

ཐུགས་རྒྱལ་

ཐུགས་རྒྱལ་ལྷ་ས་

TRANSLATION & TRANSMISSION

ཐུགས་རྒྱལ་

OCTOBER 2-5, 2014

KEYSTONE, COLORADO, USA

Workshop 4 | Room: CRESTONE PEAK I | 4:30–6:30pm, October 3, 2014

Translating Vajrayana Commentarial Materials

with Elizabeth Callahan, Jake Dalton, Lama Chönam



Jake Dalton

(University of California, Berkeley)

Jacob Dalton, Associate Professor and Khyentse Foundation Distinguished Professor of Tibetan Buddhism, received his Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the University of Michigan in 2002. After working for three years (2002-05) as a researcher with the International Dunhuang Project at the British Library, he taught at Yale University (2005-2008) before moving to Berkeley. He works on Nyingma religious history, tantric ritual, early Tibetan paleography, and the Dunhuang manuscripts. He is the author of *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (Yale University Press, 2011) and co-author of *Tibetan Tantric Manuscripts from Dunhuang: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Stein Collection at the British Library* (Brill, 2006). He is currently working on a study of tantric ritual in the Dunhuang manuscripts. His most recent translation work has focused on the recently discovered biographies of two tenth-century Tibetan figures: Nupchen Sangye Yeshe and Lha Lama Yeshe Ö.

Jake Dalton's Presentation

Contribution to “Translating Vajrayana Commentarial Materials” Workshop

Jacob P. Dalton

Translation and Transmission, Keystone, CO

Friday, October 3rd, 2014

Given that our workshop is on the subject of tantric commentary, I thought we might discuss how to handle the translation of commentarial passages whose readings differ from the (likely) intentions of the root text’s original authors. This is particular problematic when the present-day translator is providing translations of both the root verses and commentary, side-by-side. How does such a translator translate the root text? So that it aligns with the commentary, or so that it conflicts but is historically accurate?

Last year at Berkeley, Professor von Rospatt and I led a yearlong seminar on the Guhyasamāja-tantra and its famous commentary, the Pradīpodyotana by Candrakīrti. Some discrepancies between these two texts might be expected given that roughly two centuries may have passed between their respective authorships; the tantra dates from the eighth century, while Candrakīrti’s commentary probably dates to around the tenth century. In the course of our seminar, one of the chapters we studied was chapter eight, which we selected because of its significance in the history of tantric ritual development. For Candrakīrti, this eighth chapter represents the locus classicus for the ritual procedures of the secret initiation (Tib. gsang dbang; Skt. gūhyābhīṣeka). When read in isolation from Candrakīrti’s commentary, however, the chapter’s root verses themselves do not support such a reading. Instead, the chapter appears to describe a straightforward pūjā that culminates in the consumption of the bodhicitta produced through a performance of ritualized sexual union.

As I have observed elsewhere, from about the mid-eighth until the mid-ninth centuries, tantric Buddhist practice in India and Tibet emphasized the importance of this sacramental rite. The consumption of sexual fluids seems to have represented the culminating moment for most Mahāyoga sādhana practice throughout this period. With the ritual context of initiations during these same years, the third and fourth initiations had not yet developed; the vase and secret initiations were as far as one went. An important question for historians of tantric ritual is therefore, did the Guhyasamāja-tantra itself assume the performance of the secret initiation? Certainly by the time of the somewhat later Samājottara (rgyud phyi ma), it was a key element, but what about for the earlier core of chapters one through seventeen?

The passages I have selected for discussion are drawn from the eighth chapter of Candrakīrti’s Pradīpodyotana, an Ārya-school commentary on the Guhyasamāja-tantra, along with the relevant root verses. The first passage is from verses 19 and 20, where the root text instructs the reader to cultivate the “abode of the families,” i.e. the mandala, and worship it with offerings. Candrakīrti divides the verse, however, reading different intended ritual subjects into each half. Thus, he writes, the abode should be constructed by the guru who is going to bestow the secret initiation, but the subsequent worship should be made by the disciple seeking initiation. In such a situation, the translator is face with the question, how should the pronouns in each sentence (“the wise one” and “he” in my translation of the root verses below)? As my translation stands, the present-day reader would probably assume “he” would be the same as the “wise one.”

Guhyasamāja-tantra, VIII.19:

རིགས་རྣམས་གནས་ནི་མཚོན་པའི་ཕྱིར།

ཤེས་རབ་ཅན་གྱིས་བསྐོས་པར་བྱ།

འདོད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ལྔ་རྣམས་གྱིས།

དེ་ལ་མཚོན་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་བརྩམ།

*[318] So that the abode of the families may be cultivated,
It should be cultivated by the wise one.
With the five qualities that please the senses,
He begins making oceans of offerings to that.*

Pradīpodyotana (Dpe bsdur ma bstan 'gyur, p. 972, ll. 13-18):

རིགས་རྣམས་ཏེ།རིགས་ལྔ་རྣམས་གྱི་གནས་དང་གཞིར་གྱུར་པར་ཤེས་རབ་ཅན་ཏེ།གསང་བའི་དབང་བསྐྱར་བ་ཤེས་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པ་
ས་མཚོན་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཏེ།གསང་བའི་དབང་བསྐྱར་བའི་ཕྱིར་བསྐོས་པར་བྱའོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་བར་ཏུ་འོ་དེ་ལྟར་སྒྲ་མའི་བྱ་བ་བསྐྱན་པའི་འོག་ཏུ་
གསང་བའི་དབང་བསྐྱར་བར་འདོད་པའི་སློབ་མས།གང་ཞིག་བྱ་བ་དེ་བསྐྱན་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར།འདོད་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་
པ་གསུངས་ཏེ།

Regarding “the families...:” [All of the above,] up to the line with, “should be cultivated,” has been taught so that one who has the wisdom that [the mandala constructed above] is an abode and a ground for the five families, that is, a yogin who understands the secret initiation, may worship, i.e. so that he may grant the secret initiation.

Following the teaching on the actions of the lama, in order to teach what should be done by the student who desires the secret initiation, it says “[the five] qualities that please the senses...” and so on.

*The second passage I want to examine is from verse 26, the penultimate verse of the same eighth chapter. Here the root text instructs the practitioner to “obtain” the sexual fluids from the consort and eat them, whereas Candrakīrti’s reading would have the disciple “receiving” them and eating them. The question here, then, is how to translate the Tibetan word *blangs*, which can be either “to obtain/take out” or “to receive.” How we choose to translate this term determines which reading we are following.*

GST, VIII.26:

མིག་ཡངས་ཁྱུ་བ་སྒྲངས་ནས་ནི།

བརྟན་པའི་སྣོད་ལྷན་པས་བཟའ།

*Obtaining the semen from the long-eyed one,
One with a firm mind eats it.*

Pradīpodyotana (Dpe bsdur ma bstan 'gyur, vol. 30, ll.5-II):

མིག་བཟང་སྟེ་བྱུང་མེད་ཀྱི་ཕུག་རྒྱའོ། བརྟན་པའི་སྣོད་ལྷན་པ་སྟེ། བྱང་རྒྱུ་ལས་མི་གཡོ་བའི་བསམ་པས་ཁྱུ་བ་སྒྲངས་ནས་ཉེ་སྟོམས་པར་
འཇུག་པའི་མཚན་པའི་འོག་ཏུ། པརྒྱ་ལ་གནས་པའི་བྱང་རྒྱུ་གྱི་སེམས་སྒྲངས་ལ་བཟའ་བར་བྱ་སྟེ། སྣོབ་མོ་ལ་སྒྲ་མས་བྱིན་པ་འདིས་ར
ང་གི་ལྷུས་ལ་གནས་པའི་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཚེས་པར་བྱའོ་ཞེ་བསམས་ནས་བཟའ་བར་བྱ།

The long-eyed one is the mudrā-girl. One with stable mind, whose thoughts are unwaveringly turned toward awakening, receives the semen: After the worship of resting evenly, one accepts, or “eats,” the bodhicitta that remains in the lotus. Thinking that all the tathāgatas that reside in one’s own body are satisfied by this gift of guru to disciple, one should eat it.