THE JOURNAL

OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF

BUDDHIST STUDIES

Volume 13   *1990*   *Number 2*

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The *Mantra* "*Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ*" in an Early Tibetan Grammatical Treatise

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Among the treatises on Sanskrit grammar incorporated into the Tibetan Buddhist canon commonly known as *Bstan-'gyur*, a few can be found that were written originally in Tibetan, while the vast majority are translations of Sanskrit texts.[1] One of these original Tibetan compositions dealing with Sanskrit grammar is a highly interesting treatise entitled *Sgra'i-rnam-par-dbye-ba-bstan-pa*, "Exposé (of) the Nominal Cases."[2] It describes the essentials of the Sanskrit system of nominal declension, while also relating this system to the semantics—and sometimes even the morphology—of the Tibetan case-particles.

The author's name is not mentioned in the text or its colophon. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the *Sgra'i-rnam-par-dbye-ba-bstan-pa* and the two titles immediately preceding it in the *Bstan-'gyur*, also grammatical treatises,[3] have been written by the Tibetan grammarian and translator Lce-khyi-'brug (alias Ci-khyi-'brug or Ce-khyi-'brug), who can positively be associated with the period 798–815 A.D.[4] It seems fair to assume a date of composition for this treatise in the early period of the formation of the Tibetan canonical literature, most likely the ninth century A.D.[5] In the treatise under consideration the Sanskrit nominal declension is described as a system of eight cases, with a further subdivision of each case into singular, dual and plural. These eight cases are dealt with in the traditional order: nominative, accusative, instrumental, dative, ablative, genitive, locative and vocative.[6] For each of these cases a summary description of the semantics and the

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main points of the morphology are presented, supplemented with Sanskrit examples (with their Tibetan translations).

In the final section of the text, dealing with the vocative case, the well-known *mantra* "*Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ*" is cited as an example. Here I will present a short excerpt from the text, containing the reference to this *mantra* and its subsequent (grammatical) interpretation. In the paragraphs immediately preceding this excerpt it has been stated that the vocative case is indicated in Sanskrit mainly by (the interjection) *he*, "Oh!" or (the case-ending) *-e*.[7] As examples for the use of *he* the author gives " **he he bhagavan*," "Oh, oh, venerable one!" and " **he vajra*," "Oh, *vajra!*": as an example for *-e* he mentions " **vṛkṣe*,"[8] "Oh, tree!"

Excerpt from
Sgra'i-rnam-par-dbye-ba-bstan-pa
[Peking *Bstan-'gyur: Mdo-'grel*: vol. *NGO* 63v7–64r2:]

/ *gzhan-yang-bod-pa-'di-phal-* / [63v8:]*cher-e-ston-pa-yin-la* /   *de-yang-snying-po-rnams-ni-bod-pa-kho-na-yin-pas-phal-cher-e-yod-de* / *de-yang-'di-ltar-oṃ-ma-ṇi-padme-hūṃ-zhes-pa-lta-bu-la* /   *oṃ-ni-ye-shes-lnga'i-ngo-bo-yin-pas-dang-por-smos-pa-*[64r1:]*yin-pas* /   *hūṃ-ni-thugs-dgongs-shig-ces-par-mjug-bsdus-pa-yin-te-bar-gyi-bod-pa-dngos-ni-ma-ṇi-ni-nor-bu-yin-la* /   *padme-ni-dngos-te-sor-bzhag-go*[/] / *des-na-nor-bu-padma-zhes-pa-*   *la-*[64r2:]*phyag-'tshal-gyi-sgo-nas-bod-pa-yin-la* /   *me-zhes-pa'i-e-sbyar-ba-ni-kye-yin-te* /   *kye-nor-bu-padma-zhes-pa-lta-bu'o* /

Translation

'Morever (*gzhan-yang*), this vocative (case) (*bod-pa*) is gener-ally[9] (*phal-cher*) indicated (*ston-pa*) (by case-ending) *-e*, and as the hearts (or essences) (*snying-po-rnams*) (scil. the *mantras*, or: of the *mantras*) are precisely (*kho-na*) invocations (or: vocatives) (*bod-pa*), (these invocations / vocatives in the *mantras*) generally (*phal-cher*) have (*yod*) (case-ending) *-e*; so then (*de-yang*) (this vocative case-ending occurs) accordingly (*'di-ltar*) for instance in (*lta-bu-la*) (the *mantra*) "*Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ*."

(In this *mantra*) *Oṃ* is uttered (*smos-pa*) as first (*dang-por*), because it is the essence (*ngo-bo*) of the five wisdoms (*ye-shes-*

lnga'i[10]; *hūṃ*, (which is to be translated as) "Be mindful of (this)!" (*thugs-dgongs-shig*),[11] is placed at the end (*mjug-bsdus*), so the actual (*dngos*) vocative (or: invocation) (*bod-pa*) in between (*bar-gyi*) (*Oṃ* and *hūṃ* consists of) *maṇi*, (to be translated as) "jewel" (*nor-bu*) and *padme* (emend to: *padma*) ("lotus"), which is the same (*dngos*) (word in Tibetan as in Sanskrit) and so remains unchanged (*sor-bzhag*)[12] (in translation).

So (*des-na*), to (this) "jewel-lotus" (*nor-bu-padma*)[13] an invocation (*bod-pa*) by means of a salutation (*phyag-'tshal-gyi-sgo-nas*) is (addressed), (which results in) the application (*sbyar-ba*) of (case-ending) *-e* in (the syllable) *me*, which is (to be translated as) "Oh!" (*kye*), so that (the translation of) the example (*lta-bu*) is: "Oh, jewel-lotus!".

Short Evaluation

The choice of the *mantra Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ* as an example in the above passage from the *Sgra'i-rnam-par-dbye-ba-bstan-pa*—presumably dating from the ninth century—seems to be an indication of the relative popularity of this formula already in the early period of the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. This is contrary to the opinion prevalent in western Tibetology until rather recently that, as no mention of *Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ* had (until then) been discovered in the Tibetan literature of that period, this *mantra* did not play a role of any significance in the earliest phases of Tibetan Buddhism.[14]

However, early references to this *mantra* can be found in the ninth- and tenth-century Tibetan literary remains from Dun Huang, notably in a text entitled *Dug-gsum-'dul-ba*,[15] as well as in the well-known, rather cryptic, Sanskrit-Tibetan formulary.[16] It would seem that the present passage can now provisionally be added to the ninth-century textual evidence of *Oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ*.

It should be noted that in this passage from the *Sgra'i-rnam-par-dbye-ba-bstan-pa*, the formula is nowhere explicitly associated with the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara.

From a grammatical point of view it is rather interesting that the term *maṇi-padme* is cited as an example of the vocative case.[17] This means that according to the morphology of classical Sanskrit this form should be considered either as a vocative dual of a neuter compound stem *maṇi-padma* or as a vocative

singular of a feminine compound stem *mani-padmā*. In the former interpretation it would most likely be a *dvandva*-type of compound ("Oh, jewel and lotus!"),[18] while in the latter, a *bahuvrīhi*-type of compound would have to be supposed ("Oh, [you woman] who have the jewel-lotus!").[19]

Considering the above it would seem that the formula *Oṃ mani-padme hūṃ*, which was to become such a prominent feature of later Tibetan Buddhism, was—at least—known in Tibet already in the period of the first propagation (*snga-dar*) of Buddhism.

NOTES:

1. Cf. P.C. Verhagen, "Sanskrit grammatical literature in Tibet: a first survey," to be published in: *Panels of the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference*, vol.7(?), Leiden (1991), pp. 47–62.

2. Peking ed. Suzuki (1955–1961) title nr. 5838, *Bstan-'gyur Mdo-'grel NGO* ff. 54r6–64r4. The text is not extant in the Sde-dge, Co-ne or Snar-thang editions of the *Bstan-'gyur*.

3. *Gnas-brgyad-chen-po'i-rtsa-ba*, Peking ed. Suzuki (1955–1961) title nr. 5836, *Bstan-'gyur Mdo-'grel NGO* ff. 40v6–43v7 and *Gnas-brgyad-'grel-pa*, Peking ed. Suzuki (1955–1961) title nr. 5837, *Bstan-'gyur Mdo-'grel NGO* ff. 43v8–54r6.

4. On Lce-khyi-'brug in general and his dating, cf. S. Inaba, *Chibetto-go Koten Bunpōgaku*, Kyōto 1954, pp. 24–29, N. Simonsson, *Indo-tibetische Studien I*, Uppsala 1957, pp. 243–244 and R.A. Miller, "Thon-mi Saṃbhoṭa and his Grammatical Treatises," *JAOS* 83 (1963), pp. 486–487 (= repr. in: *Studies in the Grammatical Traditions in Tibet*, Amsterdam 1976, pp. 2–3).

There are ample text-internal indications (such as striking similarities in method and terminology) that the three texts—the first of which is certainly the work of Lce-khyi-'brug—are closely related, almost certainly contemporaneous and quite possibly by the same hand. Text-externally the main arguments for the attribution to Lce-khyi-'brug are to be found in several canonical catalogue-indexes (*dkar-chag*); the earliest *Bstan-'gyur* catalogue, written by Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364) (ed. L. Chandra, *The Collected Works of Bu-ston*, vol. 26, New Delhi 1971, = Śata-Piṭaka Series vol. 66, f. 117r3), a slightly later version by Bu-ston's pupil Sgra-tshad-pa Rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan (1318–1388) (ed. L. Chandra, *The Collected works of Bu-ston*, vol. 28, New Delhi 1971, = Śata-Piṭaka Series vol. 68, f. 111r6), as well as the catalogue of the Peking *Bstan-'gyur* written by the fifth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho (1617–1682) (ed. L. Chandra, *Catalogue of the Peking Tanjur*, vol. 1, New Delhi 1983, = Śata-Piṭaka Series vol. 325, f. 138r4) have virtually identical entries pertinent to these texts, that seem to indicate that Lce-khyi-'brug was the author of all three texts.

5. Besides the characteristic similarities between our text and the treatise that can be positively attributed to Lce-khyi-'brug (cf. note 4), another

indication for an early date of composition is the location of the text in the canon, viz. among a group of treatises written by early Tibetan scholars, e.g., the Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon *Mahāvyutpatti* and its partial commentary *Sgra-sbyor-bam-po-gnyis-pa* (Peking ed. Suzuki 1955–1961 title nrs. 5832 and 5833), both datable to the late eighth, early ninth century, and *Sum-cu-pa* and *Rtags-kyi-'jug-pa* (Peking ed. Suzuki 1955–1961 title nrs. 5834 and 5835), the well-known treatises on Tibetan grammar.

6. It should be noted that it is not common practice in the Indian indigenous grammatical traditions to employ the total number of eight for the cases; usually we find a sevenfold case-system there with the vocative case as a subtype of the first, nominative case.

7. In classical Sanskrit the case-ending -*e* as specific for the vocative case occurs only in vocative singular of nominal stems (of all genders) ending in *i* and feminine stems ending in *ā*, cf. W.D. Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar*, 1889, par. 335.h, 339, 363.f, 364. This is by no means the only—or even the most frequent—form the vocative case assumes. Moreover, the case-ending -*e* also occurs as vocative (here identical to nominative and accusative) dual of neuter stems ending in *a* and feminine stems ending in *ā*, cf. Whitney, op. cit., par. 328.b, 330, 363.g, 364.

The ending -*e* as specific for the vocative case does not seem to have been particularly more frequent in Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit, cf. F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, New Haven 1953, vol. 1, par. 8.27–28, 9.14–15, 10.33–41, 12.15–16, 13.9; note the occasional use of nominative singular endings (-*o*, -*u*, perhaps -*e*) for vocative of stems in *a* (cf. Edgerton, op. cit., par. 8.28) and the use of -*e* as vocative singular for stems in *r* (cf. Edgerton, op. cit., par. 13.9).

8. This, in fact, is not the correct classical form. The vocative singular of the nominal stem *vṛkṣa*, "tree," is identical to the stem-form: *vṛkṣa*; however, cf. Edgerton, op. cit., par. 8.28.

9. It certainly does not hold for classical Sanskrit that the case-ending -*e* is the "general" or most frequent ending for the vocative case; cf. note 7.

10. Cf. e.g. *Mahāvyutpatti*, ed. R. Sakaki, Kyoto 1916–1925, entry nrs. 110–114.

11. Note that a respectful expression (scil. *thugs-dgongs*) is employed here.

12. Translation of *sor-bzhag* is based on the relevant entry in *dge-bshes* Chos-kyi-grags-pa's Tibetan dictionary entitled *Brda-dag-ming-tshig-gsal-ba* (n.p., n.d.; Chinese translation Peking 1975), p. 744: "*gzhan-du-ma-sgyur-bar-rang-ngo-bor-gso-bar-bzhag-pa*," "to establish (*bzhag-pa*) (something), preserving (*gso-bar*) the thing itself (*rang*) in identical (form) (*ngo-bor*) without altering (*ma-sgyur-bar*) (it) into another (form) (*gzhan-du*)."

13. Apparently the author regards *maṇi-padma* as a compound. Unfortunately he does not specify the relation between *maṇi* and *padma*, the two members of the compound; cf. "short evaluation" and note 19.

14. Cf., e.g., P. Pelliot, *T'oung Pao* XXXI (1934), p. 174, M. Lalou, "A Tun-huang Prelude to the *Karaṇḍavyūha*," *Indian Historical Quarterly* vol. 14 (1938), p. 200. However, cf. also C. Regamey, "Motifs vichnouites et śivaites dans le Kāraṇḍavyūha", in: *Études tibétaines, dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou,*

Paris 1971, p. 419–420, particularly note 13.

   15. Cf. the important article by Y. Imaeda, "Note préliminaire sur la formule *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ* dans les manuscrits tibétains de Touen-houang," in: M. Soymié (ed.), *Contributions aux études sur Touen-houang*, Genève-Paris 1979, pp. 71–76.

   The three Dun Huang manuscripts of this text studied by Imaeda give variant readings of the *mantra*, scil.: "*oṃ-ma-ni-pad-me-hūm-myi-tra-swa-hā*," "*oṃ-ma-ma-ni-pad-me/ hum-mye/ /*" and (correct Imaeda's reading of Pelliot tib. 37 to:) "*ōṃm-ma-ma-ṇ[?] i-pad-me/ hum-myi/* ."

   Imaeda suggests an interpretation of the syllables *myi-tra* in the first version as equivalent to *mitra*, either the Sanskrit word meaning "friend" (cf. also *maitrī*, "compassion") or perhaps even connected with the Iranian deity Mithra.

   A different interpretation seems possible: I propose that the syllable *myi* in the first version and the final syllables *mye* and *myi* of the latter two versions, could be interpreted as a notation of the stressed (and in ritual recitation often prolonged) nasalization which is the pronunciation of the *anusvāra* (viz. *ṃ*) in the preceding syllable **hūṃ*. This could also account for the curious repetition of syllable *ma* in the latter two versions; in either version the first syllable *ma* could then be regarded as notation of this same pronunciation of *anusvāra* in the preceding syllable *oṃ*.

   This interpretation would not allow the reading of *myi-tra* as *mitra*; the syllable *tra* would have to be read separately or combined with the following element *swa-hā* (**trā-svāhā?*).

   16. In this text the *mantra* itself is not quoted, but it is referred to with the terms **ṣaḍ-anakṣara* (cf. *ṣaḍ-akṣarī*) and *yi-ge-myi-btub-pa-drug*; cf. R.A. Miller, "Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *āli, kāli* as Grammatical terms in Tibet." *HJAS* 26 (1966), pp. 141–143 (= repr. in: *Studies in the Grammatical Tradition in Tibet*, Amsterdam 1976, pp. 49–51); edition: J. Hackin, *Formulaire sanscrit-tibétain du Xe siècle*, Paris 1924, cf. p. 23, 38, 81.

   Note the different interpretation of this passage in A. Róna-Tas, *Wiener Vorlesungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte Tibets*, Wien 1985 (= Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 13), p. 350 (viz. **s[v]ara anakṣara*).

   17. It should be noted that the interpretation of *(maṇi-) padme* as ending in a vocative case is already found in the well-known account of the 18th-century Jesuit Ippolito Desideri's missionary activities in Tibet between 1716 and 1721, commonly called *Relazione*; cf. R.A. Miller, "Notes on the Relazione of Ippolito Desideri, S.J.," *Monumenta Serica* XXII:2 (1963), pp. 467–469.

   18. The neuter gender is not common for *padma*, the final member of the compound, but not unthinkable either.

   19. The *bahuvrīhi* type of compound allows a variety of grammatical relations between the members internally; possible translations for a *bdhuvrīhi maṇi-padmā* would be inter alia: "(woman) who has the lotus of the jewel" or "(woman) who has the lotus with the jewel" or "(woman) who has the lotus in the jewel" or "(woman) who has the lotus that is a jewel." Could it be that this feminine compound noun *maṇi-padmā* refers to *Prajñā-pāramitā*, the well-known Mahāyāna concept of "transcendental wisdom," which is grammatically feminine and, when personified, female?