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वैश्वानर

TRANSLATION & TRANSMISSION

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KEYSTONE, COLORADO, USA

Workshop 5 | Room: CRESTONE PEAK III | 4:30–6:30pm, October 4, 2014

Translating Canonical Materials: Tantra

with Thomas Yarnall, Christian Wedemeyer, David Gray



Christian Wedemeyer
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Christian Wedemeyer's Presentation

Workshop: Translating Canonical Materials: Tantra



Tsadra Foundation, *et al.*
Translation and Transmission Conference
4 October 2014

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Translating Canonical Materials: Tantra



- ❧ *A kathambhūtinī* commentary:
- ❧ བད། What?
- ❧ བད་ལ། For what (or whom)?
- ❧ བད་གྲིས། How? and By whom?
- ❧ དུས་བད་ལ། When?
- ❧ Ancillary issues: secrecy, transgression, mantras, terminology

What are Tantric canonical materials?



- ❧ Wide range of sources
 - ❧ Kangyur
 - ❧ Non-transgressive Tantras
 - ❧ Transgressive Tantras
 - ❧ Tengyur
 - ❧ Sādhanas and ritual liturgies
 - ❧ Expository Works
 - ❧ Commentaries
 - ❧ Pseudepigrapha

Canonical Pseudepigrapha



- ∞ In Tengyur, there exist multiple texts attributed to Indian authors that were manifestly composed by Tibetans.
- ∞ E.g. *Caryāmelāpaka Commentary* by Śākyamitra
- ∞ Nāgabodhi commentaries on *Pañcakrama*

What does this mean for our approach to the translation and presentation of materials from that are ‘canonical’?

N.b. Tibetan scholia explore these issues in some detail.

གང་ལ།



ལེ གང་ཟག་གང་གི་དོན་ལ། For what audience?

ལེ དོན་གང་གི་སྒྲིབ་དུ། With what aim or objective?

ལེ Solitary reading?

ལེ Textbook/reading for course/teaching?

ལེ Proof text for debate and exposition?

བཤམ་གྱི་ལུ་ལོ་ལོ་ How?



- ལེ་ Philological and linguistic expertise
 - ལེ་ Sanskrit: language *and* culture
 - ལེ་ Tibetan language and culture
- ལེ་ Study
 - ལེ་ Buddhism (not merely esoteric Buddhism)
 - ལེ་ Indian and Tibetan religion
 - ལེ་ Commentaries
 - ལེ་ Contemporary teachers
 - ལེ་ Historical/intellectual/literary analysis
- ལེ་ Experience (?)

Philological and linguistic expertise



- Knowledge of Sanskrit an essential skill
- Not merely language, but cultural knowledge

Example one:

दशकुशलान् कर्मपथान् कुर्वन्ति ज्ञानावरजिताः ।
daśakuśalān karmapathān kurvanti jñānavarjitāḥ |

Like Septuagint, preserves source language syntax.

Knowledge of Sanskrit an essential skill



Example two: *upasargas* (verbal prefixes)

e.g.: anu+√bhū (to experience) (to “subsequently-exist”)

Style one: preserve prefix, translate complex

ईनसुभ्रुद्व (RYD: to “actually experience”)

Style two: preserve both prefix and root

ईनसुभ्रुद्व

Further example: *vyavasthitiḥ* (vi+ava+sthā, meaning distinction)

Rendered རྣམ་པར་གཞན་, rather than, e.g., རྣམ་པར་འབྱེད་

Formal Tibetan Dictum



- ∞ *Bam gnyis* stipulates that *upasarga*-s should be translated literally and as an extra element only if they have a semantic effect; those which do not add anything semantically (i.e. *upasarga*-s used pleonastically) need not be translated as an extra element, but rather the entire verb may be translated according to the meaning (*pari dang | sam dang | upa lta bu la sogs te | tshig gi phrad dang rgyan lta bur 'byung ba rnams bsgyur na don dang mthun zhing 'byor pa'i thabs ni | yongs su zhe'am | yang dag pa zhe'am | nye ba zhes sgra bzhin du sgyur cig | don lhag par snyegs pa med pa rnams ni tshig gi lhad kyis bsnan mi dgos kyis [sic for kyi] don bzhin du thogs shig |*).

གང་གིས། By whom?



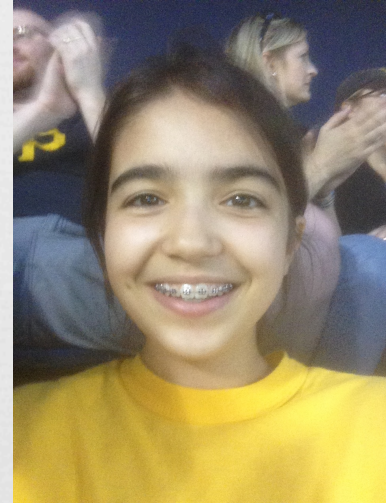
ལྷ Maitreya said, “I can read anything.”

གང་གིས། By whom?



☞ Maitreya said, “I can read anything.”

Maitreya, aged 12



Ancillary Issues



∞ Secrecy?

∞ Transgression?

∞ Translate Mantras?

∞ Evolution of terminology?

Secrecy



- ❧ Secrecy: can we translate esoteric texts and make them available?
- ❧ Easy answer: sure.

Transgression



❧ Must preserve semiosis

❧ Heraclitus, cited by Plutarch, remarked: “The lord whose shrine is at Delphi neither states nor conceals, but signs (*sêmainei*).”

❧ “Eat fæces and drink urine!”

VS.

❧ “Pacify the sense objects and sense organs!”

Translate Mantras?



- ❧ Best practice: do both.
 - ❧ Preserve the Sanskritic original and offer translation.
- ❧ śakrāya svāhā |
- ❧ om akāro mukhaṃ sarvadharmānāṃ ādyanutpannatvāt |
- ❧ om svabhāvaśuddhāḥ sarvadharmāḥ svabhāvaśuddho 'ham |
- ❧ Tibetan scholia offer these translations, but why not put them in the text for easy reference?

Evolution of Terminology



- ⌘ Key issue: progressive refinement swimming upstream against habituated usage.

Evolution of Terminology



- ❧ Key issue: progressive refinement swimming upstream against habituated usage.
- ❧ E.g., names of the levels of the subtle mind
 - ❧ Āloka ལྷང་བ་
 - ❧ Ābhāsa མཚེད་པ་
 - ❧ Upalabdhi ཉེ་བར་ཐོབ་པ་
 - ❧ Prabhāsvara འོད་གསལ་

Evolution of Terminology



❧ Key issue: progressive refinement swimming upstream against habituated usage.

❧ E.g., names of the levels of the subtle mind

❧ Āloka	སྣང་བ་	appearance
❧ Ābhāsa	མཆེད་པ་	increase
❧ Upalabdhi	ཉེ་བར་ཐོབ་པ་	near-attainment
❧ Prabhāsvara	འོད་གསལ་ལ་	clear light

Evolution of Terminology



❧ Key issue: progressive refinement swimming upstream against habituated usage.

❧ E.g., names of the levels of the subtle mind

❧ Āloka	སྒྲོལ་བ་	luminance
❧ Ābhāsa	མཚོལ་པ་	radiance
❧ Upalabdhi	ཉེ་བར་ཐོབ་པ་	imminence
❧ Prabhāsvara	འོད་གསལ་ལ་	brilliance



Good luck!

