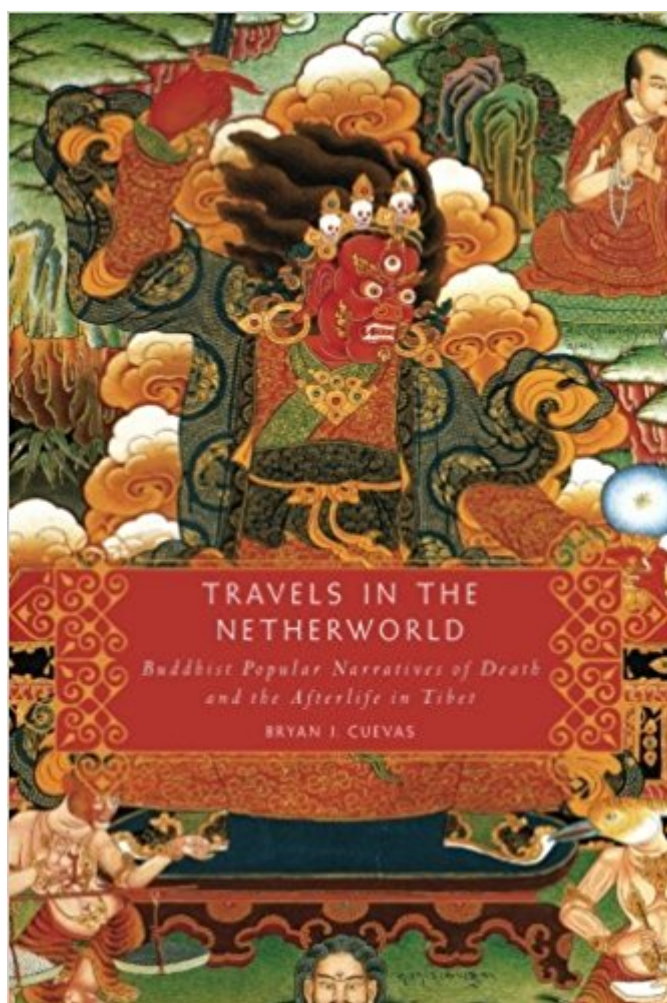


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Travels In The Netherworld: Buddhist Popular Narratives Of Death And The Afterlife In Tibet



Synopsis

In *Travels in the Netherworld*, Bryan J. Cuevas examines a fascinating but little-known genre of Tibetan narrative literature about the *dāfālok*, ordinary men and women who claim to have died, traveled through hell, and then returned from the afterlife. These narratives enjoy audiences ranging from the most sophisticated monastic scholars to pious townsfolk, villagers, and nomads. Their accounts emphasize the universal Buddhist principles of impermanence and worldly suffering, the fluctuations of karma, and the feasibility of obtaining a favorable rebirth through virtue and merit. Providing a clear, detailed analysis of four vivid return-from-death tales, including the stories of a Tibetan housewife, a lama, a young noble woman, and a Buddhist monk, Cuevas argues that these narratives express ideas about death and the afterlife that held wide currency among all classes of faithful Buddhists in Tibet. Relying on a diversity of traditional Tibetan sources, Buddhist canonical scriptures, scholastic textbooks, ritual and meditation manuals, and medical treatises, in addition to the *dāfālok* works themselves, Cuevas surveys a broad range of popular Tibetan Buddhist ideas about death and dying. He explores beliefs about the vulnerability of the soul and its journey beyond death, karmic retribution and the terrors of hell, the nature of demons and demonic possession, ghosts, and reanimated corpses. Cuevas argues that these extraordinary accounts exhibit flexibility between social and religious categories that are conventionally polarized and concludes that, contrary to the accepted wisdom, such rigid divisions as elite and folk, monastic and lay religion are not sufficiently representative of traditional Tibetan Buddhism on the ground. This study offers innovative perspectives on popular religion in Tibet and fills a gap in an important field of Tibetan literature.

Book Information

Paperback: 216 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (November 1, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199895554

ISBN-13: 978-0199895557

Product Dimensions: 9.1 x 0.4 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #809,295 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #40 in [Books > Travel > Asia > Tibet](#) #847 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Rituals](#)

Customer Reviews

"Travels in the Netherworld is well researched, a pleasure to read, and relevant to the interests of students, scholars, and general readers concerned with Tibetan civilization, Buddhist studies, near-death experiences, and the literary depiction of death and post-mortem itineraries. Bryan Cuevas's new book is a noteworthy addition to our knowledge of the rich Tibetan heritage of traditions exploring the life beyond." --Matthew T. Kapstein, The University of Chicago and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris)"The narratives explored in Travels in the Netherworld have been shared by clerics and laity alike for centuries. In this book, Cuevas convincingly demonstrates that stories of death and return were created, told, and retold by women, men, monks, aristocrats, and commoners. Perhaps more than any other form of Buddhist literature, these stories evoke Tibetan concerns about virtue, vice, life, and death in a world defined by uncertainty -- all portrayed through the drama of compelling personal narratives. Cuevas has ensured that the tales of Tibetan revenants will enjoy a long life among contemporary readers, and that such tales must be a central literary source for our ever-evolving appreciation of Buddhism as a living religion. It is sure to revive the study of death in Tibet." --Kurtis R. Schaeffer, author of Dreaming the Great Brahmin: Tibetan Traditions of the Buddhist Poet-Saint Saraha"Just as the Tibetan spirit mediums described in this book return from the dead and entertain the living with stories of their adventures in the other world, so too the author, Bryan Cuevas, breathes new life into Tibetan concepts of the afterlife. The author's fascinating story casts important new light on a side of Buddhism usually kept in the dark: moral teachings on karmic causation, the daily concerns of common people, the layout of the other world, and the workings of religious narratives. Anyone interested in near-death experience will want to read this lively and provocative book."--Stephen F. Teiser, author of Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples"Travels in the Netherworld is well researched, a pleasure to read, and relevant to the interests of students, scholars, and general readers concerned with Tibetan civilization, Buddhist studies, near-death experiences, and the literary depiction of death and post-mortem itineraries. Bryan Cuevas's new book is a noteworthy addition to our knowledge of the rich Tibetan heritage of traditions exploring the life beyond." --Matthew T. Kapstein, The University of Chicago and the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris) "The narratives explored in Travels in the Netherworld have been shared by clerics and laity alike for centuries. In this book, Cuevas convincingly demonstrates that stories of death and return were

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Bryan J. Cuevas is John F. Priest Professor of Religion and Director of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies at Florida State University.

Scholars of Tibetan Buddhism typically focus on doctrine and rituals; Tibetan enthusiasts typically romanticizes Tibetan Buddhism to be a religion of peace and otherness. This book is a refreshing history of how the Tibetans actually conceived of their own worlds (living and the dead), how they lived their lives, and how the rich lore about the world of the dead was transmitted. The mastery of

primary sources used for the research of this book is impressive. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in Tibetan culture, and specifically the religious praxis. The book is well worth the investment!

This book rocks. It's a fast-paced narrative about journeys to the netherworld and back: the stories of a Tibetan housewife, a young lama, a noble and a Buddhist monk. The beauty of this book is that it is both a lasting contribution to our understanding of Tibetan Buddhism and yet completely accessible to a wide audience. Cuevas writes with verve. Five stars!

Well written with excellent research. Anyone interested in Tibetan studies will definitely find this a much needed addition to their library and a wonderful book to read.

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