

The Use of Thread Crosses in Tibetan and Himalayan Rituals

Charles Ramble

EPHE – PSL University, CRCAO, Paris

Friday, 14th March 2025
Main building, room no. 217, 11:00 am

Thread crosses and string meshes feature in a wide variety of rituals in Tibetan and Himalayan communities, but their significance has often been a source of misunderstanding among foreign observers. English-language accounts often refer to the Tibetan variants as “dreamcatchers,” after the well-known Native American constructions that they resemble, even to the extent of including feathers in their composition. One author, writing in 1902, describes a typical thread-cross construction as “a rude imitation of the mast of a vessel with yard-arms and rigging,” intended to entrap a class of demons that “are reputed to have a great passion for the rigging of a vessel.” Recent research on this little-understood topic shows that Tibetan thread crosses in fact have nothing to do with trapping demons or dreams (and even less to do with shipping), but may be used alone or in combination with other effigies to represent a wide range of abstract or personified forces. This presentation will introduce recent and ongoing investigations that are beginning to shed light on the great variety of these sometimes highly complex constructions and the ritual contexts in which they appear.

