dice and a colophon. While the IOL Tib J 734 highlights the equal relationship between local gods and local kings, in contrast, IOL Tib J 740 focuses on transforming local deities into divinatory sources of Tibetan imperial power. Dr. Wang pointed out that after the establishment of the Tibetan Empire, it was necessary to incorporate the former mountain gods into the imperial pantheon to ritually declare dominance over the local kings. Transforming local deities into divinatory sources of imperial law, as observed in IOL Tib J 740, represents a strategy to separate these deities from their ties to local powers and re-centralise them under the control of the central government.

In the third part of the lecture dealing with divine emperors and their body gods (Tib. *sku bla*), Dr. Wang argued that the method of the Tibetan Empire of unifying mountain deities not only included using them as imperial divination gods, but also identifying them as body gods of the emperors, as represented by P.T. 1047, a manuscript dealing with a divination. Dr. Wang assumed that the concept of body gods in the imperial divination texts such as P.T. 1047 indicated that body gods, the personal deity of the Tibetan Empire, was a symbol of the power centralisation of Tibetan emperors.



In the final part Dr. Wang argued that in the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts, the method of the Tibetan Empire of sanctifying and centralising its kingship included the invention of a celestial god origin of the Yarlung royal genealogy. This celestial god origin was of the Phyva (Tib. Phyva) class (a class of the highest celestial gods who generated the cosmos), as illustrated by the Kongpo Inscription (Tib. rKong po, abbreviated as Insc\_Rkong; ca. 799–815). However, the Kongpo Inscription did not mention that the mountain gods, such as the group of the nine mountain gods (Tib. *lha dgu*), were also of Phyva origin. In contrast, the early Bön (Tib. *bon*) genesis myth, *Stod lha rabs* [Lineage of the Gods on High], indicates this. When compared with the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts, *Lineage of the Gods on High* provides a more detailed account of the genealogy of Phyva gods and constructs a specific paternal kinship between the celestial gods, the mountain gods, and the divine kings.

The lecture concluded with the observation that during the transition period from pre-imperial Tibet to the Tibetan Empire, the mountain gods underwent a significant transformation. The Tibetan mountain gods evolved from being local protective deities and agents of the local kings in pre-imperial Tibet, to the unified pantheon gods and the divine paternal relatives of the Tibetan emperors.

