

# The Buddhist Tradition of Epistemology and Logic (*tshad ma*) and Its Significance for Tibetan Civilisation

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This paper is the slightly adapted form of a lecture delivered on November 15, 2002, at the Chinese Tibetology Research Centre in Beijing. This institution was founded in 1986 to function as a research institute on the national level, and thus followed not only specific research objectives of its own, but also served as a steering centre for tibetological research on all regional and provincial levels within the PR China.<sup>1</sup> In recognition of this political function my topic was chosen to demonstrate with a comparatively neutral example the possibility of advancing the study of cultural traditions in Tibet's past, firstly by taking appropriate care of the testimonies still existing, and secondly, by introducing the methods of a critical and historical approach to their interpretation rather than acknowledge their existence by merely repetitive doxographic and historiographic reconfirmation of their existence in the past. A change from this latter attitude of research on various Tibetan cultural phenomena towards a history of problems, notions, and solutions based on an appreciation of the contexts cannot be expected to develop meaningfully, when, as presently is still the case, a great part of important and influential sources are still unpublished and mostly inaccessible. The main emphasis of my lecture was given to the necessity of regaining the relevant literatures.<sup>2</sup>

A second aim of this lecture was to advance clarification on the issue of the Indian cultural heritage with regard to religion, philosophy, and literature within the Tibetan culture. In the terminology proposed by D. Seyfort Ruegg<sup>3</sup> we may speak of two coordinate strands within Tibetan culture, which are related to this Indian heritage: an *Indian*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. K. Sørensen, "A Survey of Institutes and Research Centres of Tibetology in The Peoples Republic of China," *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 3, (1990, 113–124; 4, 1991, 83–5) 1990, 116f.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of one specific effort on these lines, cf. my Gonda lecture 2003: *A Tale of Leaves. On Sanskrit Manuscripts in Tibet, their Past and their Future*. Amsterdam 2004.

<sup>3</sup> D. Seyfort Ruegg, "The Indian and the Indic in Tibetan Cultural History, and Tsong

strand which “consists of elements originating *historically* in India and found documented in sources that are still extant either in their original language or in canonical Tibetan translations of Indian works”, and an *Indic* strand which has “been developed in a process of elaboration by Tibetans thinking in a style and along lines that are *typologically* Indian without being historically *Indian*.”

Within the cultural parameters thus defined, Tibetan thinkers, as exemplified by Seyfort Ruegg through Tsong-kha-pa, had been following both the path of a “conservative traditionalist” in their translating, summarizing, and explaining Indian texts, and of “creative innovator.”<sup>4</sup> It is important here to add, that innovative creativity in the Tibetan tradition does not occur in the garb of originality, which is only pejoratively attributed to results of “personal invention (*rang bzo*),” but occurs in all efforts to restore the final intentions of the Buddha’s teaching with an awareness of the various Indian systematic and exegetic traditions, and is developed in the form of an “explicative elaboration.”<sup>5</sup>

Major sources of importance in both respects, *Indian* and *Indic* in this sense, are still available in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, e.g., the numerous Sanskrit texts on palm leaf and paper manuscripts, as well as the numerous Tibetan texts from the early period of the second diffusion of Buddhism and even before among the manuscripts kept, e.g., in the recently opened collection of the Fifth Dalai Lama at Drepung.<sup>6</sup> This lecture was meant, therefore, to prepare the ground for scholarly access to both kinds of documents, in Sanskrit as well as in Tibetan.

Truly honoured by this invitation and the possibility to speak to an audience that represents an important section of scholarship in one of our world’s most ancient societies, I would like to introduce my topic and my ways of approach with a few simple, and possibly only too

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kha pa’s Achievement as a Scholar and Thinker: An Essay on the Concepts of Buddhism in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004) (321–43) 328.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: 329.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 335.

<sup>6</sup> The catalogue of this collection compiled by members of the sPal-brtsegs bod-yig dpe-rnying shib jug khang has meanwhile been published: ‘*Bras spungs dgon du bshugs su gsol ba’i dpe rnying dkar chag*. Two vols., Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang: Beijing 2004 (ISBN 7-105-06690-3).

evident, remarks on the purpose of the kind of humanistic or cultural studies we venture, in particular the study devoted to an interpretation of texts.

The conceptual scope of the term 'text' has been broadened in the last decades by semiotic scholarship to include anything that can carry information. For my purpose today, however, I would like to use the term in its more limited traditional sense: information carried by the stabilising instrument of writing with the purpose of transmitting it to other peoples' minds, or even of only rendering it persistent.<sup>7</sup> This kind of information as 'text' implies – in my opinion – that the 'author', in the main, created it with the intention of being understood by another person. His 'text' is therefore intentional and conscientious communication. Compared with other non-linguistic forms of communication – e.g. gestures and other signs or actions – a 'text', as the main carrier of information in a language community, has the advantage of preserving its content over time as well as through natural and social vicissitudes. This means that such information may still exist even after the disappearance of its language community, and that it may also be available to other language communities, contemporaneous or future.

That a 'text' has been created with the intention to communicate, i.e. that its author wishes someone else to understand what he has to say, allows us to characterize 'text' – because of its durability – as one of the most important means of establishing relationships between individuals, social groups and whole societies. I even dare to say – in respect to, for example, the multi-lingual situation of our world today – of connecting mankind as such. In the same way as one may consider the 'family' as a biological nucleus of social groups, 'text' can be considered as a nucleus of an organisational kind, in the sense that it is, mostly, an instrument of building and maintaining social stability.

The 'study of texts', i.e. philology, within such a frame of reference can then be considered as an effort to exercise and train the capacity to understand this type of communicated information. All societies depend on understanding information for their existence. Specialized

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of the existence of strong and living oral traditions, my remarks are valid for orally transmitted information as well, for these, too, must be considered 'texts' in the limited sense. However, since the oral lineages are, for whatever reasons, interrupted more often, the written text remains the main paradigm of 'text'.

people have always been engaged to concentrate on this task: interpreters, translators, spies, and philologists. The greater the distance of a 'text' in terms of time, place, language, and culture, the greater the effort needed for understanding. This is the main reason why I see the work of the philologist as a useful and indispensable task, particularly in our modern societies. For without ever ongoing efforts towards mutual understanding of information on social and cultural issues, as well as on the economic and other necessities of life, violence and disastrous antagonism are the more than evident alternatives.

It is for this reason that I think the support and development of philological professionals is necessary in all greater societies of our world, be they European or Chinese, Indian or American. It is the responsibility of these great societies to guarantee peace in our world by maintaining a balance of powers and mutual influence. All of these greater societies are, therefore, more than ever in our dangerous times also obliged to continuously care for their ability to appropriately interpret information from other societies in any textual forms. They, therefore, must also support their professionals in the necessary efforts and foster the development of the necessary expertise among their population.

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As a simple example of such professional social services I would like to offer you my own efforts to understand the Buddhist epistemological tradition, in its origins and Indian developments, as well as in its Tibetan continuation.

After I was introduced – when still a student – to the existence of a long and famous tradition of epistemology and logic within Buddhism which began in India in the fourth century AD and, after the disappearance of Buddhism in India, was continued in Tibet until the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD, one of my first questions was with regard to the motivation of the thinkers in this religious tradition to develop such a line of rational inquiry at all. I soon found that others, in fact famous scholars, were also bothered by the existence of this tradition and tried to cope with it in different ways that I, however, did not find satisfying. Some scholars, such as Theodor Stcherbatsky, liked it for the wrong reasons, some, like Edward Conze, deplored it, also for the wrong reasons. They all found the rational attitude of these philosophers to indicate secularising tendencies within this religious tradition, for a tendency towards emancipation of

thought, freedom from religious fetters and superstition, as if it were comparable to the development of the methodology of natural sciences and autonomous philosophy in the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ within the garb of European Christianity.

For this very reason Theodor Stcherbatsky found this logical tradition most useful for exemplifying – in the first post-revolutionary years at Leningrad University – that Buddhism was the kind of atheistic and thoroughly rationalistic religion that could be allowed to survive within the newly established Marxist society – an illusory hope soon to be dissolved by history. And for the same reasons, Edward Conze, in his youth a communist who later became fascinated by the mystical aspects of early Mahāyāna Buddhism, interpreted the same tradition as being a serious deviation from the central ideas of Buddhism, a deterioration that he even assumed to be one of the causes for the decline of Buddhism in India.

Both otherwise highly respectable and rightly famous scholars were wrong, mainly on methodological grounds: they superimposed their own preconceived ideas upon the words and teachings of these philosophers and logicians, and tried to find support for their own pre-conceptions in the texts selected. Instead, they should have tried to understand what these thinkers themselves said about their motives and intentions, and should have judged their efforts in accordance with their results. And they also should have related the information received through texts that were written at a certain time with certain problems in mind and for a certain public, to what we nowadays call their ‘context.’ meaning all cultural, social and traditional conditions which must be considered in order to do justice to any form of information. For philology without a consideration of the context of its subject is bound to be distorting and cause anachronistic misunderstandings about the information received.

Many years ago I tried to overcome these misinterpretations of the Buddhist epistemological tradition in an article.<sup>8</sup> The basic result of

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<sup>8</sup> “The Spiritual Place of the Epistemological Tradition in Buddhism,” Nanto Bukkyō 49 (1982) 1–18. Cf. now also my “Once More on Circles,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 31 (2003) 323–341; Helmut Krasser, “On Dharmakīrti’s Understanding of *pramāṇabhūta* and His Definition of *pramāṇa*,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 45 (2001) 173–199; John D. Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy*. Wisdom Publications: Boston 2004.

this study was that the philosophers of this tradition – in India they may be called ‘*pramāṇavādin*,’ in Tibet ‘*tshad ma pa*’ – were attempting to support and to defend the authority of the Buddha, the founder of their religion, as well as the truth of his teaching. No doubt, there were always other, strong traditions also within Buddhism that found the efforts of these philosophers useless. These other strands of Buddhism remained primarily interested in meditation practices, in direct mystical experience, or even in belief and devotion. But because of the rationalistic character of Indian intellectual life in general, the Buddhist epistemologists and logicians proved to be highly successful and influential.

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In terms of historical periods of Indian philosophy, this represents a development, after the creation of the classical philosophical systems, that emphasised the inquiry into the sources of knowledge or valid correct cognition at the bases of the different philosophical and religious traditions. This inquiry was summarised under the topics of the number of these sources of knowledge, their definition, their objects, and their results. The theories falling within such topics can be labelled as ‘Indian epistemology’. Among these theories, those dealing with the means to know about what is not directly knowable, namely by means of perception (*pratyakṣa*, *mngon sum*), are concerned with inference (*anumāna*, *rjes su dpag pa*) and proof (*sādhana*, *sgrub pa*). And, at the very core of inference, the theories of the nature of a correct and faulty logical reason or evidence (*hetuvidyā*, *gtan tshigs rig pa*) are what we can refer to within Indian epistemology as ‘logic’ properly speaking. The theories of inference and the logical reason propounded both by Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions reveal a common ‘need for justification’ and account for large areas of agreement in their elaboration. It is possible to find the reason for those points that differ in the ontological presuppositions accepted in the different traditions. That is to say, the logic developed by a school of thought which followed the idea of the existence of a creator-god (*īśvara*, *dbang phyug*), for example, had to be conceived of in such a way that it was possible to prove the existence of such a creator-god, and if momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*, *skad cig ma nyid*) was assumed to be an essential character of existence, the possibility of inferring and proving this character had to be provided by the logic of its logicians.

Within Buddhism, Dignāga / Phyogs-glang (ca. 480–540 CE) is the founder of a ‘school of epistemology’ in the true sense of the term.<sup>9</sup> In his last work, the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* / *Tshad ma kun las btus pa*, he gives a succinct survey in six chapters of his ideas on perception, inference, the nature of concepts and language, incorrect rejoinders in debate, as well as a summary of his arguments against the corresponding ideas not only of the brahminical schools of his times, but also of his Buddhist predecessor Vasubandhu / dByig gnyen. The most important philosopher after Dignāga / Phyogs-glang is Dharmakīrti / Chos-grags (ca. 600–660 CE). It is Dharmakīrti’s interpretation of Dignāga’s theories that has become authoritative for the whole subsequent period of the school. This is already reflected by the respective transmission of their texts. All of Dharmakīrti’s texts have come down to us, either in their original Sanskrit, or in excellent Tibetan translations, while Dignāga’s ‘root-text’ seems to be lost in the original and is available only in two quite insufficient Tibetan translations, one from the late eleventh or early twelfth century (Vasudhararakṣita with Seng-ge rgyal-mtshan) and the other from the late fifteenth century (Kanakavarman with Mar-thung Dad-pa’i shes-rab).<sup>10</sup>

The following centuries saw a rich elaboration of these beginnings by a number of creative and original minds, to mention only Dharmottara / Chos-mchog (ca. 740–800 CE), Prajñākaragupta / Shes-rab ’byung-gnas sbas-pa (ca. 800 CE), and Jñānaśrīmitra / Ye-shes-dpal (ca. 980–1040 CE) as the most outstanding. Polemics with rival traditions and apologetic efforts in defending the Buddhist creed kept this school alive until the very end of Buddhism in India, when the great monastic colleges and libraries that were centres of learning and scholarship in the late Gupta and Pāla periods<sup>11</sup> were finally destroyed under the impact of increasing Hindu antagonism and the onslaught of Muslim raids and final conquest.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Erich Frauwallner, “Dignāga, sein Werk und seine Entwicklung,” *WZKS* 3 (1959) 83–164.

<sup>10</sup> On the correct form of the Tibetan translators’ names cf. van der Kuijp, “Studies in the Life and Thought of Mkhas-grub-rje I: Mkhas-grub-rje’s Epistemological oeuvre and his Philological Remarks on Dignāga’s *Pramāṇasamuccaya I*,” *Berliner Indologische Studien* 1 (1985) (75–105), note 32.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*. London 1962.

It is impossible even to summarise the wealth of ideas, problems and solutions, as well as the direct and indirect influences this intellectual tradition within Buddhism had on the rationality and rationalistic tendencies first in its Indian home ground, and then in some limited areas of Chinese and Japanese, but particularly in Tibetan intellectual life. Suffice it to say that in its Tibetan continuation, the rich and profound ideas that had been elaborated were almost completely integrated into Tibet's cultural life.<sup>12</sup>

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First translations were already started during the early period of propagation of Buddhism in Tibet, the *snga dar*, at the end of the eighth century.<sup>13</sup> In the beginning only small treatises were chosen although the translation of major works of the school seems to have been attempted, too, but without success. This work was resumed, however, with the later period of propagation, the *phyi dar*, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and was more or less complete by the end of the thirteenth century.

This period was filled by the efforts of fathoming the real meaning of the information received with the help of Indian, Kashmirian, and Nepalese specialists of translating, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist, and by an ongoing process of improving these translations. The scholarly character of this period can be described as one of trial and error, dispute and correction, and finally summarising, in short, as a process of gradually improved enculturation. The Tibetan translators, to mention only Mang-'or Byang-chub shes-rab who with Atiśa (982–1054), in ca. 1043, translated the huge and difficult commentary of Jayanta on the *rNam 'grel rgyan / Pramāṇavārttikālaṅkāra*, and rMa lotsāba dGe-ba'i blo-gros (1044–1089) who first translated the *rNam 'grel / Pramāṇavārttika*, a translation later revised by both Blo-ldan shes-rab and Sa-skya paṇḍita, all true pioneers, soon became specialists themselves. An outstanding figure of this first period is the **rNgog lotsāba Blo-ldan shes-rab** (1059–1109), who headed the first notable Tibetan school of

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<sup>12</sup> Fort a short survey cf. E. Gene Smith, "Glo-bo Mkhan-chen and Buddhist Logic in Tibet," in: E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts. History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*. Wisdom Publications: Boston 2001, 11–116.

<sup>13</sup> As evidenced by the translations made under Khri Srong-lde-btsan and listed in the catalogue of the collection in the lHan-kar palace. Cf. Erich Frauwallner, "Zu den buddhistischen Texten in der Zeit Khri Srong-lde-btsan's," *WZKS* 1 (1957) 104–146.



epistemology and logic (*rNgog lugs*) with his translation of the *rNam nges / Pramānaviniścaya*, his summary of the same (*bsDus don*), and the very first indigenous Tibetan commentary (*rNam bshad*).<sup>14</sup> rNgog-lo's translations in general, to quote VAN DER KUIJP (1989: 12), "rank as the finest in terms of accuracy and elegance, and their number makes his genius and sheer output reminiscent of that of Xuan Zhuang."

The influence of rNgog-lo, its second abbot, must be recognized as forming the monastery of gSang-phu sNe'u-thog into a major centre of *tshad ma* studies right from its founding.<sup>15</sup> This monastery was founded in 1076 by rNgog-lo's uncle rNgog Legs-pa shes-rab, a disciple of Atiśa. Its sixth abbot, presiding for eighteen years, was a remarkable personality: **Phya-pa Chos kyi seng-ge** (1109–1169). He belongs to the *rNgog lugs*. He is said to have written a commentary on the *rNam shes* and a *Tshad ma bsDus pa* together with a commentary (*rang 'grel*). None of these works seem to be extant any more.<sup>16</sup> His ideas are, however, well-known through many quotations and references in later literature. It is possible that it was the fact, well-attested by Tibetan historians, that he did not know Sanskrit, therefore remaining less impressed by the aims and achievements of the various translating efforts, which contributed to the astonishing independence of his thought. Phya-pa had to rely on completed translations, and concentrated with an awareness of the philosophical and technical problems involved, even to the point of frequent open disagreement with his forerunners, including

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. L. W. J. van der Kuip, *Contributions to the Development of Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology. From the eleventh to the thirteenth century*. Wiesbaden 1983: 29–58; *An Introduction to Gtsang-nag-pa's Tshad-ma mam-par nges-pa'i ñi-ka legs-bshad bDus-pa*. (Otani University Tibetan Works Series 2), Kyoto 1989, 1–33; David P. Jackson, *The Entrance Gate for the Wise (Section III)*. Vienna 1987: 165–169.

A critical edition of his *rNam thar* by his chief disciple Gro-lung-pa Blo-gros 'byung-gnas by Dramdul/Zhengdui, is to be published as a first specimen of a joint publication venture between your institution and the Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien of Vienna University in 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. L. W. J. van der Kuip, "The Monastery of Gsang-phu ne'u-thog and Its Abbatial Succession from ca. 1073 to 1250," *Berliner Indologische Studien* 3 (1987) 103–127; Shunzo Onoda, "The Chronology of the Abbatial Successions of the gSañ phu sNe'u thog Monastery," *WZKS* 33 (1989) 203–213.

<sup>16</sup> Only ten days later, in Lhasa, these words proved not to be true any longer. When I was given the opportunity to visit the recently opened manuscript library of the Fifth Dalai Lama in Drepung, I was shown a considerable number of works by Phya-pa to be extant in this collection. In all haste I was able to note the following titles:

rNgog-lo, on the task of critically and systematically understanding the transmitted Indian theories. He can, therefore, be seen as the first Tibetan philosopher who attempted to create a truly Tibetan tool of methodology and analysis on the basis and within the framework of the Indian Buddhist epistemological heritage. As one of his major achievements, one that is still alive in the debate practice of Tibetan scholastic colleges in the so-called *bsdus grwa* classes, is the *thal phyir* (*thal* = chain of consequences, *phyir* = reasons) method.<sup>17</sup> By this *thal phyir* method of interpreting any kind of argumentation met with in Buddhist scholastic literature it is possible to transform the arguments used into a series of deductive syllogisms, in which the logical reason (*gtan tshig*) of a preceding syllogism, if accepted as correct, forms the thesis (*chos can*) of the next one. This method was first practiced in the *rNgog lugs*. By the fourteenth century it was also used by the Sa-skyapa (Nya-dbon Kun-dga'-dpal, G.yag-ston, Rong-ston) and Zhva-lu-pa (Buston, Rin-chen rnam-rgyal) and later most extensively by all the dGa'-ldan-pa colleges. The later *blo rigs* manuals of epistemology and *rtags rigs* manuals of logic as arranged particularly in the bKra-shis-'khyil monastery in Amdo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are the last result of Phya-pa Chos kyi seng-ge's methodological acuteness.<sup>18</sup>

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1. *Tshad ma rnam nges kyi 'grel ba*
  2. *Tshad ma bsdus yid kyi mun sel*
  3. *dBu ma rgyan gyi 'grel ba*
  4. *dBu ma de nyid snang ba*
  5. *rGyud bla ma' 'grel ba*
  6. *mDo sde rgyan gyi 'grel ba*
  7. *bSlab btus kyi 'grel ba*
  8. *dPal lha mo nam mkha'i gos can gyi gtor chos slob dpon Phwa pas mdzad pa dang bsKang bso man ngag dang bcas pa*, and possibly
  9. *sPyod 'jug gi 'gral ba*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. David Jackson, *loc.cit.*, 129–31; van der Kuijp 1989 (n. 6): 13–19; Shunzo Onoda, *Monastic Debate in Tibet. A Study on the History and Structures of bsDus grwa Logic*. Vienna 1992.

<sup>18</sup> To identify and analyse the intellectual process of this extraordinary and idiosyncratic philosopher in penetrating the Buddhist heritage and coming to grips with not only its variously diverging ideas as well as with the difficulties of the early often faulty translations will not be an easy, but certainly most exciting task of future tibetological research. For latest remarks on the *tshad ma* works cf. van der Kuijp, "A Treatise on Buddhist Epistemology and Logic Attributed to Klong chen Rab 'Byams pa (1308–1364) and its Place in Indo-Tibetan Intellectual History," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 31 (2003) 385f., 400.

This early period of Tibetan epistemology culminates and ends with the famous *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter*, together with an autocommentary, *rang 'grel*, by the **Sa-skya paṇḍita Kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan** (1182–1251), called Sa-pan.<sup>19</sup> Sa-pan had strong ties to the *rNgog lugs*, worked with Indian pandits, and had excellent knowledge of Sanskrit. With his broad and profound mastery of the Indian tradition and the work of his Tibetan predecessors, as well as with his amazingly analytical and systematic intellect, he was able to produce the first thorough and comprehensive presentation of Phyogs-glang's / Dignāga's theories in the light of the seven treatises (*sde bdun*) of Chos-grags / Dharmakīrti. Of import for Sa-pan's interpretation is, that while before his time Chos-grags' *rNam nges* was the main source of information to Tibetan epistemologists, Sa-pan strongly relied, for the first time, on the *rNam 'grel* whose translation he had also revised for a second time together with Śākyaśrībhadra in 1210. Because of his energetic propagation and his disciples' efforts, e.g. 'U-yug-pa Rigs-pa'i seng-ge and Zhang mDo-sde-dpal, the *rNam 'grel*, and particularly its second chapter which contains the main religious ideas of Chos-grags, the history of epistemological thought in Tibet gained a new dimension, the meaning of which I shall explain later. It is also important to note at this point, that Sa-pan not only set the stage for all later epistemological thought in Tibet, but due to his penetrating insight into the received Indian theories is also invaluable from the point of view of interpreting these and the problems we are confronted with in understanding them.

A rich and long commentarial and creative tradition followed the composition of this first Tibetan summary of Buddhist epistemology which Sa-pan started in 1219 and which contains in its eleven chapters all major topics in succinct presentations, including discussions of previous interpretations. The Sa-skya-pa scholars Nya-dbon Kun-dga'-dpal (1345–1439) and Red-mda'-ba gZhon-nu blo-gros (1349–1412), both appearing in the lineage lists (*gsan yig*) of the *rNam 'grel / Pramāṇavārttika*, provide the link to the founder of the dGa'-ldan-pa or dGe-lugs-pa tradition, **Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang grags-pa-dpal** (1357–1419).

Tsong-kha-pa himself did not write a major work on *tshad ma*. We have only his summary of Chos-grags' teaching in the *sDe bdun la 'jug pa'i sgo don gnyer yid kyi mun sel*, a small work which was probably copied from the notes of his disciple **rGyal-tshab Dar-ma**

<sup>19</sup> Cf. van der Kuijp 1983 (n.13): 97–109; Jackson, *loc.cit.*, 15–189.

**rin-chen** (1364–1432). On the other hand, it seems quite likely that the epistemological works of both major disciples, rGyal-tshab and **mKhas-grub dGe-legs dpal-bzang-po** (1385–1438), closely represent the ideas of their teacher in this field. To them we owe extensive and excellent commentaries on the *rNam 'grel* and on the *rNam nges*. rGyal tshab's *Thar lam gsal byed* and *dGongs pa rab gsal*, and mKhas grub's *Rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* as well as his comprehensive survey of Chos-grags' ideas in the *Tshad ma sde bdun gyi rgyan yid kyi mun sel* must be mentioned as they were considered more or less authoritative in the following period.

In his study years, Tsong-kha-pa engaged in the practice of moving around (*grwa skor*) studying and debating in various colleges of Central Tibet: gSang-phu and its branches bDe-ba-can, Tshal Gung-thang, as well as sNar-thang and Zhwa-lu which adopted the tradition of gSang-phu. Thus, these colleges were all connected with the *rNgog lugs* tradition of epistemology and logic, and the gSang-phu education had a formative influence on Tsong-kha-pa's intellect. The first monasteries of his new movement, dGa'-ldan, 'Bras-spungs, and Se-ra, were founded during his lifetime by his disciples whose scholarly training was also connected with gSang-phu. No wonder that the college curricula of these new establishments contained *tshad ma* as one of their five principal subjects (*po ti lnga*) together with *phar phyin*, *dbu ma*, *'dul ba*, and *mngon mdzod*. The following centuries saw the well-known flourishing of Tsong-kha-pa's tradition, the dGa'-ldan-pa, in many aspects of Tibetan religious, social and political life. Education in *tshad ma* was divided as a rule into summer sessions, when the students joined debating groups, often at gSang-phu, and winter sessions which would be devoted mainly to debating Chos-grags' classic, the *rNam 'grel / Pramānavārttika*. Gradually school manuals (*yig cha*) were prepared for each of the many colleges. The indigenous Tibetan *bsdus grwa* literature with *blo rigs* and *rtags rigs* texts provided the basis for the initial stages of education, the *rigs lam*, rather than the study of Indian texts. These stages can roughly be characterised as introducing the student into the subjects of ontology, epistemology, and logic. The student would then have acquired the capacity not only to dispute in a strictly regulated manner, but also to apply this methodical tool in his studies of the next subjects such as *phar phyin* or *dbu ma*. The method used is, as already said, the *thal phyir* style created by Phya-pa Chos kyi seng-ge.

In more general terms, a major concern for all these Tibetan scholars of *tshad ma* remained the question of whether it was to be considered a branch of science (*rig gnas*, *vidyāsthāna*) of an external, non-Buddhist kind (*phyi rol rig gnas*), as opposed to Buddhist teaching proper (*nang rig pa*), or whether it had to be taken as an integral part of the science of Buddhism, and as such as a necessary educational precondition on the Buddhist path towards liberation. This is an ancient issue, already expressed in the *Byang chub sems dpa'i sa / Bodhisattvabhūmi*.<sup>20</sup> The tension between these positions is felt here and there in Indian authors too, but it does not seem to have been clearly discussed and resolved.

Already during the first period of Tibetan *tshad ma*, however, it had become a subject that was conscientiously disputed. I cannot go into the details of this issue here and will only summarise previous research:<sup>21</sup> One motive for interpreting *tshad ma* as a secular science was certainly its early inclusion among the *rig gnas / vidyāsthāna*. Another was nourished by the soteriological focus of the average Buddhist on meditation and/or ritual practice over theoretical insight for attaining the highest level of liberating experience. Also the fact that among Dharmakīrti's works, the *rNam nges* was the first to be seriously studied contributed to such an interpretation; for this is a text that, except for a short remark towards the end of the first chapter of three, entirely deals with the sources of valid cognition only. Therefore the early scholars of the gSang-phu tradition, following Phya-pa Chos kyi seng-ge, opted for this non-soteriological function of *tshad ma*. However, after Sa-skya Paṇḍita had refined the older translation of Dharmakīrti's first major work, the *rNam 'grel* by the 13<sup>th</sup> century was fully incorporated into the Tibetan realm. The second chapter of the *rNam 'grel* bears the name *Tshad ma'i grub pa / Pramāṇasiddhi*, normally translated as "Establishment of (the means of) valid cognition," but really meaning,

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<sup>20</sup> BBh 1.8 (p.96). Cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée Bouddhique de l'Inde et du Tibet*. Paris 1995, 102 (note 12).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. L. W. J. van der Kuijp, "An Early Tibetan View of the Soteriology of Buddhist Epistemology: The Case of 'Bri-gung 'Jig-rten Mgon-po," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 15, 1987, 57–70; David Jackson, "The Status of Pramāṇa Doctrine According to Sa skya Paṇḍita and Other Tibetan Masters: Theoretical Discipline or Doctrine of Liberation?" *The Buddhist Forum* 3, 1994, 85–129; D. Seyfort Ruegg, *loc.cit.*, 105f. (note 20); H. Krasser, "Are Buddhist Pramāṇavādins non-Buddhistic? Dignāga and Dharmakīrti on the impact of logic and epistemology on emancipation," to appear in *Hōrin* (200?).

in my opinion, “Establishment of (the Buddha) as (a means of) valid cognition.” This is, in fact, Dharmakīrti’s ‘religious text in which he shows how it is possible to think of the Buddha metaphorically as a ‘source of valid cognition,’ i.e. as a ‘person of authority’ (*tshad ma’i skeyes bu / pramāṇapurūṣa*). Beginning with Sa-pan, the lineage of the *rNam ’grel* leads, via Nya-dbon and his teacher Red-mda’-ba, directly to Tsong-kha-pa.

For Tsong-kha-pa it can then be said that the ‘fruit’ of *tshad ma* is the highest insight into ultimate reality which, of course, may be understood in terms of the *stong pa nyid / śūnyatā* conceptions of the *dBu ma* tradition. This point is definitely made clear, however, only by his disciples rGyal-tshab and mKhas-grub, both of whom composed *Tshad ma’i lam ’khrīd* manuals which are, in fact, guides to the science of epistemology conceived of as an integral part of the Buddhist path.

No doubt, this emphasis on the study of *tshad ma* as a necessary part of the path to liberation was also a reason for the widely influential later dGa’-ldan-pa establishments to introduce *tshad ma* into their general educational curricula. Disregarding what the soteriological function may have actually meant to the individual Tibetan students at these colleges, this fact means nothing less than that all Tibetans who over the last centuries received this kind of primary monastic education were at least familiar with the main concepts and categories of the *tshad ma* tradition as well as with its practical meaning in intellectual life.

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In summarising this short survey we may say that traditional Tibetan culture was essentially shaped by Buddhism, and that the strong Buddhist epistemological tradition introduced from South Asia played an influential part in the intellectual development of the Tibetan people. Thus, the study of the relevant texts in their original Sanskrit form and in their Tibetan translation can help us to better understand the aims and motives of this important branch of Tibetan Buddhism and therefore of Tibetan culture.

With regard to the further Tibetan developments of the *tshad ma* tradition I would like to emphasise three major aspects:

(1.) The Tibetan philosophers not only attempted to correctly understand the theories they had received from India, but worked creatively to solve inherent problems, and to this purpose developed and refined the concepts, theorems and definitions of the traditions received. Their

work must therefore be considered an independent expression of Tibetan intellectual culture and thus forms a part of Tibetan Studies.

(2.) Irrespective of this value, their interpretations can, and – with due consideration of their own further developments – must also be acknowledged as a source for any explanation of the transmitted Indian textual heritage.

(3.) The influential Sa-skyapa and dGa'-ldan-pa centres of learning, with their emphasis on conceptual and linguistic refinement and awareness, were for centuries instrumental in promoting the rationalistic tendencies among Tibetan societies.

In conclusion of this rough survey I would like to consider some tasks in this connection for future scholarly work:

- (1.) One of the most urgent tasks is certainly the edition of important treatises from the early period. Much has already been done. We already have editions of rNgog-lo's and gTsang-nag-pa's *rNam nges* explanations (1994 and 1989), of Rigs-pa ral-gris' survey of Dharmakīrti's thought (1991), of dGe-ba'i rgyal-mtshan's commentary on Dignāga's root-text (2001), and of mTshur-ston's *Tshad ma shes rab sgron ma*,<sup>22</sup> to give some examples. Much more still seems to be available in manuscripts (e.g. works by rNgog-lo, Bo-dong 'Jam-dbyangs Sho-re-pa, Phya-pa Chos kyi seng-ge, Rong-ston Śākya rgyal-mtshan, or Rin-chen tshul-khrims, summaries and commentaries on the *rNam nges*, but also Redmda'-ba gZhon-nu blo-gros' commentary on the *rNam 'grel*,<sup>23</sup> as well as other works mentioned, e.g., in A-Khu-chin Shes-rab rgya-mtsho's list<sup>24</sup> of lost or rare Tibetan works of the *tshad ma* tradition).
- (2.) Another task is the study of various *tshad ma* topics in all Tibetan theoretical traditions that were not dealt with in all details and

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<sup>22</sup> An edition by Pascale Hugon appeared 2004 in Vienna (Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 60).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. L. W. J. van der Kuijp, "On Some Early Tibetan *Pramāṇavāda* Texts of the China Nationalities Library of the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing," *Journal of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies* (Calgary) 1994, 1–30 and "A Treatise .." (cf. note 18) for more information on texts from this tradition available mainly through manuscripts in the China Nationalities Library of the Cultural Place of Nationalities in Beijing.

<sup>24</sup> Published in Lokesh Chandra (ed.), *Materials for a History of Tibetan Literature*. Part 3, New Delhi 1963, 503–601.

implications in the Indian epistemological tradition, but which were examined and systematically elaborated by Tibetan philosophers and logicians. The major aspects among such topics will need to be examined in their historical elaborations in terms of a history of ideas. For it is in this area that we will best be able to recognize how Tibetan intellectuals were able to recreate by developing new concepts and generalisations an ideal form of original Buddhist truth that they were devoted to in their spiritual aspirations.<sup>25</sup>

- (3.) A third important task I would like to indicate concerns one of the most valuable cultural treasures of Asia: the original Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts, mostly on palm-leaves (*ta la'i lo ma*), some on birch bark, some on paper, that are still extant in different collections in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. As a material they are classified as “cultural objects” (*wen-wu*). With regard to their “contents” (*nei-rong*), the “texts”, they are not obviously a subject of Tibetan Studies. For they are written in Sanskrit. But because of their history<sup>26</sup> they nevertheless form a part of Tibetan culture, and therefore must be considered in this academic frame as well. Their importance, however, reaches far beyond the realms of Tibetological interest. Many of these palm-leaf manuscripts (*ta la'i lo ma*) contain texts which until today are only known in their Tibetan translations. Within the Indian epistemological tradition, to which only a small part of these texts is related, I would only like to mention the fact that two of Dharmakīrti's main works, the *rNam nges / Pramāṇaviniścaya* and the *gTan tshigs thig pa / Hetubindu*, the study of which had until now to rely on their Tibetan translations, are now to be available in their original language.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. D. Seyfort Ruegg, “The Indian and the Indic ...” (cf. note 3), 528f.; for first examples on this line of research cf. Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *Recognizing reality: Dharmakīrti's philosophy and its Tibetan interpretations*. State University of New York Press: Albany 1997, and several articles by Tom Tillemans as, e.g., collected in Tom J. F. Tillemans, *Scripture, logic, language: Essays on Dharmakīrti and his Tibetan successors*. Wisdom Publications: Boston 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ernst Steinkellner, *A Tale of Leaves. On Sanskrit Manuscripts in Tibet, their Past and their Future*. 2003 Gonda Lecture, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences: Amsterdam 2004: 6–17.

<sup>27</sup> Both texts have recently become the subject of a cooperation between the China Tibetology Research Center and the Institut für Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens



For many years by now, various individual scholars and academic institutions have been trying to make the responsible institutions in Beijing and Lhasa aware of the need – in addition to taking care of these treasures – of also making them available to scholarship in general. I myself have proposed memoranda to Chinese authorities on what I think is necessary for this task (in terms of preservation, cataloguing, publication and research) on several occasions in the past, the first to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences already in 1984.<sup>28</sup> I know that this issue has been considered repeatedly in this country and several steps have already been taken in that direction, for example by your institution. But the task is enormous. I therefore remain convinced that its sheer volume requires international cooperation. Such co-operation would bring the benefits of the support to begin such an enterprise with the best standards available in scholarly and technological ‘know-how’ for such work. But its lasting effect would be that the Chinese and Tibetan co-operating scholars could acquire the necessary methodological capacity and thus would be able to fulfil this task finally themselves.

There is, perhaps, no need to stress the enormous value of these texts in the history of pre-modern ideas not only with regard to our world’s community of scholars in particular and for all mankind in general, but also with regard to those Asian societies whose populations are still predominantly Buddhist. This value can hardly be exaggerated. A decision of the Chinese national authorities and the T.A.R. regional authorities responsible for these cultural relics to make them available for scholarly work in a well-planned and organised way would most fittingly attest to their intention for preserving the cultural heritage in this realm. It would also be a clear sign of their openness to co-operation, thereby strengthening the ties with international scholarship.

These texts, distant in time and content from our world as they are, must not only be taken in their own material value as cultural objects. Since they contain texts, they may also serve as a symbol:

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der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Editions of both texts are presently under preparation.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *loc.cit.*, 23–26.

a symbol for information (*hsin-hsi*), as I said in the beginning, that is given to us as a means for understanding another human being, another human religion, another human society. To actively care for texts of such cultural importance as those contained in these manuscript collections can also be understood as a symbol for an unconditioned readiness to listen and pay attention to the words and ideas of our present and past “neighbours” in the global community that we all live in nowadays.

It is necessary, therefore, first of all to clearly distinguish between the palm-leaf, birch bark, and paper manuscripts as “cultural objects” and their contents as “texts”. As “cultural objects” they have to be conserved and protected in their material form. But their contents as “texts” have to be made available to scholarly work and study: they have to be studied and edited and published. For, if information is not channelled into the process of understanding, it is nothing, it is dead and meaningless, and so has no value for the people.