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Reader's Report

Linda Szabóová, *The Three-headed Black Man: Analysis of a Ritual Text from the Gto Collection (Gto 'bum)*. Master's Thesis. Faculty of Arts, Charles university, 2024, 66 pp.

This master's thesis explores Tibetan rituals, focusing particularly on a text called *The Three-Headed Black Man*. In the classification of Tibetan rituals, this text falls under the *gTo* category. *gTo* rituals are primarily concerned with curing illnesses and addressing broader natural afflictions by appeasing supernatural forces identified as the cause. These specific rituals have been less studied and are more deeply rooted in indigenous Tibetan practices, unlike other Tibetan rituals that originate from the Indian Buddhist tradition.

In Tibetan culture, rituals are deeply embedded in everyday life, influencing religious rites, governance systems, and even business activities. Despite the richness of this field, it has been relatively underrepresented in academic research. This underrepresentation is largely due to the fact that most research in Tibetan studies has traditionally focused on the philosophical doctrines of Tibetan Buddhism. It is only in recent years that rituals have begun to attract scholarly attention, and the number of studies in this area is gradually increasing, as mentioned in this thesis. Fortunately, we now have a growing body of publications on various ritual topics available.

Given this context, studying the concepts of Tibetan rituals is essential. This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the subject, structured into four major parts:

1. **General Overview of Tibetan Rituals:** This section offers reliable information about rituals in general and makes a significant effort to clarify the complex concepts of Tibetan ritual practices, including their origins, contexts, and categorizations.
2. **Tibetan Astrology and Divination:** This part examines the crucial role that Tibetan astrology and divination play in ritual practices.
3. **The Black gTo of the Three-Headed One:** The thesis delves into the specifics of *The Black gTo of the Three-Headed One*, followed by discussions on effigies in Tibetan rituals and the procedures for ransom offerings.
4. **Critical Translation and Comparative Analysis:** The final section provides a critical translation of the ritual text, including notes that compare the Bonpo version *Srid pa'i gTo nag mgo gsum* with the Nyingma version *Gto nag mgo gsum gyi cho ga bzhugs so*.

Translating a Tibetan ritual text is no easy task, particularly when the text is written entirely in verse, adhering to a strict seven-syllable structure. The challenge is further compounded when



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the text employs numerous ornamental words, metaphors, and abbreviations. Despite these difficulties, Linda has approached the challenge with great seriousness, and the outcome is, in my opinion, quite impressive. Her translation successfully navigates the complexities mentioned above, which are all present in the text she worked on.

Linda has translated a ritual text that had not been previously explored, shedding light on the nuances and variations within Tibetan ritual practices through comparative research between a similar ritual from the Bon tradition and one from the Buddhist tradition. Moreover, the thesis includes a comparative analysis of different versions of the same ritual from the Nyingma school of the Buddhist tradition. Through this comparative study, Linda has demonstrated that slight variations can arise depending on the specific ritual tradition or regional practice, even within the same sect.

Overall, this thesis offers a well-researched and scholarly examination of Tibetan rituals. It highlights *The Black gTo of the Three-Headed One* as a microcosm of Tibetan ritual practices, contributing to a broader understanding of how Tibetan Buddhism has evolved by incorporating and adapting indigenous practices over time.

There are a few minor points in the translation that could be discussed during the defense. For instance, on page 48, the phrase "*phyag na sa yi 'khor lo bsnams*" is translated as "carrying a [golden?] wheel." While Linda has clearly indicated other possible interpretations in the footnote, the order of the "elements" in this context suggests that the "earth" element, rather than "gold," is the intended meaning.

In conclusion, I consider this thesis to be of very high quality. I propose that it be graded as "excellent."

Handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nima Hojer Lama".

Nima Hojer Lama

30th August 2024
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