

Flesh-selling Rituals in Indian Tantric Buddhism:

Descriptions in the Buddhist and Hindu *Bhūtaḍāmaratantra*

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1. Introduction In my previous paper, I discussed the differences between speakers in the earlier Buddhist version of the *Bhūtaḍāmaratantra* (*BT*) and later Hindu version.¹⁾ While the speaker in the Hindu version is different, the fact that both versions have the same contents implies that the two religions share some rituals or doctrines. This paper focuses on one shared ritual that appears in both versions—the so-called “selling of flesh”—in order to gain a better understanding of the Buddhist version of the *BT*. I describe mentions of “practitioners selling flesh” in the *BT* and other Buddhist Tantric texts, and examine trends. In addition, I compare the descriptions of the ritual in Buddhist literature with a similar ritual that appears in Indian literature.

2. “Selling flesh” ritual in the *BT* The *BT*’s *Sādhana* of *Ceṭīceṭaka* describes a “selling flesh to *Bhūtinī*” ritual. The text includes a mantra for the ritual and then describes how the practitioner should go to the *śmaśāna* (crematorium) with the prescribed amount (8 *para*) of black goat’s flesh and look in the four directions. Then *Mahābhūtinī*, who lives in the *śmaśāna*, will appear in the form of *Brāhmaṇa* and exchange the flesh for the same amount of gold. However, the Sanskrit is unclear about the subject of the sentence; according to the Chinese translation, if *Mahābhūtinī* does not receive flesh, she will die because she disobeyed the *Vajrapāṇi*’s command.²⁾ It is also unclear why the practitioners of the ritual seek gold; the mantra states that it is “for the benefit of poor people”; however, it remains unclear whether this is for the benefit of the practitioner himself or for that of other poor people.

3. Selling flesh or liquor in other Buddhist Tantric texts Other Buddhist Tantric texts mention a similar sale of flesh at the *śmaśāna*. For example, Ōtsuka (2013) describes “the *Sādhana* by human flesh” found only in the Tibetan translation of *Subāhuparipṛcchātāntra*.³⁾ This text describes the sale of human flesh (*mi yi sha*) as follows: a practitioner should go to *dur khrod* (*śmaśāna*) with a body and cut it into pieces at night. Holding the human flesh in his left hand and a sword (*ral gri*) in his right, he should loudly

call, “I hope you will buy this flesh.” Repeating these words, he should walk to the east, west, south, and north.⁴⁾ A similar ritual appears in *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rtog pa gsang ba'i rgyud* (妙吉祥最勝根本大教經).⁵⁾ In 1420, Ngor chen describes the history of this text's translations in *Spyod pa'i rgyud spyi'i rnam par gzhogs pa legs par bshad pa'i sngon me*.⁶⁾ According to him, there were originally three translations, the one of which was by Paṇḍita Vidyākara-prabha (a disciple of Padmasambhava) and Nam mkha'i snying po. However, this translation has been lost over time and we are unable to determine the veracity of his statement. What we can say with certainty is that the Chinese translation was completed at Chunhua 淳化5 (994 A.D.). According to lo tsta ba 'Gos lhas, as cited by Ngor chen, the *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rtog pa gsang ba'i rgyud* has Tibetan origins and is not originally in Sanskrit. However, Ngor chen denies this view.⁷⁾ In my opinion, it seems that the Tibetan translation is an expanded version of the Sanskrit: the 10–chapter Chinese translation corresponds to a portion of the longer 22–chapter Tibetan translation. The fact that a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit exists suggests the document was not originally Tibetan. The following verses appear in both the Chinese and Tibetan translations:

復次尸陀林夜叉等成就法。持明者先收自死人肉如前作法爲自擁護已。以左手執刀右手執肉。於夜分往尸陀林中。作無畏相高聲唱言。我今賣肉。心念焰鬘得迦大明。時彼林中所有大惡夜叉羅刹鬼神等。聞高聲賣肉悉皆出現。…夜叉言曰高聲賣肉欲求何事。行人言曰我有所願。欲求眼藥及聖藥等。…彼夜叉等即收其肉已。一切所求皆得成就。⁸⁾

The ritual described here differs from that in the *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra* in several details. For example, the hand holding the flesh and the hand holding the knife (刀/chu gri) are switched. However, there are also some similarities, such as the loudly proclaiming the saying “to sell flesh” in the *śmaśāna*. Both these descriptions also share details with the ritual described in the *BT*, including the fact that the ritual is practiced at night in the *śmaśāna*, how the practitioner asks for the flesh to be bought, and the fact that he receives compensation for the flesh. There are, however, important differences. For example, in the *BT*, the flesh to be sold is goat flesh (*kṛṣṇachāgalamāṃsa*), while in the above two texts it is human (*sha chen* [mahāmāṃsa] or *mi yi sha*). Another similar ritual in *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra*, *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rtog pa gsang ba'i rgyud* and *BT* is the selling of liquor instead of flesh. This can be seen in 金剛薩埵說頻那夜迦天成就儀軌經, which appears only in Chinese and is translated by the same translator (法賢) as the

aforesaid 妙吉祥最勝根本大教經 (994 A.D.). The Chinese emperor forbade this text from being included in the Buddhist canon.⁹⁾ The text reads as follows:

將往尸陀林中。三度白言。尸陀林中諸鬼神等當來買酒。如是言已。…各現本形悉來買酒。¹⁰⁾

Similar to the abovementioned rituals involving flesh, this ritual, too, fits under the umbrella of “rituals involving the sale of things in the *śmaśāna*.” Thus, regardless of whether a ritual involves flesh or liquor, it surely involves going to the *śmaśāna* and obtaining profits through the sale of something (i.e., flesh or liquor) to the *Yakṣas* or *Bhūtinīs* there.

4. Selling flesh in Indian literature Similar practices to the rituals described above also appear in Indian literature. For example, the following ritual is described in the drama *Mālatīmādhava* (*MM*), written by Bhavabhūti (ca. late-7th century to mid-8th century).¹¹⁾ In the text, one of the characters, Mādhava, the hero of the story, is disappointed about being unable to connect with Mālatī, the heroine. Mādhava thinks to himself:

(sodvegam) saṃśayitajanmasāphalyaḥ saṃvṛtto 'smi / tat kim atra kartavyam / (iti vicinity) na khalu mahāmāṃsavikrayād anyad upāyāntaram paśyāmi¹²⁾

And after the depiction of *Śaktinātha*'s meditation by the practitioner Kapālakuṇḍalā, she looks at Mādhava entering the *śmaśāna* and states:

(sakautukam avalokya) tat ko 'yaṃ gambhīramadhurākṛtir uttambhitakuṭilakuntalalakalāpaḥ kṛpāṇapāṇiḥ śmaśānam avatarati /...harati vinayaṃ vāmo yasya prakāśitasāhasaḥ pravigaladasṛkpaṇkaḥ pāṇir lalannarajāṅgalaḥ // 5 // (nirūpya) sa eṣa kāmāndakīsuhr̥tputro mahāmāṃsasya pañāyitā mādhaveḥ¹³⁾

Her words here draw a picture of Mādhava as a seller of flesh holding a knife (*kṛpāṇa*) and human flesh (*narajāṅgala* / *mahāmāṃsa*). In the next scene, when Mādhava goes to the *śmaśāna*, he says:

bho bhoḥ śmaśānaniketanāḥ pūtanāḥ /
aśastrapūtanirvyājaṃ puruṣāṅgopakalpitaṃ /
vikṛīyate mahāmāṃsaṃ gr̥hyatāṃ gr̥hyatām idam // 12 // ¹⁴⁾

The depiction in the *MM* corresponds to the ritual described in both the *Subāhupariṣṭchātānta* and *Khro bo mnam par rgyal ba'i rtog pa gsang ba'i rgyud*: a prac-

tice involving flesh and sword/knife (*ral gri/chu gri*). In the *BT*, there is no description of flesh or a sword, but the phrase “take [the flesh],” referring to those living in the *śmaśāna*, remains in the form of a mantra. Previous research has already pointed out the similarities between the *MM*’s selling of flesh in the *śmaśāna* and the description of selling flesh in *Kathāsaritsāgara* (*KSS*).¹⁵⁾ The *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* (*BKM*), which is believed to be an earlier document than the *KSS*,¹⁶⁾ has a similar description.¹⁷⁾ In both, selling flesh in the *śmaśāna* is a way to obtain anklets (*nūpura*). In addition, the point that addresses “take [the flesh]” is also the same (*KSS*=“*mahāmāṃsaṃ gr̥hyatām iti ghoṣayan...*,” *BKM*=“*vikīṇāno mahāmāṃsaṃ mantrākṛṣṭamahāśavaḥ / gr̥hāṇety...*”). In addition, the *MM* and *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra* both describe similarities in how a practitioner “moves around the *śmaśāna* calling for someone to purchase the flesh.”¹⁸⁾ These examples show how similar rituals are depicted in multiple literary works. The fact that the *MM*, *Subāhupariṣcchātāntra*, and *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba’i rtoḡ pa gsang ba’i rgyud* agree that a practitioner should hold in his hand both a knife (sword) and flesh suggests that these rituals are based on a common source. There is currently no source that is clearly the root of the Buddhist version of the *BT*. However, as in the above example, it is presumed that there was a motif at least for that part in *BT*. In the Buddhist version of the *BT*, practitioners must fulfill *sarvamāṃsavikrayakarman* (ritual of selling all flesh) by reciting the mantra 8,000 times including the word “take [the flesh].” On the other hand, in the Hindu version of the *BT*, *Piśitākaraṣaṇḍevī* is fulfilled by reciting the corresponding mantra. The reason for this modification can be seen in the description of *BKM* above: it is a description of “*mantrākṛṣṭamahāśavaḥ*” (having human flesh attracted by the mantra) in *BKM*. In *BKM*, the flesh traded was obtained through the mantra, a description that corresponds with the Hindu version of the *BT*, which also depicts the fulfillment of *piśitākaraṣaṇḍevī* (goddess attracting flesh) through a mantra. Thus, we can infer that while the Hindu version of the *BT* largely agrees with the Buddhist version, modifications have incorporated other stories or knowledge of the person who made the changes over time as well.

5. Conclusion My research shows that the Buddhist version of *BT* precedes the Hindu version. As the Buddhist version of *BT* was incorporated into the Hindu one, the names of un-shared deities were modified and rituals, such as the selling the flesh described in this paper, were partially modified and reconstructed. Furthermore, the relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism is highlighted by the examination of the parts of the ritual that

changed over time and by the fact that some parts of the ritual were unmodified: these were seen to be consistent with Hindu beliefs and practice. The rituals described above can all be understood as rituals under the general category of “selling things in the *śmaśāna*.” This general category includes rituals of selling both flesh and liquor. The flesh category can further be broken down into selling human flesh (*Subāhupariṣṭchātāntṛa*, *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rtoḡ pa gsang ba'i rgyud*, *MM*, *KSS*, and *BKM*) and “other flesh” (i.e., black goat flesh in the Buddhist version of the *BT*). Despite the differences mentioned above, this paper demonstrates that this overall ritual was shared by both Buddhists and Hindus and is based on some well-known story, although the exact source cannot be identified. The ritual *Vetāla* (or *Vetāḍa*) is a common theme of such common rituals,¹⁹⁾ and it can be said that “the ritual of selling things in the *śmaśāna*” is similar. We have also determined the ritual described in the Buddhist version of the *BT* can be classified in the same genre.

Notes

- 1) Bhattacharyya (1930) and Fujii (2016). 2) Buddhist version of *BT* Sanskrit A1 22b5–23b2, T1 16a4–16b3, T2 14b1–14b7, G 7b1–7b3. Tibetan D 244b7–245a3, P 39b3–39b7, sT 56a3–56a7, Ph 203a6–203b4. Chinese T No.1129 552b4–552b16. Hindu version *BT* Sanskrit N1 14b2–14b5, N2 8b3–8b5, B 18b3–18b7, M pp.60–61. For more on the lineage of each Buddhist *BT* manuscript, see Natori (2018).
- 3) Ōtsuka (2013: 878, 908), and Davidson (2002: 203). 4) Tibetan D No.805 130a3–130a7, P No.428 191b3–191b8. 5) T No.1217, D No.604, P No.291, Ph No.490. 6) Davidson (1981: 86).
- 7) Ngor chen 75b5–76b4. The title *gshin rje'i gshed bkra khog bslangs* cited as one of the old translations of this text can be identified as *gshin rje gshed khro bo rnam par rgyal bsrā khog snang rtsa ba'i rgyud / rgyud phyi ma / phyi ma'i phyi ma* in Catalogue of Bu ston (Nishioka [1983: 65]). In the introduction of the Phug brag manuscript No.490, the title '*phags pa 'jam dpal gsang ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po // pra khog bslang ba'i man ngag / phyi ma'i rgyal po bsrung ba'i lung / khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyud phyi ma'i yang phyi ma* is mentioned, it can be said that this translation is identified with the above one.
- 8) T No.1217 91a24–91b5, D No.604 ba 8a5–8b2, P No.291 29a2–29a7, Ph No.490 43b5–44a5.
- 9) See 佛祖統紀 (T No.2035 405c26–406a2). And also (T No.2035 452b26). The description in 宋会要 is almost the same (Nagai (2015: 90–92)). 10) T No.1272 314b10–314b13. 11) Tsuji (1973: 265–266, n.463). 12) Coulson (1989: 91) and Kāle (1967: 92). 13) Coulson (1989: 95–96) and Kāle (1967: 97–98). 14) Coulson (1989: 98) and Kāle (1967: 103). 15) Kāle (1967: 24); Penzer (1984: 214–216); Durgāprasād (1930: 105); Brockhaus (1839: 424); Iwamoto (1957: 118).
- 16) Tsuchida (2017: 99, 108). 17) Śivadatta (1931: 126). 18) *Subāhupariṣṭchātāntṛa* says that “roaming around the east, west, south and north quickly, you should repeat [that I hope you buy the flesh].” (*shar dang nub dang lho dang byang phyogs su // myur du bskor cing shin tu brjod par bya //*) (D No.805 130a5–130a6, P No.428 191b6). *MM* says that “*parikramya aśāstrapūṭetyādi paṭhitvā*” (Coulson [1989: 101]; Kāle [1967: 107]). Moreover, *Subāhupariṣṭchātāntṛa* commentary (D No.2672 81b2, P No.3497 90b7–90b8) explains roaming east, west, north, and south in detail. The *BT* described “pay at-

tention to the four directions” as “looking in the four directions”. 19) Kamimura (1978: 289) and Ōtsuka (2013: 820–821, 876–877).

Abbreviations and Primary Sources

- BT* (Buddhist ver.) Āśā Archives DPNo.3695(A1). Matsunami No.274(T1), No.273(T2). Bandurski No. Xc14/50(G). D No.747. P No.404. sTog Palace No.698(sT). Phug Brag No.519(Ph). T No.1129.
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