

in the three hamlets comprising Žollam. In her 14½-page instalment, Chirkova finally acknowledges that Dwags-po (or *Báimǎ*, as she calls the language in Mandarin) is a Bodish language, so no longer kowtowing to Sūn Hóngkǎi's view that Dwags-po is not Bodish but represents some altogether distinct subgroup within the Trans-Himalayan language family. Copyediting could have been more attentive, for typographical errors such as "Geo-linguistic" (p. 55), "Standand Tibetan" (p. 311) are not infrequent.

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JAMES DUNCAN GENTRY:

Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism: The Life, Writings and Legacy of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen.

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On recent fieldwork in a Tibetan area, I snapped a photo of a painted image on the outside of a temple and sent it to an artist friend. She responded via text: "What does it mean?" I thought this was an interesting question, given its installation as part of an active religious site. Surely it's not what it *means*, but rather what it *does* that piques one's curiosity. To those who study ritual and material culture – not only but especially in the Tibetan cultural area – an emphasis on the activation or function of objects through construction, application and circulation feels more appropriate than any discussion of significance. And yet, this work by James Duncan Gentry is the first major volume to address ritual materials – or objects – as active elements of the dynamic social, political and intellectual network in which Tibetan Buddhism has been established and cultivated.

In *Power Objects*, Gentry articulates an essential lexicon for material-centred discussions of Tibetan ritual activity through the literary record of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1552–1624), thus-named "Mongol-repeller" and ritual master of the rNying ma order. Via the material cultural vocabularies of contemporary thinkers like Bruno Latour and the region-specific explorations of scholars such as Dan Martin and Sokdokpa himself, Gentry explores how ritual materials mediate relationships between political institutions and religious authorities, individuals and their social context, experience and knowledge, and non-humans and their manifestations. This mediation occurs as objects shape and are shaped by the flow of power and charisma through social, political and ritual actors, becoming agents in their own right.

The structure of the book is roughly chronological, presenting the social, historical and institutional setting into which Sokdokpa asserted his expertise as a ritual master in the volatile political and sectarian arena of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tibet. Gentry explores the legacy of Sokdokpa's teachings, writings and practices through the master's literary oeuvre, his critics and his lasting influence on other key figures in regional history, including Lha btsun nam mhka' 'jigs med (1597–1653), who was instrumental in the establishment of Sikkim's Buddhist institutions, and the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtso (1617–82). Though at heart a thorough and compelling literary study, Gentry's work puts issues of

materiality foremost, addressing efficacy and subject/object distinctions as they are illustrated through the work and career of Sokdokpa as a writer and ritual specialist.

Most usefully, Gentry's approach puts sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates on the role of objects as mediators and informational agents in Tibetan Buddhism in conversation with the discourse of scholars making sense of this intellectual and material heritage in our own time. This marks a significant and much-needed development in the academic understanding of Tibetan hermeneutics and its historiography, and the author provokes new ways to discuss the logic of Tibetan ritual activity by examining materials within their relational matrix. Throughout, Gentry narrows his discussion to certain volatile substances and their rites, promoted by Sokdokpa and used to liberate, protect, or empower. This is useful both in its historical specificity but also in its elaboration of vocabularies used to discuss the objective aspect to Tibetan ritual practice: concepts of efficacy, phenomenology, valorization, and the implications of a perceived subject/object divide are all given an examination via the writings and priorities of Sokdokpa.

This work inspires several further developments in the study of Tibetan ritual materials, some of which are alluded to by the author directly in his terminology and conclusions. For example, "material", "substance", "object/thing", "instrument", and "representation" are all distinct aspects of and operative categories for Tibetan ritual logic, and each deserves its own investigation. Moreover, the interpretation of materials themselves – not only through literary analysis but through their technological and physicochemical aspects – will be a useful contribution to the study of Tibetan Buddhism and its expressions throughout cultural history. This has been a glaring omission by scholars of what has been called Tibetan "art", where we are working to cultivate a more rigorous concept of how representational objects in particular communicate through their material nature.

Overall, *Power Objects* develops and articulates the general "material turn" of ritual studies – evidence of which seems ubiquitous in academia at present – to provide an informed case study of these topics within Tibetan Buddhism. Building on the recent work found in *Tibetan Ritual* (ed. José Cabezón, Oxford University Press, 2010), where religious activities are treated as a specialized and highly diversified facet of the region's cultural history – and to which Gentry contributed as well – this volume is a rich and inspiring step in our study of and conversation with Tibet's actual and intellectual records.

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EAST ASIA

SAM VAN SCHAİK:

The Spirit of Zen.

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The International Sacred Literature Trust has over the years published a good number of titles in English translation that have drawn on most of the major religious traditions of the world. But inevitably the tendency has been to concentrate