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THE INTRODUCTION OF INDO-TIBETAN STUDIES DURING THE EARLY SPREAD OF BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Shedup Tenzin

Buddhism penetrated Tibetan plateau through the then Himalayan kingdom of Nepal in the early 7th century AD. In fact, for centuries, Nepal, the Land of Wool (Tib. Bal yul) as known to Tibetan hosted as the hub of sojourn for Tibetan Lotsava¹ on their way to Indian plains in quest of truth that discovered by Buddha till 13th century AD. Indian Buddhist Pandits too used to sojourn in Nepal while crossing the lofty Himalayan mountain ranges to reach Tibetan plateau for the dissemination of Buddha's teaching of love and compassion such as Ācārya Śāntarakṣita (725-788), Atiśa Dīpaṅkara (982-1054) etc.

Under the royal patronage of 33rd King Songtsan Gampo (Wylie: Srong btsan sgam po, 617-698 AD)², led by Thonmi Sambhota, sixteen³ young Tibetan students were sent to India in pursuit of learning Buddhism, Sanskrit grammar, and Indian scripts prevalent at that time. Among the group of Tibetan students sent to India only Thonmi was survived from the scorching heat of plain India and the rest of other students were either died of heat or could not continue to travel or returned back to Tibet as they were unable to learn local vernacular in India.

Thonmi accomplished his studies under the guidance of Brahman Lipidatta or Lipikara⁴ to whom he offered a gold and request for teach him a knowledge of grammar, logic and the art of writing. Brahman

¹ This is the corrupted form of Sanskrit term "lok cakṣu" literally means "the eye of universe" here refer to professional Tibetan translator who are well versed in both Sanskrit and Tibetan and has engaged in the task of Sanskrit-Tibetan translation project.

² This date is widely accepted in many of the Tibetan historical text including "*Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*" whereas *Tun-huang document*, *The White Annals* of Gedun Chopel, *Byams ma* of Bon chronicle asserted the date as 617-650 AD.

³ The number of Tibetan students accompanied Thonmi Sambhota varies depending upon the different historical sources. *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* of Sakya Sonam Gyaltsen recorded "seven" whereas Bu-ston and Pawo Tsuglag Trengwa maintained sixteen in their works "*Bu-ston chos 'byung gsung rab rin po che'i mdzod*" and "*Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*" respectively.

⁴ Lipikara is the Sanskrit word meaning 'writer' is written in several different ways of transliterated (Tibetanised) forms by the Tibetan scholars such as 'Libikara' (Li-bi ka-ra), 'Lijin' (Li-byin), 'Lekjin' (Legs-byin), 'Lijin Hara' (Li-byin-hara). Raj Bali Pandey in his work *Indian Palaeography*, part-1, p. 90, quoted as: "besides the term 'lekhaka' another term which was used in the sense of a 'writer' in the fourth century BC was 'lipikara', 'libikara' or 'dipikara'. It occurs many times in the edicts of Ashoka. Sanskrit lexicons regard the term 'lipikara' as a synonym of 'lekhaka'. But it seems that in the Asokan edicts the term is used both in the sense of a 'writer' and an 'engraver'; more in the sense of the latter. In the Sanskrit fiction *Vasavadatta* the

Lipidatta with great delight accepted to teach Thonmi all branches of knowledge. Thonmi further studied with Deva Vidhya Sinha (Tib. *Lha rig pa'i seng ge*) who was another very important teacher under whom Thonmi had learnt thoroughly the science of grammar, logic and many other branches of literature.⁵

Returning home after six to seven years of devoted in the quest of Sanskrit learning and Buddhist literature as well, Thonmi Sambhota devised the current Tibetan script called U-can (Tib. *dbu can*)⁶ followed by the composition of eight treatises on traditional grammar. Soon after this, led by Lotsava Thonmi Sambhota and his disciples Dharma Koṣa, Lhalung Dorjay Pal⁷ and so forth, the team of Indian Pandits Kusara and Brahmin Śankara, Kashmiri Pandita Tanu, Nepalese Pandita Śīla Mañju, Chinese scholar Hwashang Mahādeva⁸ has initiated the translation project on the following Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan namely;

1) *'Dus pa rin po che tog gi gzungs*, 2) *Zla ba sgron ma*, 3) *dKon mchog sprin*, 4) *Sher phyin stong phrag brgya pa* and 5) Twenty one *Sūtras* and *Tantras* of Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *sPyan ras gzigs kyi mdo rgyud nyi shu rtsa gcig*)⁹. Apart from these, there are two other texts namely 1) *Pang (dpang)kong phyag rgya (brgya)*, 2) *za ma tog* or *mDo sde za ma tog (Karaṇḍavyūha sūtra)* which are believed to be fallen down on the roof of the fort called Yumbu Lagang (Wylie: *Yum bu bla sgang*) during the reign of 28th King Lha Tho Tho Ri Nyantsan (Wylie: *Lha tho tho ri gnyan btsan*). Taranatha maintained that King Lha Tho Tho Ri Nyantsan was a contemporary of Acārya Vasubandhu¹⁰. *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* quoted without naming the author and his work as “some other maintained that there were four texts namely 1) *Cinta ma ni'i gzungs*, 2) *mDo sde za ma tog*, 3) *Pang kong (spang skong phyag brgya)*, and 4) *mDo sde las rnam 'byed*.¹¹

Hence, the epoch-making landmark in the history of translation project of Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan began in the 7th century AD which continues till 13th century AD with short interruption in the 10th century AD.

From the 7th century AD until 12th century AD, the translation was mainly focused on Buddhist philosophical texts.

word 'lipikara' means 'writer' in general". According to *Vai ro'i rnam thar 'dra 'bag chen mo*, (p. 83) Brahmin 'Lijin' (Li-byin) was invited to Tibet.

⁵ Trengwa, Pawo Tsuglag. *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (also known as Lho brag chos 'byung), Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Vols. I & II, Pp. 178-179, 1985.

⁶ Bon scholars are against this theory and maintained that there exists the ancient style of writing known as *Zhang Zhung smar yig* prior to Thonmi Sambhota. See Rabsal, Khyungpo Lodoe. “Thon mis bod yig dsar du bzos min gyi gtam”. *Bon sGo*, Dholanji: BCC, Vol.11, 1998, p. 79.

⁷ This should not be identified the same person as Lhalung Palgyi Dorjee, the one who assassinated the king Lang Tharma.

⁸ Though bears the similar name, Hwashang Mahādeva is not the same as the one who participated in the Samye debate with Ācārya Kamalaśīla.

⁹ The 21 texts as enumerated in *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (Pp. 182-183) as: 1) *za ma tog bkod pa*, 2) *phyag stong spyan stong gi gzungs*, 3) *pad ma snying po'i mdo*, 4) *zhal bcu gcig pa'i mdo*, 5) *bcu gcig zhal gyi gzungs*, 6) *don yod zhags pa*, 7) *don zhags phyi ma*, 8) *pad ma mchog*, 9) *dbang bsgyur 'khor lo*, 10) *cho ga sngags kyi rgyud*, 11) *yid bzhin nor bu'i gzungs*, 12) *snying rje chen po mi bshol ba*, 13) *'od zer rnam bkod*, 14) *pad ma cod pan gyi rgyud*, 15) *yi ge drug pa'i mdo*, 16) *dam chos pad dkar*, 17) *puṇḍa ri ka'i mdo*, 18) *chu klung sna tshogs pa'i mdo*, 19) *snang ba rol ba'i mdo*, 20) *mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad pa*, 21) *mtshan rab yongs su bstan pa'i mdo*.

¹⁰ Taranatha, *rGya gar chos 'byung*, Xinhua: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1986, p. 159.

¹¹ Trengwa, Pawo Tsuglag. *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (also known as Lho brag chos 'byung), Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Vols. I & II, p. 183, 1985.

The 38th King Trisong Detsen (Wylie: *Khri srong lde btsan*, 742-797), made a royal invitation to Ācārya Śāntarakṣita (725-788) of ancient Nālandā university and the great Yogi Padmasambhava (8th century AD c. 701- c. 800) for the propagation of Buddha's teaching in Tibet and to supervise the construction of Tibet's first monastery at Samye which was built on the model of *Odantapuri Mahāvihāra* in India. Soon after the completion of Samye monastery construction, seven Tibetan youth were ordained under the spiritual guidance of Ācārya Śāntarakṣita according to *Mūlasarvāstivādin* tradition. Hence, the Sangha community was established for the first time in the history of Buddhism in Tibet.

Later on, the successor of Ācārya Śāntarakṣita, Ācārya Kamalāśīla (740-795) regarded as the 12th abbot of Nālandā was invited to Tibet in order to resolve the doctrinal disputes with regard to the philosophical standpoints between Ācārya Kamalāśīla and Chinese monk called Hwashang. Ācārya Kamalāśīla is said to have defeated the Hwashang in the debate and the consequence of this historical Samye debate culminate in the production of famous meditation treatise known as *Bhāvanākrama* (Wylie: *sGom rim*) ascribed to Ācārya Kamalāśīla and the Tibetan translation of which was done by Lotsava Kawa Paltseg (Wylie: *sKa ba dpal rtsegs*).

During the reign of King Trisong Detsen, approximately three hundred young men were ordained and many of them were given a royal support to train as a professional *Lotsava*.

We learnt from the historical accounts that the Tibetan Kings and the scholars were not only interested in the field of Buddhist philosophy but they were also deeply interested in Indian healing system particularly in the ancient *Āyurvedic* system. The father of Tibetan medicine popularly known as Yuthog Yonten Gampo (Wylie: *g.Yu thog yon tan mgon po*, 708-833) the elder, underwent training in *Āyurvedic* system in India under the guidance of *Ayurvedic Vaidya* Candra Deva and composed the medical text called *rGyud bzhi* on the basis of *Āyurvedic* text *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* (Wylie: *Yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po bsdus pa*) of Vāghbata (Wylie: *Pha khol*). *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* was translated into Tibetan by Lotsava Rinchen Sangpo (Wylie: *Rin chen bzang po*, 958-1055) in the 11th century AD which is now incorporated in Sowa-rig pa (Science of Healing) section in the *Tangyur*. Yuthog became the personal physician to King Trisong Detsen. According to Yuthog Yonten Gampo's chief disciple Sumton Yeshe Zung, Yuthog have received the teaching of *Āyurvedic* medical texts such as *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā* at Vārāṇasī and Rājgrha.

Under the royal patronage of King Trisong Detsen, a Central Committee of Translators known as *bCom ldan 'das kyi ring lugs kyi mdun sa* in Tibetan consisting of both Indian Paṇḍita and Tibetan Lotsava was formed. The chief purpose of forming this committee was to revise the old translations and the new translations of the Buddhist texts in order to maintain the uniformity in technical terms as well as the translation methodology and techniques.

During the reign of Tride Tsugdan (Wylie: *Khri lde gtsug ldan*), the son of Trisong Detsan, one of the remarkable tasks of this committee was the compilation of *Mahāviyutpatti* (Tib. *Bye brag rtogs byed chen mo*)¹² a Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon of Buddhist technical terms runs into 9565 entries in total. Incorporated in *Tangyur*, this bi-lingual Sanskrit-Tibetan glossary

was compiled on the basis of translation experiences of the Tibetan translators during the last centuries. The chief purpose of the compilation of newly coined phrases and terms enlisted in *Mahāviyutpatti* is to maintain the uniformity of terminology while translating the Sanskrit works into Tibetan. Subsequently, the committee compiled another descriptive glossary called *Madhyāviyutpatti* (Tib. *Bye brag rtogs byed 'bring*) or *Drajor Bampo Nyipa* (Wylie: *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*) which is a technical description to 414 of the entries available in *Mahāviyutpatti*. This work is also incorporated in *Tangyur*. So these two lexicographical works became the manual for Sanskrit *Paṇḍits* and Tibetan *Lotsava* as well as the Tibetan monk students who were engaged in the task of Sanskrit-Tibetan translation work.

During the reign of 41st King Tri Ralpacan (Wylie: *Khri ral pa can*, 866-901)¹³, the team of Indian *Paṇḍits* and Tibetan *Lotsava* had carried out the revision and edited the translation works translated during the earlier centuries. The King made a royal invitation to many prominent Indian *Paṇḍits* namely *Nyi 'og gi mkhan po Ācārya Jinamitra*, *Surendrabodhi*, *Śilendrabodhi*, *Dānaśīla*, *Bodhimitra* for the sake of carrying out the translation project with the collaboration of Tibetan abbots and *Lotsava* namely *Khenpo Ratna Rakṣita*, *Dharmataśīla* and *Lotsava Jñānasena*, *Jayarakṣita*, *Mañjuśrivarma*, *Ratnendraśīla*.¹⁴ The team of Indian and Tibetan *Lopaṇ*¹⁵ mentioned above were engaged in the compilation of *Mahāviyutpatti*.

The introduction of Buddha's teachings in Tibet during the reign of emperor Songtsan Gampo in the early 7th century followed by the firmly establishment of Buddha's teachings by the King Trisong Detsen in the 8th century and widely dissemination of Buddha's teachings by the emperor Tri Ralpacan in the 9th century is recorded and termed as "*the Early Spread of Buddhism in Tibet*" (Wylie: *bsTan pa snga dar*) in the history of Buddhism in Tibet. The above mentioned three great kings of Yarlung

¹² The great Hungarian scholar Alexander Csoma De Kőrös has provided the English equivalent of *Mahāviyutpatti*. His manuscript of this work is displayed in the Asiatic Society Library, Kolkata.

¹³ This is the most widely accepted date of Tri Ralpacan maintained by Tibetan scholars such as Bu-ston, Tsalpa Kunga Dorjay, Sakya Sonam Gyaltsen, Panchen Sonam Dragpa, Fifth Dalai Lama, Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Paljor etc.

¹⁴ Drup, Bu-ston Rinchen, (ed.) Dorjay Gyalpo, *Bu-ston chos 'byung gsung rab rin po che'i mdzod*, Xinhua: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, Pp. 190-191, 1988.

¹⁵ The contracted term *Lopaṇ* is appeared to be used frequently in the Tibetan historical texts to denote Indian *Paṇḍits* and Tibetan *Lotsava*. *Lo* and *Paṇ* stands for *Lotsava* and *Paṇḍita* respectively.

Tsanpo dynasty are collectively known as *Chos rgyal mes dbon rnam gsum* that is to say “the three ancestral dharma kings” in the history of Buddhism in Tibet.

The assassination of King Tri Ralpacan by his brother Hudum Tsanpo (Wylie: *'u dum btsan po*) who is derogatively known as Lang Darma (Wylie: *gLang dar ma*, 790-842) in 838 AD ended the royal patronage of Buddhism. He ascended to the throne and became the 42nd in the royal lineage of Tibetan King. During this anti-Buddhist king, the Buddha's teaching was temporarily declined for almost 98 years¹⁶ in central Tibet as a result of his persecution against Buddha dharma. So here ends the period of “*the Early Spread of Buddhism in Tibet*” (Wylie: *bsTan pa snga dar*).

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