

Re-making, Re-marking, or Re-using? Hermeneutical Strategies and Challenges in the Guhyasamāja Commentarial Literature

PAUL G. HACKETT

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ph2046@columbia.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study in the exegesis of Buddhist tantric literature by examining a segment of the corpus of Guhyasamāja literature and, in doing so, addresses both emic and etic approaches to the hermeneutics of tantric texts. On the most basic level, we discuss the mechanisms for interpreting statements within the root tantra internal to the exegetical tantric literature itself, as exemplified by Candrakīrti's 'Brightening Lamp' (*Pradīpoddyotana*) commentary and the extensive sub-commentary by Bhavyakīrti. On another level, however, these same exegetical moves can be viewed in terms of the ideas 're-use' and reformulation of the root text, and how they shape the understanding of the role and function of tantric commentary.

KEYWORDS

Tantra, hermeneutics, Guhyasamāja, śāstric commentary

Introduction

While research into the tradition and texts of classical Buddhist sutras and sutra-based thought has flourished over the past century in Europe, America, and Japan, one cannot say the same of the Buddhist tantric tradition, which has received attention only in specialized quarters. Although in recent years more and more research on Buddhist tantra has been published, when approaching this literature, it is useful to recall the observations and advice of Ernst Steinkellner who, some thirty-five years ago, wrote:

Only when the developmental succession and the coexistence of coherent tantristic conceptual structures will have been clarified and thereby the dependent hermeneutical instruments will be localized historically it will also be possible to

interpret the Tantras themselves more critically in each single case. As long as these developments cannot be judged we have to proceed for the time being from those literary strata which give us exact exegetical advice from a certain historical moment onwards in order to understand the meaning of the tantric revelation.
(Steinkellner 1978, 447–448)

In our effort to produce critical editions of the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of these works, along with authoritative translations, maintaining cognizance of the different strata under examination has been a foremost consideration. In application however, we¹ have found the boundaries of such strata to be easily blurred for a number of reasons. What follows is thus a discussion of some of the textual and metatextual issues connected with the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and its commentarial corpus derived from research on the *Pradīpodyotana*, as well as observations on the nature of research into similar corpora.

The *Guhyasamāja Tantra*

Contrary to the emulated narrative of Prince Siddhārtha going forth from his life of luxury into the renunciant realm, from at least the turn of the eighth century of the common era, the competing vision of the tantric yogi, who could remain a householder, began to gain ascendancy in Buddhist communities in present-day India and Nepal. Of all the works arising out of this period of a re-envisioning of Buddhist religious theory and practice, the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* is perhaps the earliest of the Anuttarayoga Tantras,² and certainly the earliest text of that class of literature for which Sanskrit manuscripts are still extant.

Within the range of interpretations of the history of early medieval tantric Buddhist composition, a predominant interpretation³ is one of a culture clash between essentially discontinuous and formally incompatible groups: the extra-collegiate *siddha* composers and practitioners of the Anuttarayoga Tantras and their institutional, monastic Buddhist counterparts. Among the many problems with such an approach is the immediate consequence that it presumes and then reifies entities and agencies that cannot actually be shown to exist. It is impossible, for example, to locate a community of *siddha* authors outside of the texts of Anuttarayoga Tantras. This is not to deny the possibility of locating such a community, only to observe that the starting point for delving into the history and meaning of tantric religion must be the many discrete receptions of these texts with the interpreters — the authors of the various commentaries — for whom it was clearly coherent and meaningful. In contrast, a consequence of the methodological imperative of the *ur*-text has been to block the validity of precisely these individual interpretive streams and discrete knowledge systems that actu-

1. Throughout this article when I refer to the collective research efforts of the team mentioned in my acknowledgements, I use first person plural pronouns; otherwise, all observations and opinions should be taken to be those of the author alone.
2. Of the different classifications of tantric systems (into four, six, and seven categories), all place the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* in one of the higher categories. It has been argued that the classification of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* in the category of 'Mahāyogatantra' found in the six- and seven-fold schemes is in accord with its classification as an Anuttarayogatantra in the four-fold scheme. Here, we refer to the more prevalent four-fold scheme. Cf. His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1984.
3. Cf. Davidson 2002.

ally make up tantric Buddhist history, and to drive a wedge artificially between original revelation and exegetical innovation so as to produce a false dichotomy.⁴

This framing of such an approach to research into late first millennium Buddhism should not be construed as a post-structuralist fantasy; rather, we argue that it is the very logic of the Sanskrit oral and literary culture that produced such texts as the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. Indeed, as seen as early as the sixth century BCE with the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini, a shared assumption among traditional Sanskrit authors was that the proper role of commentary was to make manifest what was latent in the authoritative scripture under consideration. In the high literary culture of the first millennium CE, a concise ‘root’ text was not only constructed in such a manner as to be open to interpretation, but intended to *only have meaning* in the context of its commentarial apparatus; in this sense, the commentary must not only be present, but present itself *as part of* the original, based on a commentarial logic that operated upon the recovery — rather than the discovery — of meaning.

Consequently, it is well within the dictates of what is known about first millennium Indian culture to hold that the communities of Indian Buddhists that redacted, preserved, transmitted, and commented upon the Anuttarayoga Tantras relied upon precisely this type of dialectic of encryption and disclosure. It is important therefore to realize that such a process was not unique to tantric commentaries. Rather, such modes of discourse should be seen *as the norm* for the traditional intellectual culture of South Asia. Stated another way, unless we wish to relegate texts such as the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* to the a-historical category of ‘divine revelation’ — in this case, pronouncements by a cosmic Buddha spoken in a timeless realm — then such texts must be placed firmly in their historical context,⁵ a context that was the high literary culture of first millennium India, and we must accept that because the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* was rendered in Sanskrit, this very fact presupposes that its text communities had to some extent internalized Sanskrit commentarial logic, and therefore *required* that the meaning of the text be extracted through exegesis. Thus, it is not that we believe the interpretive stance of any one commentary to necessarily be the best, but rather that a text

4. This and related issues have been dealt with at length in Campbell 2009.

5. The precise date of composition of Candrakīrti’s text has yet to be determined. The only figure with known dates in the *Guhyasamāja* chronology is Buddhāśrījñānapāda (ca. 750–800 CE) based on his tutelage under Haribhadra, while all the authors that are explicitly cited by Candrakīrti in the *Pradīpoddyotana* — such as Nāgabuddhi and Padmavajra — are loosely datable to within a generation of Buddhāśrījñānapāda. Similarly, there are a number of significant commentators on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* another generation later who are conspicuously absent from Candrakīrti’s commentary. These facts alone would seem to place the composition of the work in an era that only slightly post-dates these cited authors. Moreover, while the sophistication of Candrakīrti’s narrative has been taken by some as evidence of a later era of scholarship, the opposite holds true for the associated ritual texts (*sādhana*), in which the works connected with Candrakīrti’s line of exegesis are closer in terms of content to the root tantra, while the ritual texts associated with the Jñānapāda lineage evince a system that is somewhat removed from the root tantra (cf. Hackett 2014). It is equally plausible, therefore, to conclude that rather than one tradition radically post-dating the other, the two exegetical traditions could easily represent systems that underwent parallel development with a certain amount of cross-fertilization, and that they were not temporally distant from each other. On this basis, we take the exposition provided by Candrakīrti in the *Pradīpoddyotana* to be situated well within the era of the root text, and no less so than any other extant canonical commentary.

of the Anuttarayoga Tantra class, like the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, does not properly and meaningfully exist outside of its commentarial apparatus. Both semantically and syntactically, the work cannot stand alone nor be understood without contextualizing it as the *textus receptus* of the community of its era as reflected in the mirror of an enveloping commentary.

The *Pradīpoddyotana*'s exegesis of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*

To illustrate the above point, in addition to presenting a running commentary on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* itself, the *Pradīpoddyotana* explicitly specifies a system of interpretive guidelines both for extracting the meaning of the core text and for implementing its avowed practices:

The enumeration of the preliminaries is five, and the method is in four parts;
There is the extensive explanation in terms of the six parameters as well as four kinds of interpretation.

The fifth [ornament] is divided into two parts, the sixth into five,
The seventh has two aspects; [thus are] the ornaments in brief.⁶

In this way, the *Pradīpoddyotana* assigns to the statements of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* multiple layers of simultaneous meaning appropriate to tantric practitioners at different levels of ritual and performative expertise, while at the same time, aligning the entirety of tantric practice with non-tantric, Mahāyāna Buddhist practice and cosmology.

Thus, Candrakīrti states that his commentary 'ornaments' the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* in seven ways: the five preliminaries (*upodghāta*; *gleng bslang ba*), the four methods (*nyāya*; *tshul*), the six parameters (*koṭi*; *mtha*),⁷ the four modes of interpretation (*vyākhyā*; *bshad pa*), the two types of teaching (*nirdiṣṭa*; *bstan pa*), the five types of persons (*pudgala*; *gang zag*), and the 'two truths' (*dvayasatya*; *bden pa gnyis*) in the context of the Perfection Stage *sādhana* (*niṣpannakrama-sādhana*; *rdzogs pa'i rim pa sgrub pa*). It is the third and fourth ornaments — the six parameters and the four modes — however, that form the core of Candrakīrti's hermeneutical system. That is, according to Candrakīrti, there are six classes of statements in the root tantra, and as many as four modes of interpretation of each of those statements.

As described and demonstrated by Candrakīrti, the third ornament consisting of the six parameters — interpretable meaning (*neyārtha*; *drang don*), definitive

6. *pañcasamkhyā upodghāto nyāyāś cāpi caturvidhaḥ | ṣaṭkoṭikam tu vyākhyānam ākhyānam tu caturvidham || pañcāmo dviprabhedāś ca ṣaṣṭhaḥ pañcaprabhedavān | saptamo dviprabhedā[h]i sy[ā]d alaṅkāraḥ samāsataḥ ||; gleng bslang ba yi grangs ni lnga, ,tshul ni rnam pa bzhi yin la, ,rgyas bshad mtha' ni rnam pa drug, ,bshad pa yang ni rnam pa bzhi, ,lnga pa'i dbye ba rnam pa gnyis, ,drug pa'i dbye ba lnga dang ldan, ,bdun pa'i dbye ba rnam gnyis te, ,rgyan rnam mdo ru bsdus pa'o. (Bstan-gyur (Snar thang) 1742, Rgyud-'grel vol. SA fol. 3a,1-3).*

7. Of all the technical terms that occur in this text, the translation of this term has been most challenging. The Tibetan, *mtha*, simply means 'limit' and is minimally informative. The Sanskrit, *koṭi* on the other hand, is much more evocative in its connotation. Denoting, according to Monier-Williams, the 'the curved end of a bow' or of a claw, horn, etc., the term connotes 'a point or side in an argument or disputation' (Monier-Williams 1899). Although its contemporary usage is confined almost exclusively to technical fields deploying user-adjustable settings, the English word 'parameter' comes closest to this range of meanings. Consequently, we use the 'parameter' here in its mathematical sense of 'a quantity which is fixed (as distinct from the ordinary variables) in a particular case considered, but which may vary in different cases', and by extension, 'a boundary or limit' (OED).

meaning (*nīrārtha*; *nges don*), ulterior [mode of] speech (*sandhyāya-bhāṣā*; *dgongs pa'i bshad*), non-ulterior [mode of] speech (*na sandhyāya-bhāṣā*; *dgongs min*), literal speech (*yathāruta*; *ji bzhin sgra*), and encoded speech (*nayathāruta*; *ji bzhin sgra ma yin pa*)⁸ — are fully applied to all seventeen chapters of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* in the opening chapter of the *Pradīpodyotana*. For example, in applying these categories to the first chapter Candrakīrti states,

The passage from ‘thus have I heard’ up to ‘he dwelt’, has an explanation that is subject to the four-fold modes of interpretation. The statements beginning with the assembly described as ‘inexpressible’ and so forth, up to ‘they resided in the heart of the Tathāgata Bodhicittavajra’ are of interpretable and definitive meanings.

The [first three] *samādhis* ... are explained in terms of the four-fold modes of interpretation. The [remaining] *samādhis* ... are all statements of interpretable and definitive meanings.

As for ‘the secret of body, speech, and mind’, the ‘community’, and ‘with words arisen from the *vajra* commitments’, these statements require the four-fold modes of interpretation. Regarding ‘the personification of the great knowledge being’ and ‘jewelled clouds of commitments emanating worship’, these are statements of interpretable and definitive meaning.⁹

Candrakīrti continues

The statement

Aho hi! The *bodhicitta* of all Buddhas going forth,

The secret of all Tathāgatas, non-conceptual, and non-local!

is non-ulterior exposition. From the part where the Bhagavan says to all the Tathāgatas ‘Excellent, excellent!’ and so forth, up to ‘he is not inclined toward showing the secret of body, speech, and mind’ is ulterior speech. From the words ‘anger family’ up to ‘they took their place in the northern gate’ and starting from *Vajrasattva*’s flowing out, and up to the emission of the cauldron of fierce elixir is literal. From the mantra words *vajradhṛk*, *jinajik*, *ratnadhṛk*, *ārolik*, *prjñādṛk*, *dveṣarati*, *moharati*, *īrṣyārati*, *rāgarati*, *vajrarati*, *yamāntakṛt*, *prajñāntakṛt*, *padmāntakṛt*,

8. Candrakīrti defines these as follows. ‘For the less fortunate persons, the Conqueror explains in a hidden way, and this is the *interpretable meaning*. He also declares the *definitive meaning* in order to show the perfect meaning (*sadbhūtārtha*/*yang dag don*). For the sake of those beings who are desirous of the supreme, there is the instruction in the actuality of things that is taught by employing contradictory expressions (*viruddhālāpavogena*), that is, explanation with *ulterior [mode] of speech*. For the sake of the realization of beings of lesser faculties, by means of the supremely clear, there is the definitive teaching of reality, that is, the *non-ulterior [mode] of speech*. Whatever extensively explains the meaning [of] the statements that accord exactly with engaging in the precise ritual of the maṇḍala and so forth, that is *literal speech* (*yathāruta* = *sgra ji bzhin*). Words such as ‘*koṭākyaka*’, [found] neither in worldly usage nor in grammatical treatises, come to be symbolic of the Tathāgatas, and that is proclaimed to be *encoded* (*narutaṃ*; *ji bzhin min*) *speech*.’ (Sanskrit: Bahulkar 2009, 123,13–22; Tibetan: Snar-thang Bstan-’gyur, vol. Rgyud Sa, fol. 4a,1-5)
9. Translated from Bahulkar 2009, 126,13–22 and Snar-thang Bstan-’gyur, vol. Rgyud Sa, fol. 5b,5–6a,5. For sake of brevity, I have omitted the lists of *samādhi* names; there are also certain differences between the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts, but since those differences are not germane to the purpose of this passage — a general illustration of Candrakīrti’s commentarial approach — the translation here (and below) follows the Sanskrit in general.

vighnāntakṛt and so forth up to ‘this concludes the chapter on the consecration of the *maṇḍala* of the *samādhis* of all the Tathāgatas’ are statements of interpretable and definitive meaning.

This concludes the analysis of the words of the first chapter in terms of the six parameters.¹⁰

Candrakīrti follows this basic pattern, assigning different parameters to different sections of the root text or demarcating portions for treatment by the fourth ornament — that is, multi-valent statements that are subject to analysis according to the four modes, conveying simultaneously: an etymological meaning, a literal meaning, a hidden meaning, and an ultimate meaning.¹¹

The textual foundations

Even when following these guidelines, producing a translation remains problematic when we consider the textual basis that such a translation depends upon — since, at different places through ‘the text’, the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions do not say exactly the same thing. This will be discussed at length below.

The Sanskrit and Tibetan textual sources of the root tantra

Regarding the root tantra itself, the bulk of the Sanskrit manuscripts are all of relatively late provenance, post-dating both the Tibetan and Chinese translations by 500 to 1000 years. The Chinese translation of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* (T. 885), as has been noted by others, is not a literal word-for-word translation.¹² Consequently, it is in reference to the Tibetan tradition that problematic passages have needed to be adjudicated.

The Tibetan manuscripts and xylographs of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* are slightly better than the extant Sanskrit manuscripts in terms of apparent scribal fidelity, although they are not without their own problems. Several translations of the root tantra are documented as having been made:

Rin-chen-bzang-po (958–1055) and Śraddhākaravarman

Pa-tshab Lo-tsā-ba (b. 1055)

’Gos Khug-pa Lhas-btsas (ca. eleventh c.) revision of Rin-chen-bzang-po

Chag Lo-tsā-ba Chos-rje-dpal (1197–1264) revision of Rin-chen-bzang-po

some of which were still extant as late as the fifteenth century. Only the last two however, appear to have survived intact up to the present day. In addition, there are text fragments from Western Tibet,¹³ and a single incomplete version of the *tantra* found amongst the Tun-huang manuscripts (IOL Tibj 438) — although the latter’s close correspondence with the ’Gos Khug-pa Lhas-btsas revision of Rin-

10. Translated from Bahulkar 2009, 127,1–9 and Snar-thang Bstan-’gyur, vol. Rgyud Sa, fol. 6a,5–6b,2. For an earlier draft of this passage, see Campbell 2009, 343–344.

11. These categories have received ample discussion in Wayman 1977, Steinkellner 1978, and Thurman 1988.

12. Matsunaga remarks that the Chinese version of the text ‘is not a literal word-for-word translation as it includes within the body of the text a large number of commentarial passages, appended for the benefit of Chinese readers [and] since in the strict sense of the word it is not a literal translation, instances where the Chinese translation can be used with certainty to illustrate textual differences are quite limited’ (Matsunaga 1978, vi).

13. Including fragments of the *Pradīpodyotana*. Cf. Tomabechi 1999.

chen-bzang-po's translation has yet to be adequately explained.

In editing the texts, we have tried to be aware of the tendency to rely overly on a single manuscript — what has been referred to as 'the tyranny of the copy-text' (Greg 1950/1951, 26). At the same time, there is the opposite tendency to disregard readings in the text in reference to some presumed theoretical ideal. For example, Tucci suggested emendations to the Sanskrit in reference to the Tibetan (1934–35, 351–352), taking the Tibetan to be authoritatively indicative of the grammar of corresponding Sanskrit passages.¹⁴ Matsunaga, by contrast, in the production of his critical edition of the the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, took strict adherence to Sanskrit meter as his metric, and as a result, altered numerous passages in the text to force them to conform to the expectations of Sanskrit poetics despite the resulting readings not being attested in a single manuscript. Indeed, from an examination of Indian commentaries on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, preserved in Tibetan translation, numerous *semantically* valid readings that were rejected as metrically impossible, are repeatedly attested in extant Sanskrit and Tibetan commentaries.

The approach that we have followed then, is that unexpected or ametrical readings are not necessarily mistaken ones, that Tibetan translations can guide decisions but cannot be the sole criterion for determining correct readings, and that only the authorial intent and context from the period of composition of the text can serve as adequate criteria for assessing textual variants. Given the lack of any biographical or archeological evidence regarding the authorship of a text such as this, the only guides to the semantic dimension ('authorial intention' and 'context') of the text are the various textual commentaries upon it.

The Sanskrit and Tibetan textual sources of the *Pradīpoddyotana*

As for the *Pradīpoddyotana*, itself, the composition is exemplary of the high classical *śāstra* tradition of Sanskrit scholastic commentary applied to Buddhist tantra. At present only a single Sanskrit manuscript of the *Pradīpoddyotana* is known to exist. Photographed twice in the 1930s and 40s, first by Rahula Sankṛtyāyana and later by Giuseppe Tucci, the present location of the manuscript is unknown.

Although it may be obvious to some, it bears mentioning that one cannot presume that Tibetan translations are verbatim representations of their original Sanskrit sources. More often than not they would appear to be, but for instance, when an explanatory passage is concerned solely with points of Sanskrit grammar, one often sees the passage omitted entirely in the Tibetan translation. For example, the passage that reads:

āṛṣatvāt karmaṇi ṣaṣṭhī //

Because this is an archaic form (*āṛṣatvāt*), the sixth case (*ṣaṣṭhī*) ending [is used to mark] the syntactic object (*karman*).¹⁵

is completely missing in the Tibetan translation. This is not unusual, however,

14. For example, he attempted (p. 352) to correct the Sanskrit text of one verse of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* (vs. II.3) in reference to the Tibetan translation. Due to his failure to recognize that the locative in Sanskrit can perform an instrumental function (a grammatical ambiguity that is absent in Tibetan and hence the difference in declensions between the Sanskrit and Tibetan not being indicative of an error), Tucci proposed the erroneous and hypermetrical 'correction' of *abhāve* to *abhāvena*.

15. *Pradīpoddyotana* comm. to *Guhyasamāja Tantra* VII.7 (Bahulkar 2010b, 101).

as there are numerous instances of such omissions in Tibetan translations. Yaśomitra's *Vyākhyā* to the *Abhidharmakośa* is a perfect example of just such a text that contains extensive grammatical information, nearly all of which was omitted by the Tibetan translators.

The style of the *Pradīpoddyotana*

Such instances aside, it is fair to say that a text like the *Pradīpoddyotana* — in both its Sanskrit and Tibetan forms — is good example of classical *śāstra*-style exegesis. It conforms, on the whole, to the highly formalistic dictates of the genre. Portions of the Tibetan translation are perfectly intelligible, requiring only a slight semantic shift for proper comprehension. For example, when ambiguous Sanskrit constructions are represented in Tibetan, the Tibetan equivalent of *iti* — *zhes* or *zhes bya ba* — is inserted to set them off as the subject of discussion, for example,

atropacārād ānantaryaśabdah tatkāriṣu vartate / prabhrtiśabdena-upānantaryaparigrahaḥ //
nye bar mtshon pa 'dis na mtshams med pa zhes bya ba'i sgra ni de byed pa la 'jug go, sogs
pa zhes bya ba'i sgra ni, mtshams med pa dang nye ba rnams bzung ngo,

[When analyzed] in terms of its secondary connotations, the word 'inexpiable'¹⁶ [means] engaging in those actions. The words 'and so on' subsume those nearly inexpiable transgressions [as well].¹⁷

In instances where the Sanskrit source merely provides appositional glosses to an otherwise complete sentence in the root text, again the Tibetan breaks the longer Sanskrit passage into simple sentences of predication. In other cases, however, again because of the highly formulaic style of the genre, the resulting Tibetan translation violates nearly all of the expected norms of literary grammar. Indeed, one could go so far as to argue that this genre of literature requires its own unique presentation of formulaic Tibetan grammar — principles that are only superficially shared with normal narrative texts.

In this genre of Tibetan translation, one finds numerous idiosyncratic usages of grammatical particles; genitive particles, continuative, and rhetorical syntactic particles are used in a hierarchy of apposition markers, while frozen adverbials and other otherwise intelligible phrases are used in a highly technical sense to convey the meaning of Sanskrit grammatical structures. In such instances, it is no exaggeration to say that without a knowledge of these formulaic commentarial structures, it is nearly impossible to read canonical, *bhāṣya*-style, commentaries in Tibetan.

In the more simple passages, a normative reading of the Tibetan grammar produces a resulting translation that is not necessarily wrong, but slightly inaccurate. For example, where the conjunctive particle *cing* is used to indicate an appositional gloss, the Tibetan is not far off:

mantryante bhāvyaṅte iti mantrā vacanāni //

16. Literally, 'no intervening interval', referring to actions that entail immediate karmic consequences.

17. *Pradīpoddyotana* comm. to *Guhyasamāja Tantra* V.3 (Bahulka 2010a, 118); Snar-thang Bstan-gyur, vol. Rgyud Sa, fol. 36b,5.

*'don cing brjod par bya ba yin pas na, sngags te tshig thams cad do,*¹⁸

yields:

Since [they are to be] recited **and** are what is to be expressed — [they are] mantras, that is, all words.

as opposed to the intended meaning in Sanskrit:

Since [they are to be] recited — that is, expressed — [they are] mantras, expressions.

In cases such as this, the meaning is still recoverable. In other instances, however, reliance on the normative meaning of these Tibetan phrases will produce a mistaken translation. This can be seen, for example, in the passage:

*triguhyam paryupāsata iti | sarvabuddhasaṃbandhikāyavākittaguhyam paryupāsate
adhigacchati tadātmako bhavatīti yāvat //*

*gsang ba gsum la bsnyen bkur byed, ces bya ba ni, de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad dang 'brel
pa'i sku dang gsum dang thugs kyi gsang ba gsum la bsnyen bkur byed cing rtog par 'gyur
ba ste, de'i bdag nyid can du 'gyur ro zhes bya ba'i bar du'o,*¹⁹

Here, the Sanskrit phrase *iti yāvat* (lit. 'just this much') is used in *sāstra*-style exegesis 'after a paraphrase that expresses the meaning of the original text more precisely', and where the formulaic expression *iti yāvat* is represented by the Tibetan phrase *zhes bya ba'i bar du*, a phrase normally used to indicate the concluding portion of an elided passage. Hence, rather than meaning 'up to where it says ...', the phrase simply means 'to put it plainly', or 'the underlying sense is ...' (Tubb 2007, 25). Hence, the correct translation would be

As for the statement, 'one devotes oneself to the triple secret', one devotes oneself — that is, studies — the secrets of body, speech, and mind associated with all Buddhas. *The underlying sense* is that [one] attains their nature.

As a final example, we can look at a passage from the *Pradīpodyotana* that illustrates the generic *kathaṃbhūtinī*-style (Tubb 2007, 149–160) of commentary deployed in that text. A verse in the root *Guhyasamāja Tantra*²⁰ reads:

*yat kāyaṃ sarvabuddhānāṃ pañcaskandhaprapūritam /
buddhakāyasvabhāvena mamāpi tādrśaṃ bhavet //*
*sangs rgyas kun gyi sku gang yin, ,phung po lnga yis rab tu rgyas,
sangs rgyas sku yi rang bzhin gyis, ,bdag kyang de dang 'drar gyur cig,*

That which is the body of all the Buddhas is replete with the five aggregates.

By means of the nature of the body of the Buddha, may mine as well, come to be like that.

The corresponding section of the *Pradīpodyotana* reads:

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18. *Pradīpodyotana* comm. to *Guhyasamāja Tantra* VII.32 (Bahulkar 2010b, 107); Snar-thang Bstan-'gyur, vol. Rgyud Sa, fol. 57a,6.
19. *Pradīpodyotana* comm. to *Guhyasamāja Tantra* XII.13 (Bahulkar, unpublished); Snar-thang Bstan-'gyur, vol. Rgyud Sa, fol. 96a,3–4.
20. *Guhyasamāja Tantra* VII.28 (cf. Matsunaga 1978, 22; Snar-thang Bka'-'gyur, vol. Rgyud Ca, fol. 81a,6–7).

*sarvabuddhānāṃ tryadhvavartidaśadigvyavasthitavairocanānāṃ sambandhi
pañcaskandhaprapūritam nirmitam yat kāyam asti mama ghaṭamānasyāpi tam
svabhāvaṃ kāyaṃ buddhakāyasvabhāvena hetunā bhaved iti prārthanā /*

*sangs rgyas kun gyi dus gsum du gshegs shing phyogs bcu na bzhugs pa'i rnam par snang
mdzad dang 'brel pa'i phung po lnga yis rab tu rgyas par sprul pa'i sku gang zhig yod pa,
bdag gi slob par gyur pa'i lus kyang de lta bu'i ngo bor gyur cig pa ste, sangs rgyas kyi sku'i
ngo bo nyid kyi rgyur gyur cig ces gsol ba 'debs pa'o,²¹*

and contains passages that are only intelligible when read, as intended, as a series of appositional glosses:

*sarvabuddhānāṃ tryadhvavartidaśadigvyavasthitavairocanānāṃ sambandhi
pañcaskandhaprapūritam nirmitam yat kāyam asti mama ghaṭamānasyāpi tam
svabhāvaṃ kāyaṃ buddhakāyasvabhāvena hetunā bhaved iti prārthanā /*

*sangs rgyas kun gyi dus gsum du gshegs shing phyogs bcu na bzhugs pa'i rnam
par snang mdzad dang 'brel pa'i phung po lnga yis rab tu rgyas par sprul pa'i sku
gang zhig yod pa, bdag gi slob par gyur pa'i lus kyang de lta bu'i ngo bor gyur cig
pa ste, sangs rgyas kyi sku'i ngo bo nyid kyi rgyur gyur cig ces gsol ba 'debs pa'o,*

*Of all the Buddhas [means] 'Vairocanas, who abide in the ten directions and
traverse the three times.' The connection is that [they are] replete with the five
aggregates — [meaning being] an emanation — [and hence,] whatever is their
body is that. Mine [means] the body of the disciple. Like that as well [means]
may [it] be of its nature. By means of the nature of the body of a Buddha [means
taking that] as a cause, [while the precative] 'may' [indicates that it is] an aspira-
tional prayer.*

As can be seen from the above example, in the commentary, the words of the original root texts are retained with the insertion of explanatory material in between discrete phrases and (although not seen in this example) rhetorical questions — such as 'How is it?' (*katham-bhūta; ji lta bu zhe na*), from which the style derives its name. While in Sanskrit the explanatory material is related to the root text through agreement in case, number, and gender, in Tibetan the connections must be indicated through the use of a variety of particles.

All of these issues come into play when attempting to translate materials in this genre, thus to properly read the Tibetan translation of a text like the *Pradīpodyotana*, one must bring an awareness of the underlying Sanskrit commentarial style, and have studied the specific vocabulary of *śāstra*-style commentary as replicated in Tibetan. Consequently, while documenting these parallel constructions is an interesting exercise in-and-of-itself, it is of far greater utility as a 'Rosetta Stone' for commentarial texts that remain extant solely in Tibetan translation.²²

21. *Pradīpodyotana* comm. to *Guhyasamāja Tantra* VII.28 (Bahulkar 2010b, 106; Snar-thang Bstan-gyur, vol. Rgyud Sa, fol. 56b,1-2).

22. Such a documentary handbook is precisely one of the intended products of this research project.

The sub-commentaries

Even in some instances, however, this level of engagement can prove inadequate in crafting a meaningful, informed translation, and so consultation with sub-commentaries becomes necessary.

There exist fifty-two explicit commentaries on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* (in part or as a whole) and another eighty-five related works, all of apparent Indic origin, preserved in translation in Tibetan; it is a body of work amounting to roughly 18,000 pages of textual exegesis. In addition, there are six explicit commentaries on the *Pradīpodyotana* as well. All of these commentaries offer a range of interpretations of individual passages within the root tantra itself.

While the various strands of commentarial exegesis may diverge on points of both gross and subtle meaning, we do not take this to be an obstacle to informing editorial decisions regarding any particular reading within the text. If anything, we hold that precisely the opposite is the case since numerous possible meanings yield a measure of the semantic range possible by different readings or, stated another way, it is a wide variation in meanings that allows for the exclusion of overly determinative textual variations (and potential translations) that do not support such diverse exegeses.

Of the commentaries on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, and the *Pradīpodyotana* in particular, Bhavyakīrti's commentary has proven to be both the most extensive and most useful in disambiguating terms and entities in the two texts. Where Candrakīrti uses a poetic or metaphorical term, Bhavyakīrti invariably resolves it to its common designation or mundane description. While Candrakīrti's commentary adheres to normative *śāstra*-style exegetical forms, Bhavyakīrti is far less elliptical, and provides simple equivalents and almost dictionary-style explanations. Nonetheless, in the bulk of the work, Bhavyakīrti restricts himself, more often than not, to explaining solely the individual words of the *Pradīpodyotana*. To get at the larger meaning and a discussion of practices, the Tibetan tradition must be relied upon.

Recognizing re-use in later Tibetan exegesis

Since transmission lineages of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* can be found in all the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the core texts have received commentarial exegesis across sectarian lines over the centuries. Some of the earliest commentaries known date back to the 'Later Transmission' (*phyi dar*) period, with such authors as the twelfth century writer, Gser-sdings-pa, and the Sa-skya hierarch, Bsod-nams-rtse-mo (1142–1182). Gser-sdings-pa's works,²³ however, address more the practices of the *Guhyasamāja* system, and less the foundational texts themselves, while Bsod-nams-rtse-mo (n.d. [1968]) merely references the explanatory tantras and Candrakīrti's *Pradīpodyotana* to explain tantric commentarial practices in general.

Rather, it is not until the fourteenth century, with figures such as Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364) and Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa (1347–1419) that extensive indigenous commentaries on the basic texts appear. Bu-ston's commentary is voluminous and appears to have been written in reference to

23. A number of Gser-sdings-pa's works have recently become available. See 'Bras spungs dgon du bzhugs su gsol ba'i dpe rmying dkar chag 2004, vol. 1, *inter folia* 408–428.

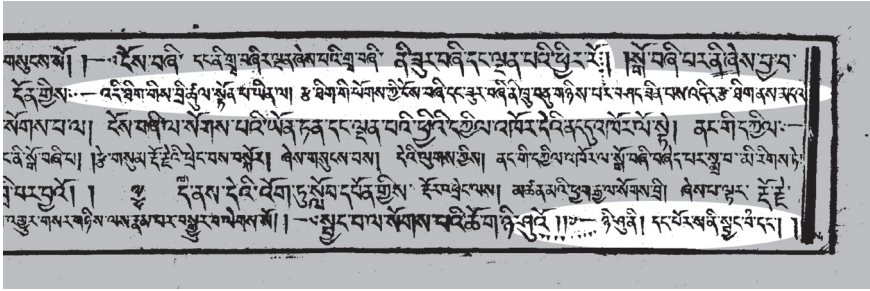


Figure 1 Inter-syllabic annotations in Tsong-kha-pa’s commentary to the *Pradīpodyotana*.

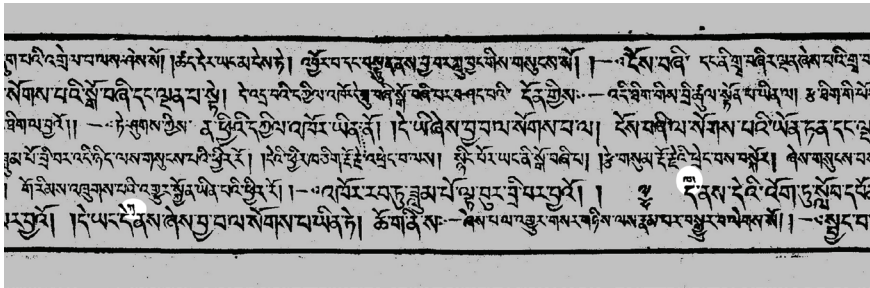


Figure 2 Resequencing indicators in Tsong-kha-pa’s commentary to the *Pradīpodyotana*.

both the Tibetan translation and Sanskrit manuscript of the *Pradīpodyotana*. Unfortunately, Bu-ston’s commentary (n.d. (1965–1971)) is non-linear and has an organizational structure that is unclear. Even utilizing the e-text of the entire work, it is difficult to locate specific passages or thematic points of exegesis.

Tsong-kha-pa’s principal commentary on the *Pradīpodyotana*, however, is quite the opposite. Written as inter-syllabic annotations to the *Pradīpodyotana*, Tsong-kha-pa unpacks terse grammar, abbreviations, and lists (see Fig. 1). In addition, he inserts long parenthetical asides discussing difficult points and controversies amongst commentators, as well as cues to resequencing text passages (see Fig. 2) to produce grammatically normative Tibetan sentences.²⁴ Most intriguingly, he presents — and indeed preserves — variant Tibetan translations in the works of authors that appear to be no longer extant, including the works of Pa-tshab, Chag, and others.²⁵

While it appears to be a safe assumption that the principal Indian commentaries on the *Guhyaśamāja Tantra* participate in the activities of the high literary culture of first millennium India, there is no reason to assume that such held true in Tibet. Indeed, there is ample evidence of the reuse and repurposing of Indic materials for radically different ends in the Tibetan literary and philosophical traditions, from the subtle but strained reformulation of Dharmakīrtian epistemology

24. This last set of indicators may or may not be the work of Tsong-kha-pa himself, as they are missing from some recensions of the commentary.

25. For a discussion of this point, see Wedemeyer 2006.

for compatibility with Madhyamaka philosophy²⁶ to the gratuitous a-contextual reuse and misquotation of Indic sources — including the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and other tantras — seen in the works of Dol-po-pa and others in his lineage in the invention of the so-called ‘other emptiness’ (*gzhan stong*) doctrine.

In assessing the utility of Tsong-kha-pa’s commentary for the task of producing the critical editions and translations of the root text, it was necessary to assess the extent to which Tsong-kha-pa might be participating in a similar cultural endeavor of re-making the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* in conformance with a Tibetan idealized image of Indic tantric systems to prevent anachronistic and revisionist readings. Fortunately, Tsong-kha-pa was very clear about his exegetical principles. As articulated in his 1408 treatise on philosophical hermeneutics, ‘The Essence of Eloquence, A Treatise Differentiating the Interpretable from the Definitive Meanings’,²⁷ Tsong-kha-pa posits logical reasoning in service of the two goals of internal consistency and conceptual coherence as the sole criterion for scriptural exegesis.

Looking to Tsong-kha-pa’s other tantric works, his approach towards that genre of literature can be examined in light of his espoused methodology for sūtric literature. Yael Bentor (2011), in her analysis of Tsong-kha-pa’s treatment of the *sādhana* for the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, notes that his interpretation of the phrase occurring in numerous tantric Indic texts, ‘mind-only’ (*cittamātra*; *sems tsam*) as ‘mere wind-and-mind’²⁸ (*rlung dang sems tsam*) is a brilliant hermeneutical move that, like his philosophical writings, brings precisely the sort of conceptual coherence that is missing in those texts when the phrase is read with its usual denotation. In his ‘Annotations’ (*mchan*) to Candrakīrti’s *Pradīpoddyotana*, there is every indication that he is following a similar approach.

To illustrate, one can compare Tsong-kha-pa’s approach to the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* with the treatment of the same text found in Dol-po-pa’s ‘Mountain Doctrine’.²⁹ Tsong-kha-pa, following Candrakīrti’s lead, differentiates the meaning of terms on a case-by-case basis, pointing out the subtle shifts in meaning associated with terms based on context and the same principles articulated by Candrakīrti himself. At the same time, however, it is clear that Tsong-kha-pa does not use this method where it is unmerited. For example, it is interesting to note that there are passages in the *Pradīpoddyotana* upon which he is conspicuously silent. Leaving aside obvious or repetitious passages, from a comparison of the Tibetan and Sanskrit, such unelucidated passages often can be seen to be instances where the Tibetan translators were in error in their reading of the Sanskrit. Rather than explicitly stating such or attempting to force an interpretation on the section to bring them into alignment with the larger context, Tsong-kha-pa simply skips over them, presumably in deference to the tradition.³⁰

26. See Dreyfus 1997; Hackett 2015.

27. *drang ba dang nges pa'i don rnam par phyed ba'i bstan bcos legs bshad snying po*. (cf. Thurman 1984; Hopkins 1999).

28. The ‘wind’ of course referring to the wind (*prāṇa*) that serves as the ‘mount’ of consciousness in tantric subtle-body theory.

29. *ri chos nges don rgya mtsho*. See Dol-po-pa Shes-rab-rgyal-mtshan n.d. (1976); Hopkins 2006.

30. It should be noted that inverting this feature thus provides a metric for identifying passages in the Tibetan translation which merit closer scrutiny and which the later tradition (or Tsong-kha-pa, at least) appears to have deprecated.

In contrast, Dol-po-pa, in his *Mountain Doctrine*, indiscriminately mixes passages from the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* with other quotations from the *sūtras*, *tantras*, and Indic commentaries in a form of hermeneutical sophistry — described by Kenny (2007, 94) in reference to similar narrative patterns used by Derrida as a ‘nosegay’ technique. Indeed, Dol-po-pa’s entire philosophical argument rests on denying the idea of polysemy, repeatedly punctuating his narrative with rhetorical statements questioning the very notion of contextual meaning such as, ‘if X did not [literally] exist, it would incur the fault of contradicting statements in ...’ (*gal te ... med na ... la gsungs pa dang ’gal ba’i skyon du ’gyur*), followed by numerous diverse quotations containing the word in question, discarding all context to terms, sources, and domains. In this manner, Dol-po-pa proceeds to assert the existence of an implied ‘other’ that constitutes a unifying principle related to otherwise irreconcilable literals. In this regard, Dol-po-pa’s use of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, and indeed all other texts that he quotes, has virtually no connection to the texts themselves as anything other than raw materials to be selectively appropriated and re-purposed in service of his own philosophical agenda.

Unlike Dol-po-pa, Tsong-kha-pa’s treatment of Indic texts and his annotations are very useful in validating the readings of the *Pradīpodyotana*. Nonetheless, the potential for injecting anachronistic readings into the editions and translations remains a danger. Irrespective of this, when critically editing the text and formulating a translation, it is difficult not to follow a strategy similar to the one advocated by Tsong-kha-pa, or at the very least, adhere to his larger hermeneutical principle — a sentiment similar to the one expressed by Ernst Steinkellner in his Keynote Address at the start of the XVIIth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies: the belief that the statements within a well-developed text are intended to be coherent and not merely superficial sophistry.

Formulating strategies for editing and translation

In devising a method for the production of the primary materials as well as a translation that fulfills its semantic obligation without entailing an infinite regress into the sub-commentarial literature, certain contextual guidelines for various situations were developed by us, since a monolithic approach is obviously not possible. Regarding the critical editing of the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of the root tantra and of the *Pradīpodyotana*, in the case of divergences between the Tibetan and Sanskrit — although possibly attesting the existence of divergent textual transmissions — in instances where there has been a clear preference for one reading over another in the sub-commentaries, that reading was followed with the variant reading provided in an annotation. Otherwise a judgment based on related literature has been made and justified in annotations.

Regarding the English translation of the root tantra, the following principles were advocated:

1. Make a distinction between translation and exegesis. The translation adopts a lowest-common-denominator semantic rendering of a term, and in doing so, attempts to match the same level of ambiguity found in the Sanskrit and Tibetan to thereby allow for coherence in the translation of different commentaries. Where necessary, such translated terms are annotated to properly define the scope of the English term (e.g. ‘parameter’ for *koṭi*). Unless overwhelming context and term definition

- dictate otherwise, the translation adheres to de facto standard translation terms found in the contemporary literature, and proper names and classes of beings are resolved to their Sanskrit equivalents.
2. Consider euphemistic or ambiguous expressions separately. Where resolved in the sub-commentaries, the literal reading is provided with a parenthetical gloss. Where such terms are not resolved in the sub-commentaries, the literal reading is provided with speculations based on related literature or near textual parallels provided in an annotation.
 3. Attempt to match the level of grammatical structure found in the root text in the translation. Only where the source text is unduly cryptic or overly aphoristic, do we supplement the text with bracketed material.

Regarding the English translation of the *Pradīpoddhyotana*, since the text presents itself as exegesis rather than as encrypted revelation, we have felt more free to take liberties with the phrasing of the English translation. To explain what is meant by that, it is necessary to recall that the *Pradīpoddhyotana*, like many other works in its genre, is highly formulaic. While adhering to formal structures of Sanskrit grammatical and semantic explanation, the text at the same time attempts to preserve the narrative flow of the root text. As a result, rendering a literal translation of the Sanskrit version of the text, with its word-by-word appositional explanations and glosses often produces a nearly unintelligible English translation.

Consequently, emulating the Tibetan strategy of conversion of glosses to discrete sentences with only a token adherence to the continuity of the root text provided by the Sanskrit, yields an English form that hopefully encapsulates the best of both styles. Indeed, the Tibetan translators themselves, followed such a strategy, going so far as to jettison even the sentence order of the Sanskrit original of the *Pradīpoddhyotana*, and instead rearranged the passages of the *Pradīpoddhyotana* to reflect the word order of the Tibetan translation of the root text instead.

While we have consciously chosen *not* to follow such a strategy, it does raise an interesting question about the extent to which a translation should be ‘localized’ to accommodate a new audience and points to the extent to which the Tibetan translators (in this instance at least) took great pains to maintain a certain bi-directional fluidity between root text and commentary such that the translation of the root text would drive the structure of the commentary, while the semantic dimension of the commentary would drive the translation of the root text.

Conclusions

Although some aspects of the research and procedures advocated above may seem obvious, we have felt it nonetheless necessary to be explicit about our approach both as a guide to ourselves and as documentation of how we have approached our subject. Despite the somewhat pedestrian nature of some of these concerns, we have felt them all to be nonetheless significant in the task of working with canonical materials. Beyond producing a set of editions and translations of these texts, it is hoped that the larger project of fully documenting Tibetan formulaic constructions in the genre of śāstric commentary — as well as the stylistic attitudes of the translators, instances of ‘re-use’, and limits to the application of this idea — will prove of use to others when all of these resources are published in archival print and electronic formats in the near future.

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Abbreviations

- n.d. No date
 OED *Oxford English Dictionary (Second Edition)*, ed. J. A. Simpson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

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