

BOOK REVIEW

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A Rosary of Rubies: The chronicle of the Gur-rigs mDo-chen Tradition from South-Western Tibet, Ehrhard, Franz-Karl, Munich: Indus Verlag, 2008, 267pp. Language: English and Tibetan

This book is a critical edition of a Tibetan text entitled *Dpal ldan gur rigs mdo chen brgyud pa'i lo rgyus nyung ngu'i ngag gi brjod pa padma rā ga'i phreng ba zhes bya ba bzhuḡs so* or in English: [A] *History of the Glorious Gur rigs mDo chen [Tradition], a speech of a few words [entitled] "A Rosary of Rubies"*. The book begins with a detailed and informative history of this tradition, placing it within the 'Brug pa sub-school of the bKa' brgyud pa school of Tibetan Buddhism. In this introduction Ehrhard details the origination of this sub-lineage of the 'Brug pa school by tracing the origins of one Ma bdun pa mDo bo che ba (12th/13th centuries) as a disciple of rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje (1189-1258) who established the *stod 'brug* (Upper 'Brug) branch of the 'Brug pa.

Ehrhard states that Ma bdun pa mDo bo che ba was associated with the region of sKyid grong in South Western Tibet, where the cult of the 'Seven Ma mo sisters' was prevalent and makes the connection between the name of the founder of the Gur rigs mDo chen tradition and this cult of female religious protectors found in the region. Ehrhard then contextualises the development of the Seven Ma mo sisters as territorial goddesses of malignant nature until their conversion to protectors (according to local tradition) by Padmasambhava and their role in the different religious traditions and schools of Tibet. His treatment of the development of this cult throughout the history of this region provides the reader with, not only, an interesting historical account but also of the linkages between this cult, the rNying ma school/*gter ma* (in the person of dMar zhabs ras pa who discovered three paper scrolls relating to this and who also disseminated a similar cult of female territorial protectors), the region and other similar cults.

Following this section Ehrhard begins to contextualise the mDo chen bKa' brgyud pa, beginning with some background information to the text that appears later in this book. He notes that this text appears as

a supplementary text to another work called *mDo chen bKa' brgyud gser 'phreng*. This introduction to the edited text helps to provide detailed information for the reader on the content and history behind the text. He then provides a historical introduction to the Gur family including a useful genealogical table for the reader to refer to, when reading either the Tibetan text or English translation.

Part two of this book includes the edited Tibetan text and English translation. Ehrhard's treatment of the Tibetan text, in particular the editing method, makes the Tibetan text easier to read. Whereas most scholars choose to transliterate the Tibetan text exactly as it appears in the original, Ehrhard has chosen to edit the transliteration and provide rejected spellings in footnotes; this allows the reader to read the Tibetan text clearly without constant reference to footnotes. In addition for those readers wishing to look more critically at the text he provides a facsimile of the original document (as plates) at the end of the book.

The translation of the Tibetan text, which follows the edited Tibetan, is precise and detailed. It offers the reader contextual information in footnotes as well as dating references in the main text, allowing the reader to follow the chronology of the text as well as clarifying certain points in the main translation. The text could have benefited from a presentation of the Tibetan text alongside the translation, perhaps on a folio by folio basis to allow the reader to follow both the Tibetan text and the translation sequentially. However, given that this is such a minor issue it does not detract from the importance of this work towards our knowledge of the little-known and even less studied Gur rigs mDo chen tradition of the upper 'Brug school. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in this tradition and the religious traditions of South-Western Tibet.