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### ***Sowa Rigpa Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Material Manifestations of Protection and Treatment***

COVID-19 affected people across the globe, but how the pandemic played out over the past three years varied greatly across different contexts. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in India, Nepal, and Bhutan, this presentation explores how Sowa Rigpa communities prepared for and reacted to this rapidly developing crisis. We compare some responses of traditional medical institutions and privately operating physicians and highlight ways in which their pandemic-related practices were impacted by state public health policies and the legal status of Sowa Rigpa.

Despite the varied spectrum of COVID-19 responses and the many factors involved, the exile-Tibetan and Himalayan practitioners we encountered were remarkably confident in dealing with the pandemic. The general sense was that (a) the occurrence of deadly epidemics in the degenerate age was prophesied in Tibetan treasure texts, (b) COVID-19 was not considered a “new” disease since virulent contagious diseases are discussed in classical works such as the *Four Tantras*, and (c) the prescribed protections and treatments had long been in use and were deemed to be effective. Although biomedical interventions were integrated in new institutional protocols and some Sowa Rigpa pharmacy experts innovated products, this pandemic narrative of confidence in tradition deserves further scrutiny. Not forgetting the ways in which customary ways of practice were re-negotiated and the tragic suffering and death that occurred, we argue that the material manifestations of the therapeutic arsenal – including amulets, pills, decoctions, and more – played a key role in “boosting the immunity” of Sowa Rigpa within the limits of existing government regulations.

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