

BAARIN GESER: AN EPIC HERO LANDED IN THE COMMUNITY

The Geser is a cross-national, cross-regional epic, which is transmitted among the Tibetan, Mongolian and Tu peoples of China and also in Mongolia, Russia, Pakistan. In the Mongolian Geser, the hero has multi-roles: the son of the God, the Lord of ten directions, the guardian of Buddhism, the god of war, the king of the tribe. This is a cross-national and cross-regional recognition of Geser, showing the multi-layered identity of Geser.

However, in a certain community, the image of Geser is no longer a vague, all-covering image. In the traditional sense of Baarins¹, Geser is a local guardian god protecting the grassland from the monsters. Geser's role in Baarin is more focused, full of spontaneity and reality. This forms a specific layer of Geser's multi-layer roles.

As Gregory Nagy states, Homeric epic once had a centered context, such as Panathenaia. Indian epic tradition also had a centered context, namely the Pan-Indian. In such a context, a local here may become a hero/god of wider identification.²

The condition of Baarin Geser tradition is the opposite, which is a local tradition in the Mongolian Geser tradition as a whole. The concept of the Mongolians parallels with that of panhellenic or pan-Indian. The context of Baarin is the local context under the larger context of the Mongolian. In the pan-Indian context, the epic hero accomplishes a bottom-up rise due to his worship, while in Baarin, Geser's local image is a hero who lands from above, landing on the local identity from the whole Mongolian identity, shifting from the son of God and national hero into the guardian god of the Baarins.

This Baarin Geser who lands from above is rather worldly in his characteristics. In this tradition, the Geser as a god above is mingled with him as the god of the world. In the Mongolian tradition, local guardian gods are the gods of local community. Geser in the Baarin tradition is described as equal with the local gods; they play chess, kick shuttlecocks, and make weapons together. They also sit together without class distinction. When Mangus invades, the local gods assist with Geser. After the war, the image of Geser is carved on the stone. Such descriptions make Geser closer with the Baarin folks and the Baarin landscape, and contribute to the local folk belief in Geser.

This landing from above of Geser relates on a certain sense to the League and Banner system of the Qing Dynasty. Geser was not a local god for any tribe during the tribal society. After the establishment of the League and Banner system, Baarin tribe was settled in the present place (in 1634), and their need for the protection and guarding of their own territory led to the landing of this epic hero and gradually formed the local Geser worship.

In Baarin, there are many scenes for the worship of this guardian god Geser, enabling a multi-level connection of the local people with Geser.

1. The worship custom on the level of the Baarin Banner. In Baarin, the temple of Geser is the highest scene for the Geser worship. There are two kinds of worship rites: the worship rite of the royals and the worship rite of the folks; the former is on June 24th and the latter May 13th by lunar calendar; the sacrifice of the former is a whole sheep, and that of the latter dairy food. The timing in the late spring and early summer shows the Baarins' earnest pray for a year of sufficient rain and nice weather. The prototype of these rites is exactly the witchcraft of pray for rain.

2. The worship custom on the level of village. The Zhulachin village of the Baarin Right Banner has the custom of reciting the Geser text on certain occasions. The elderly will recite the Geser text when some disaster happens, and the folks of the village listen to him quietly with eyes shut and palms pressed. This is another rite of Geser worship than just a narration of a story. This happens on the unusual occasions of disaster and banditry, the prototype of which is the witchcraft of exorcising demons. There is also a Geser Oboo on the west of the Zhulachin village, and worship is also conducted on the May 13th of lunar calendar, which is also a rite of pray for rain.

3. The worship custom on the level of family. In the village of Zhulachin, when a family loses cattle, they would conduct a rite of worship, which has following steps: on the evening of the day they would put ten grains of rice on a plate and cover them with a bowl, and narrate the whole story and ask Geser to help them find the cattle. This rite has two meanings. First, the ten grains of rice represent the ten directions, the territory of Geser. Second, covering with a bowl is a remain of an ancient witchcraft to keep the fortune.

To conclude, Geser provides a mental guard for the local people, and when they encounter any difficulty or unusual occasions they express their utilitarian needs to Geser on different scenes and rites for his bless. The rites of the worship are quite simple, but they help to relieve their anxieties and confusion. The prototypes of the rites are also simple, either praying for the rain, exorcising demons, or praying for fortune. The people's yearn for a happy life has led to the localization of Geser and the endurance and prosper of Geser worship.

¹ The Baarin here refers to the Baarin Right Banner and the Baarin Left Banner in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China.

² Gregory Nagy. *Homeric Questions*. Trans. by Bamo Qumubo. Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008, p. 58.