



## **Tibetan literary life and activities in the Yunnan Tibetan areas (1980–2002)**

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In May 2002, the Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House published a Tibetan translation of the novel *Lost Horizon*, James Hilton's classic of 1933 (its subsequent film adaptation was in 1937) which contributed largely to the construction of the Western 'myth of Tibet' through the invention of the word and world of Shangri-La. The Tibetan version of Hilton's novel in the PRC, has come after a series of successful Chinese translations of this type of Western 'myth-making' literature on Tibet throughout the late 1990s. The publication of all these translations in the PRC is not innocent. As is written in the introduction of the Tibetan version of *Lost Horizon*, Hilton's novel is meant to further implement the new Chinese tourist policy in the Yunnan Tibetan areas, and to legitimise the subsequent re-naming of bDe-chen county (Diqing zhou, in Diqing Tibetan autonomous prefecture) as Shangri-La county (Xianggelila zhou). Now that *Mythos Tibet* has finally found its location in Yunnan, the Yunnan Tibetan areas – which have traditionally represented the farthest south-eastern outskirts of the Tibetan cultural world – are supposed to become the new attractive centres for all those people who are interested in experiencing 'authentic' Tibetan life. The Chinese tourist promotion of Shangri-La has put the Yunnan Tibetan areas in the limelight.

The recent prolific and diverse Tibetological studies in the international arena, have paid little attention to the specific evolution of Tibetan social and cultural life in the Yunnan Tibetan areas. The fact that these traditionally belong to the greater Khams region does not justify any underestimation of the importance and distinctiveness of local realities here. All the more since the PRC partition of the Tibetan world into different provinces *does* affect the evolution of Tibetan socio-cultural life in different ways according to different regions.

In this paper, on the basis of interviews with Tibetan writers and publishers carried out during fieldwork in Yunnan Tibetan areas (September-October 2002), and through a critical reading of an ensemble of literary publications collected on the field, I describe

and analyse modern Tibetan literary life and activities in Yunnan, mainly between 1980 and 2002. Besides presenting Tibetan writers and editors, their creative and editorial initiatives, according to their language of writing (Tibetan and/or Chinese), in different areas in Yunnan, I focus on the specificities of the Tibetan literary world there, seen in a comparative perspective with the other Tibetan worlds of literature in the PRC. I will pay particular attention to literary relations among the different Tibetan cultural regions, both in terms of contacts and common activities. My objective is to observe the present day Yunnan Tibetan world of literature both in a Tibetan *inter*-national perspective, and against the background of the changing weather of the PRC Yunnan economic and nationalities policy.