

Inspired by a God's Death: Buddhist Narratives of Divine Mortality and Their Ritual Implications*

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This article explores the role of narratives about dying gods in the framing of tantric Buddhist death rituals. Focusing on versions of the Uṣṇīṣavijayādhāraṇī and Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra, Indian works translated into Tibetan during the imperial period, as well as an indigenous Tibetan Buddhist work found at Dunhuang titled the Story of the Cycle of Birth and Death, this article examines the crisis of divine mortality and the practices that answer these frame stories. Two questions drive this inquiry: What might a god's death signify for those practicing these texts' rites? And how might personal eschatology (the end of a life) connect with broader arguments made for a moral cosmology and cosmic eschatology that position humans, gods, and others in a time of devolution in which access to the Buddhist teachings—and thus opportunities for liberation—is understood to be vanishing?