



MY TIME AT THE  
WISSENSCHAFTSKOLLEG  
TSEHING GYALPO (†)

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Born in 1961 into a nomadic family in the Langchu district of Gar County, West Tibet. Director of the Religious Department of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences, Lhasa. Studied at the Minzu University and the Ethnology Department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (M.A. in Ethnology 1988), stays as a Guest Professor at universities in China and as a research associate at several foreign institutes such as Princeton (2006), Harvard (2004), Virginia (2001) and Vienna (1996, 1999, 2010, 2011), author of eight books and ca. 50 articles in Tibetan or Chinese; co-author of or collaborator on several joint (English) publications with Western scholars (2000, 2005, 2007, 2012). Research interest: Tibetan Religions, early history of Western Tibet, oral cultures of Tibet. Tsering Gyalpo wrote this report shortly before his death on June 27, 2015.

The environment of the Wissenschaftskolleg is like a recreation area, with its many green spaces, the beautiful trees, the many waters. Every day after lunch I walked around the lake behind the institute once or twice, and I enjoyed the bird life and the lake's ever-changing surface. And many times I also went on more extended trips to the forests and parks of Grunewald, not to forget targeted visits to the Berlin city centre (visits to museums, shopping malls and concerts). I made a number of such longer trips together with Shen Weirong, the Chinese Fellow and member of our Tibet Focus Group, and our long conversations about everything possible became a pleasant routine during my stay at the Wiko.

For my research programme it was important first to read as much as possible of the more recent English secondary literature on Tibet, which is not accessible to me in Lhasa.

I also browsed through a lot of volumes that did not necessarily have to do with my research topic, just because I was curious – for example, volumes of old photos of Lhasa from the beginning of the 20th century, which were unknown to me.

The work in the Tibet Focus Group (Tibetan Genealogies) partly coincided with projects that I had already begun at home. On the one hand, this concerns a study on the Kharma Kagyüpa, one of the medieval religious lines in Tibet, of which there were (and partly still are today) seven branch lines, and within whose ranks the phenomenon of incarnation first emerged. On the other hand, with Guntram Hazod I started translating a new textual source related to the history of Zhangzhung; the latter is in the focus of my planned book project on western Tibet. This chronicle contains a succession of the Zhangzhung kings that for the first time makes an approximate dating of the royal genealogy possible and at the same time provides key information on the true geographical extent of this ancient (prehistoric) empire. We compiled a list of questions, particularly relating to unknown historical toponyms mentioned in this text, which I will pursue during my next visit to West Tibet. This planned fieldwork is to form the conclusion of my many years of collecting of new data on Zhangzhung, whose heartland was situated in the area of the later West Tibetan Buddhist Kingdom of Guge (10th–17th century CE). It was also important to use the time for a detailed discussion of my existing results with Guntram by including all the Western literature that was not known to me. Without Wiko, this work would not be as grounded and as far advanced as it is today.

It was often not easy for me to follow the presentations held in the framework of the Tuesday Colloquium, but from the regular discussions with the colleagues I also learned a lot for my work and the development of my own presentation at Wiko. Today my impression is that for the first time I really was able to make the essential step back to ask what I am actually seeing in the Buddhist Kingdom of West Tibet and the cave temples of Khartse (i.e. the topic of my presentation at the Tuesday Colloquium). I was delighted by the positive reactions of the colleagues (and also the Wiko staff) to the material I presented and to my explanations of the culture of my nomadic homeland.

My stay at the Wiko, which unfortunately had to be interrupted by a longer return to Lhasa, was a unique experience for me. The warmth and generosity (from the Rector right up to the kitchen staff) and the great service and all the additional features that have been offered (such as the wonderful performance by Wiko Fellow Andrés Schiff) remain unforgettable to me. The additional offers and opportunities also included the chance to twice invite colleagues from abroad at Wiko's expense. In addition, during my stay I also

took the opportunity to contact scholars and institutions outside the Wiko – contacts with Toni Huber (Humboldt University), Michael Oppitz (former Fellow of the Wiko, whose “Tibet Collection” we discussed together), Lewes Doney (from the “Zukunftsphilologie” at the Forum Transregionale Studien) and the Tibetan Studies colleagues whom we (i.e. the Tibet Focus Group) met at a conference held in Munich in May 2015.

For me, my time at the Wissenschaftskolleg was a very happy one. I will always remember it with heartfelt thanks.