

**Buddhist Biographies and Socialist Moralities:
Life Narratives and Literary Tropes in Contemporary Tibet**

Tibetan society has undergone a profound transformation since its integration in the People's Republic of China in 1950. Traditional culture is often said to have disappeared or become irrelevant in the 'new society' of Tibet. In my presentation I will argue that despite the emphasis on radical discontinuity, traditional literary tropes still inform the way in which life narratives are told, cutting across the divide between traditional and modern Tibet, sacred and secular domains, religious leadership and party elite. In particular, the traditional idea of a biographical account (*rnam thar*, i.e. "complete [spiritual] liberation") can be linked to a 'morality of exemplars', which has been an important cultural feature of traditional and modern Inner Asian societies (Humphrey 1996; Bulag 2002). Life narratives of political and religious leaders in contemporary Tibet show that Buddhist and communist moralities can sometimes converge to promote collective interests and oppose what is perceived as ruthless technocraticism and self-serving behaviour.