

Lecture

On rNgog Blo ldan shes rab's translation of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* Pascale Hugon (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

1. Remarks and acknowledgements

This is a summary of a lecture presented in the department of Asian Philosophy at Waseda University on October 26, 2012. For the details of the argument the reader is invited to refer to my forthcoming paper “On the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*. A look into the translator's workshop of rNgog Blo ldan shes rab” in the proceedings of the panel on Sanskrit manuscripts held at the Fifth Beijing International Seminar on Tibetan Studies, August 1–5, 2012.

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2. Outline

The *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin), one of the major epistemological works of the Indian Buddhist thinker Dharmakīrti (7th c. or earlier), was translated into Tibetan by rNgog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109) (hereafter: rNgog Lo), Parahitabhadra and others between 1076 and 1093 in Anupamapura, Kashmir. This translation has, until recently, been the primary source for scholars studying this work and was adopted as original by proxy for translating it into modern languages. In this regard, contemporary scholars followed (for lack of another way) the practice of the majority of Tibetan epistemologists in the 12th century and later who relied on the Tibetan translation for the study of this fundamental source. The Sanskrit version of this text and of Dharmottara's commentary recently became available.¹ It confirmed the quality of the Tibetan version, but it also confirmed the importance

¹ On this new material, see the introduction to the edition of PVin 1 and 2 in Ernst Steinkellner (ed.), *Dharmakīrti's Pramāṇaviniścayaḥ, Chapters 1 and 2*, Beijing-Vienna, 2007: China Tibetology Publishing House / Austrian Academy of Sciences Press (Sanskrit Texts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region 2), and of PVin 3 in Pascale Hugon and Toru Tomabechi (eds.), *Dharmakīrti's Pramāṇaviniścaya, Chapter 3 (parārthānumāna) critically edited*. Beijing-Vienna, 2011: China Tibetology Publishing House / Austrian Academy of Sciences Press (Sanskrit Texts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region 8).

of having access to the original Sanskrit version. In continuity with earlier discussions by Prof. Seyfort Ruegg,² and Prof. Franco,³ my comparative study of the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the PVin adduces further evidence against the myth of automated translation that leads one to consider the Tibetan version as a mirror copy of the Sanskrit version, by highlighting in particular the role of the translator as an interpreter and the question of text transmission. In order to carry out a meaningful comparison, some methodological issues must first be discussed. I then examine cases where the Sanskrit and the Tibetan versions diverge. There are several degrees of divergence. The two versions may express a different meaning; one or several words in the Sanskrit version may be lacking an equivalent in the Tibetan version, or *vice versa*; or the Tibetan translation may render the Sanskrit in a way that is not properly speaking divergent, but unusual or unexpected. Looking at individual cases, I attempt to identify what kind of factor may be responsible for the divergence.

In addition to shedding light on the process of translation of Sanskrit texts by rNgog Blo ldan shes rab, these considerations lead us to reflect on significant consequences for editorial procedures.

3. What are we comparing?

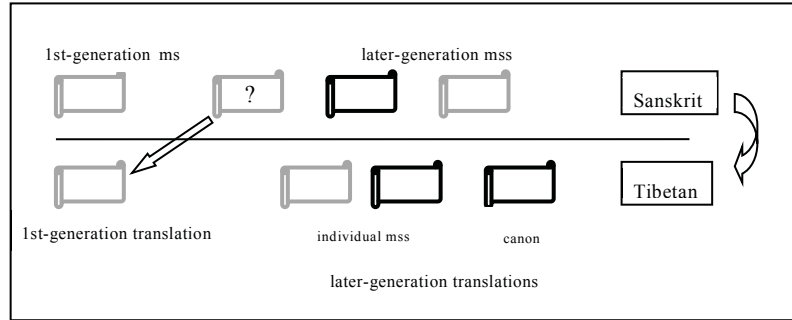
A methodological problem arises when one engages in the comparison of the Sanskrit and the Tibetan versions of this text in order to examine the translators' work. Ideally one would like to compare the exemplar(s) available to the translators to the exemplar of the translation representing the Tibetan text as it was agreed upon by rNgog Lo and his team at the time of the translation (what I call a "first-generation translation"). But this turns out difficult. The Tibetan material at our disposal consists of later generation translations. Namely, we do not have an autograph by rNgog Lo, but later versions (still identified as the translation by rNgog Lo and his team) in the canonical collections and in the form of individual manuscripts. These are the result of a complex process of text transmission that involves, among other things, copy mistakes, compilation, and revisions. The Sanskrit material at our disposal also consists of later generation copies (i.e., they are not autographs by Dharmakīrti). In addition, none of these copies represent exactly the version we can infer was available to the translators.

A further issue is that we do not know much about how this team of translators was working. In particular we do not know whether they used one or more manuscripts and/or memorized version(s) of

² David Seyfort Ruegg, "Some reflections on translating Buddhist philosophical texts from Sanskrit and Tibetan," *Etudes Asiatiques* XLVI.1, 1992, 367–391.

³ Eli Franco, "The Tibetan translations of the *Pramāṇavārttika* and the development of translation methods from Sanskrit to Tibetan," in *Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, Ernst Steinkellner (gen. ed.), Vienna, 1997: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 277–288.

the text, and we do not know what their “editorial policy” was, namely, how they proceeded in the case of unclear or corrupt reading of a manuscript, of variants among the potential various versions, or of readings they judged inadequate.



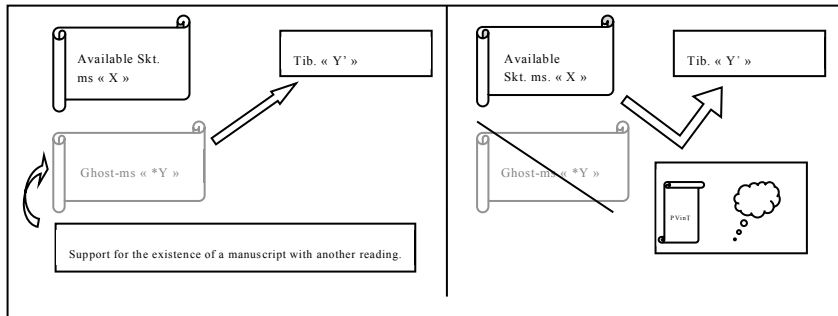
4. Can we retrieve the first-generation translation?

The surfacing of rNgog Blo ldan shes rab's commentarial work on the PVin (*dKa' gnas*)⁴, which cites the source text, appears as a promising way to make up for the lack of a complete first-generation exemplar. Indeed, it makes sense that rNgog Lo would cite the text as it appeared in his own translation. Here also, we meet with the problem that the available manuscripts of the *dKa' gnas* are later-generation copies that involve identifiable scribal mistakes. Such mistakes also affect citations of the PVin. Another issue is that most of the words cited have the function of “markers.” Namely, rNgog Lo just gives the first words of the paragraph of the PVin that is being explained. Such citations thus offer only a partial access to the original translation, and access to parts of the text that are usually not crucial. Still, by comparing these citations with the canonical versions and similar citations in other early Tibetan commentaries on the PVin, we can establish that a revision of the initial translation took place already at an early stage. We must keep this in mind when speaking of “rNgog Lo's translation”: unless the reading of the Tibetan is attested in the *dKa' gnas* (or backed up in some other way), there is a possibility we might in fact be dealing with a revision of rNgog Lo's translation.

⁴ *dKa' gnas* = *Tshad ma rnam nges kyi dka' ba'i gnas rnam par bshad pa (dKa' gnas)*. One manuscript of this text was edited by Sun Wenjing, Qinghai, 1994: *Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang*. A second one was published in *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs sgrig*, vol. 1, Chengdu, 2006: *dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang*, 420–705.

5. Divergences between the Sanskrit and the Tibetan versions: material factor vs intellectual factor

When comparing the Sanskrit and the Tibetan versions I distinguish two factors that can be responsible for divergences apart from corruption of the text in the process of its transmission: a “material factor” and a “human” or rather “intellectual factor.” The first option suggests that the translator produced a mirror copy of the Sanskrit version, and that the divergence we notice is due to the fact that the Sanskrit version he had access to is different from the ones at our disposal. The second suggests that the translator had access to the same Sanskrit version we have access to, but made a decision to adopt the given diverging or unexpected Tibetan translation. This decision may be a matter of stylistic preference, or an attempt at achieving a more readable Tibetan version. It may also be influenced by his understanding of the text. I attempt for each case of divergence to identify such possible cause of influence. A significant cause of influence regarding the translation of the PVin turns out to be Dharmottara’s *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā* (PVinṬ). This text was actually translated by the same team that translated the PVin, and probably simultaneously. It remains difficult to classify individual cases conclusively as resulting from material or intellectual factors. I suggest adopting a “principle of economy”: we do not need to postulate diverging ghost-recensions of the Sanskrit text when a Tibetan reading can be explained by appealing to intellectual factors that are clearly identifiable, and there is no external support for postulating material factors.



6. Consequences

The influence of intellectual factors on the translation has significant consequences for the value we want to ascribe to the Tibetan version and the way we use it for editorial purpose. The Tibetan translation of the PVin — or rather, each Tibetan translation — has its individual historical significance, because it was the text that was studied by Tibetan scholars as original by proxy. But from the point of view of Dharmakīrti’s original composition, the Tibetan translation must be taken for what it is: a

translation. It remains an invaluable tool when the Sanskrit text is corrupt or the manuscripts damaged. But due to the intellectual factors influencing the translation, its relation to the Sanskrit version it is based on remains opaque. This complicates the question of the relationship between the Sanskrit manuscript(s) used by the translators — of which the Tibetan translation is to be considered an indirect witness rather than a calque — and the available Sanskrit manuscripts. The active involvement of the translator that goes beyond the production of a mirror copy weakens the weight of the Tibetan translation for supporting reading choices and emendation when critically editing Sanskrit manuscripts, and complicates its use for reconstructing lacking portions of the Sanskrit text.