

Acknowledgments

If all knowledge is situated, the bits of knowledge one might find in this book are situated in very unusual times. The first drafts of the papers that were selected for this volume, and its final shape as a complete manuscript, are separated by a global health crisis that has changed the way we do ethnography and share research findings.

The coeditors of this volume, during the COVID pandemic, as many others, found themselves confined to unexpected locations while facing both new challenges and unexpected opportunities.

And as many others, I, Carola, was undergoing an unusual amount of stress and emotional trouble. A series of uncanny events happened—a bit too much to be mere coincidences. I first thought I was going crazy and hence sought mental health support from the university.

Unfortunately, counseling and mental health support were available only for the students, not for staff. So I decided to reach out to my *sikṣā guru* who lives in Bengal, India, via email—something I try to avoid, as he is very busy taking care of serious problems of disciples who need his help. In response to my email, he diagnosed that this was a case of black magic. He gave me a mantra to repeat aloud, with specific patterns of breath movement, to be accompanied with the visualization of a specific image that I should create and immediately destroy in my mind at each repetition. Besides the mantra practice, he prescribed a simple ritual, which I performed in an abandoned Muslim cemetery in Singapore. The instructions were followed. The problem was solved. I found myself at peace again.

In 2020, I, Rohit, transferred institutions and began the arduous process of learning how to mentor and teach online to pandemic-era

students, many of them enduring trauma, anxiety, and burnout. Meanwhile, isolated from family, friends, students, and colleagues, I battled with tremendous loneliness and depression. I found two sources of solace and inspiration.

First, I would be remiss to not acknowledge the emotional support of Padma, my beloved rescue dog, who for nearly two years of quarantine was my only companion. Second, during the pandemic I observed and participated in the online Tibetan Buddhist communities. I became virtually involved in a variety of Tantric rituals, initiations, and empowerments. Many of these were broadcast globally in HD and translated in multiple languages from the Dalai Lama's residence in Dharamshala, India. During the isolating days of the quarantine, through the Tantric events on Facebook and YouTube I found a sense of connectivity with others participating in these virtual mandalas.

The stories of Carola's pandemic mantra and Rohit's participation in online Tantric ceremonies serve two purposes here. First, following a canonical Tantric custom, we employ it as a way of opening this work with an homage to our gurus. Second, these experiences contain themes that will appear throughout the book, and particularly the idea that lived Tantric worlds are not solely concerned with spiritual progression and soteriological goals, but also with pragmatic remedies, health and well-being, supernatural intervention, and the power and efficacy of sound. Echoing in many contributions to this volume is the idea that Tantric practice is not a solitary or individual enterprise; instead it weaves together broad networks of diverse people in both face-to-face and online encounters.

But Tantra is also a plethora of time-devouring deities and of resources to deal with death. And with death we had to cope indeed, in the course of this publication project. One of the contributors to this volume, Dr. Jarrod Hyam, a friend, a wonderful human, and a generous colleague, passed away just a few months before submitting this work to the publisher. Unlike many of us scholars, he was humble, genuinely modest, and deeply interested in all the various forms of embodiment and healing he was exposed to during his studies and research trips to South Asia. Tantric specialists and practices are often sought after to deal with disease and loss. So did we, when in grief and in need for powerful prayers to accompany his soul's journey. We hope this piece of his published work will allow his memory and

intellectual legacy to live a long life—perhaps not up to the standards of immortality invoked by some Tantric narratives of perfected beings, the siddhas, but long enough to comfort those who miss him and to inspire present and future generations of seekers.

Besides acknowledging our debt and tribute to the gurus, the teachers, and the academic mentors, there is a long list of thanks we need to summarize here for all those who made this book possible. First, we acknowledge our heartfelt gratitude for the collaboration of local practitioners and communities whose individual members' names might not feature in this book, and yet without them there would be no such thing as the "Ethnography of Tantra" to begin with. We are also thankful to the organizers of the International Congress for Asian Studies (ICAS). This volume is largely the result of a series of panels that we have convened from ICAS 11 in Leiden in July 2019. That might have been one of the last large academic events where we participated in person before the start of the Covidian age of virtual conferences via Zoom. Carola's participation was supported by the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at National University of Singapore, her academic home for almost the entire duration of this book project. Rohit is grateful for the financial support generously given to him by ICAS. We are immensely thankful to the colleagues who agreed to read and offer generous feedback to the first, unripe drafts of this volume's introduction, particularly David G. White, Glen A. Hayes, Nicolas Sihlé, Aaron Ullrey, and Carola's colleagues at ARI's Religion and Globalisation research cluster. Lastly, we express our thankfulness to SUNY editors James Peltz and Catherine Blackwell, and to three anonymous reviewers who have shared punctual and useful comments to improve this manuscript.