

Review

The Dharma's Gatekeepers. Sakya Paṇḍita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet, by Jonathan C. Gold. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007. xii + 267pp. ISBN: 978-0-791471-65-4 (hbk); ISBN: 978-0-791471-66-1 (pbk). \$65/\$29.95.

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Some Tibetan books call out to the Western sensibility, whether through style, subject matter or both, and speak across the cultural distance that separates us from the world in which they were created. We could instance Milarepa's biography, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* or the Sixth Dalai Lama's songs. The book discussed and partially translated in Jonathan Gold's *The Dharma's Gatekeepers* will be less accessible for many readers. Its author, the thirteenth-century Tibetan lama Sa-skya Paṇḍita (or Sa-paṇ, as Gold abbreviates his name, following Tibetan convention) was undoubtedly a highly gifted scholar and teacher. He was the first Tibetan to be recognized by his Indian contemporaries as worthy of the Indian title of *paṇḍita* or master-scholar, and in his prime would doubtless have been a match in formal disputation for any Indian *paṇḍita*, as well as being a sophisticated Tantric master. Sa-paṇ's works have an edgy brilliance that is often turned against his fellow scholars and teachers. Too sharp and concise a stylist to be a pedant, he nevertheless does not come over as a warm or sympathetic person, despite his enormous stature within Tibetan intellectual history.

Gold's book, originally his PhD dissertation at Chicago, deals with the first two chapters of one of Sa-paṇ's best-known works, the *mKhas pa la 'jug pa'i sgo* ('Gateway to Learning' or 'Entrance Gate for the Wise'—*mKhas 'jug* for short), an important text within the history of Tibetan scholarship and literary composition. Chapter 3, on *pramāṇa* (logic and epistemology) and philosophical debate, was translated some thirty years ago by David Jackson, who also provided an extended introduction to both Sa-paṇ and the *mKhas 'jug* itself (Jackson 1987). With Jackson's well-known work readily available, Gold spends little time setting the scene, though he quotes Milarepa in his opening pages (pp. 2–3) to make the point that we are dealing with something very different here from Mila's well-known songs, in fact with precisely the kind of scholarship that many of those songs dismiss as irrelevant to Buddhist realization.

Gold situates Sa-paṇ as a key figure in what Ronald Davidson has called the Neo-conservative Movement, a development that was initiated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in part through the impetus of one of the last major Indian scholars to come to Tibet, the Kashmiri *paṇḍita* Śākyaśrībhadrā (7–11). Sa-paṇ studied with Śākyaśrī and with members of his entourage, and Sa-paṇ's writings helped establish the Neo-conservative Movement within Tibetan society. Its central tenets were the need to safeguard

and protect the Buddhist teachings as transmitted from India as precisely as possible, and the corresponding need to censure and eliminate anything that might represent a deviation or innovation.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the *mKhas 'jug* deal with the use of language, both in the context of composition and in that of translating the Buddhist teachings into a form as precisely and appropriately as possible for their Tibetan readers. Sa-paṅ was well aware that the Dharma would only be propagated effectively in Tibet through the Tibetan language, but he constantly reminds his readers of the possible losses in meaning that might arise through the translator or the interpreter's lack of awareness of the finer nuances of Sanskrit expression. He presents elaborate classifications of possible error, complex categorizations of linguistic terminology, detailed advice to translators, and an extensive defence of Sanskrit poetics (including an extensive paraphrase, translation and summary of Daṇḍin's classic Indian work on poetics, the *Kāvya-dārśa*). All this is written in a style barely accessible except to other scholars of his own level of accomplishment. Sa-paṅ's work sets out not only to describe the highest achievements of Indian Buddhist scholarship in its new Tibetan garb, but also to exemplify it.

Gold provides a clear and sympathetic introduction to this often recondite material, along with a translation of the introduction and most of chapter 1 of the *mKhas 'jug* (he omits the closing sections, which consist mainly of summary and paraphrases of Daṇḍin). Sa-paṅ played a central part in the transfer of Buddhist culture to Tibet. Gold's book provides a valuable window into how this great scholar understood the enterprise of cultural translation in which he was engaged. It should be of interest not only to Tibetanists, but to many concerned with similar processes of cultural translation and adaptation in other contexts.

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