

The Bonpo Mendrup (*sMan sgrub*) Ritual: Its Medicine, Texts, Traceable History, and Current Practice

Abstract

This thesis studies the mendrup (*sman sgrub*) ritual of the Tibetan Bon religious tradition. The mendrup rite comprises a specific tantric meditative practice and consecration rite, which is ascribed great efficacy for both physical and mental healing and spiritual progress. The mendrup practice is conducted for curing ailments, rejuvenation, longevity, as well as general well-being and prosperity. When performed on a large scale, the Bonpo mendrup ritual represents one of the most elaborate healing rituals of present Tibetan milieu, and likely one of the rarest, special, most demanding and expensive Tibetan rituals performed. This work is concerned with one particular conduction of the ritual, which took place in the Bonpo exile monastery of Triten Norbutse in Kathmandu, Nepal, in December 2012. The thesis is based on both textual sources and ethnographic observation, and examines this Bonpo mendrup performance from various aspects. Firstly, it traces and compares the oral and written histories of the ritual, showing that the practice has probably emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth century in Central Tibet. Historical accounts on the practice are put into context with its current performance in the exile, which is described in detail. The studied sequence of the ritual is supplemented by translations of its specific and most characteristic texts. Further, the work examines the strong medical aspect of the ritual. Throughout the work, special attention is paid to the product of the ritual, the “medicine”, its formulary and physical compounding, contemporary understandings and applications. The thesis also aims to entangle the various spheres of knowledge encompassed by the ritual, such as presumed Tibetan indigenous notions, the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Doctrine and tantric teachings, and the Tibetan Sowa rikpa medical tradition and botanical knowledge.

Keywords: Mendrup (*sman sgrub*) ritual, Bon, healing, ritual medicine, Sowa rikpa