

Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies

Volume 20 • Number 1 • Summer 1997

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On a Recent Translation of the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*

Wisdom of Buddha. The Samdhinirmocana Sūtra. Translated by John Powers. Tibetan Translation Series 16. Berkeley CA: Dharma Publishing, 1995. Xxii and 397 pages, 14 illustrations and line drawings.

Following the traditional explanation by Mahāyānist schools, Buddhist sūtras are classified according to three cycles (*dharmacakrapravartana*). The first consists in the texts of the so-called “Small Vehicle” (*hīnayāna*), which supposedly taught the non-existence of a real personal identity, reducing it to real elements (*dharma*). The second was the voluminous collection of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, which were said to have taught the idea of the unreality of persons as well as that of the elements, i. e. their voidness (*śūnyatā*) and absence of any own-nature (*niḥsvabhāvatā*). The third cycle consists, *inter alia*, of reconciliations and reinterpretations of the first two, elaborating a hermeneutic whereby apparent conflicts and unacceptable philosophical consequences of certain statements in the first and second cycles could be taken as being of only provisional meaning (*neyārtha*) and not in actual contradiction with the definitive meaning (*nītārtha*) of the Buddha’s teaching, because these statements were supposedly only designed to lead disciples, therapeutically and with non-literal language, to an ever closer approximation of the definitive thought of the Buddha. The *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* (henceforth “SNS”) is traditionally classified as belonging to this “third cycle” of Buddhist teachings. It has as one of its main goals the interpretation of very provocative statements in the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* (henceforth “PP”), namely the passages where these sūtras clearly and repeatedly say that all dharmas, indeed everything there might be, is without own-nature (*niḥsvabhāva*), unproduced / unborn (*anutpanna*), undestroyed (*aniruddha*), primordially calm (*ādiśānta*) and essentially in nirvāṇa (*prakṛtiniṣṛta*).

SNS effects its hermeneutical *tour de force* by introducing a famous schema of three natures (*svabhāva*), so that when PP speaks of all dharmas being *niḥsvabhāva*, *anutpanna* etc., these words are to be taken as having provisional meaning, needing interpretation. The SNS, which not surprisingly claims to give the definitive meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, reinter-

prets the controversial passages about all dharmas as being amphibolic: each of the three natures is *niḥsvabhāva*, *anutpanna*, etc. in its own very specific way. Only the “imagined nature” (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) of dharmas, which is as thoroughly unreal as a “flower in the sky,” can be literally said to imply a lack of own-nature, etc. Dharmas thus have a type of *niḥsvabhāvatā* in the sense that they have, in themselves, no real characters (*lakṣaṇa*) such as material properties, like shape or color, or metaphysical properties like oneness, manyness, etc.; such “characters” are exclusively mind-created and language-dependent. The other two natures of dharmas, viz. conditionality or “other-dependency” (*paratantrasvabhāva*) and the final, or “perfect” (*pariniṣpanna*) mode of being, however, imply types of *niḥsvabhāvatā* which are quite different from the *lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā* implied by the imaginary. The conditional nature of dharmas, for example, implies a lack of own-nature only in the sense of its type of production (*utpattiniḥsvabhāvata*), i. e., the dharma arises completely in dependence on other things and has no nature which it itself would cause and which would thus be self-produced. The “perfect” nature implies a lack of own-nature concerning the ultimate or absolute, a *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvata*, although as we shall see below the Sanskrit term is somewhat difficult to translate adequately, given that it is explained in two quite different ways in the SNS.

The SNS is one of the main sources for this “three-nature” doctrine as well as for the fundamental ideas of Vijñānavāda Buddhism, all of which it skilfully uses to defuse the apparent nihilism of the PP, laying the groundwork for an idealism where “mind-alone” exists and where the yogic transformation and reorientation of mind becomes the main goal of Buddhist practice. It is a main source for the doctrine of the *ālayavijñāna* (“storehouse-consciousness”) (chap. 5) and the meditational method of *śamatha* (“quietude”) and *vipaśyanā* (“insight”) (chap. 8); it develops themes such as the seven types of *tathatā* (“thusness”) and the eighteen sorts of *śūnyatā* (“voidness”), the bodies of the Buddha, the stages (*bhūmi*) of bodhisattva practice, and even has a section on logic in its tenth chapter developing four types of *yukti*. This sūtra thus is of key importance for the Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda schools in India, in Tibet and in China: it has several different Chinese translations (some only partial) and one Tibetan translation (found in various editions of the Tibetan canon); it has four canonical commentaries; it was extensively used by indigenous Tibetan writers like Tsong kha pa; it also figures prominently in the so-called “other-voidness” (*gzhan stong*) schools which synthesized Yogācāra and Madhyamaka thought. It is without any exaggeration one of the most important texts of the Mahāyāna.

The SNS was translated into French in 1935 by Etienne Lamotte, who

preceded his translation with a detailed discussion of the history of the text, its importance, the different translations, the contents of the chapters, the date of the sūtra's composition and the philosophical ideas which are developed there.¹ He then gave us an edition of the Tibetan text and a philologically sound, annotated translation of the SNS based on the Tibetan and Chinese (the Sanskrit was and still is lost). One can contest points—sometimes the translation is perhaps too free, sometimes it is unclear whether Lamotte based himself on the Chinese or the Tibetan. There can no doubt be major revisions to Lamotte, but the fact is that Lamotte's work on SNS has been and remains a classic in the field of Buddhist Studies, and justifiably so. Equally one should mention the German translation of extracts from Chapters VI and VII of SNS to be found in Erich Frauwallner's 1956 work *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus*.² Frauwallner states that he translated from the Tibetan. And although the translation has almost no notes, it remains valid and reliable. It and Lamotte's translation should be read, and read very closely, by anyone who wishes to translate the SNS. The SNS deserves that much.³

Recently, John Powers published an English translation of the SNS. Powers's audience is in part a lay North American public—as the editor of the Tibetan Translations Series, Tarthang Tulku, stated, the goal was to present the sūtra in readable English to convey the deep and subtle meanings of the text. Powers, thus perhaps understandably, did not develop the detailed philological and historical aspects discussed in Lamotte, but instead concentrated on translation. He based himself upon the edition found in the sDe dge Tibetan canon, relied heavily on the commentaries in Tibetan by indigenous writers, as well as on those by Indian writers such as Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, and mentioned a debt to oral explanations from contemporary Tibetan scholars. The unfortunate fact is that, despite the plethora of sources which Powers claims to have used,⁴ the translation is often quite unreliable, having errors which seriously obscure the basic sense of the

1. *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*. L'Explication des mystères. Texte tibétain édité et traduit par Etienne Lamotte. Paris et Louvain, 1935.

2. Recently reprinted for the fourth time by Akademie Verlag (Berlin: 1994).

3. Cf. Lamotte's conclusion on the importance of the SNS (op cit. p. 24): "En somme, dans son état actuel, le *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* est un résumé complet du Grand Véhicule bouddhique aux premiers siècles de notre ère."

4. His bibliography mentions Lamotte's translation (but not that of Frauwallner) and the various Chinese texts. In his introduction (p. xx) we find: "In my studies, I have consulted ten different Tibetan editions, as well as three Chinese editions, and have noted their variant readings."

sūtra's words, let alone its deep and subtle meanings. In the case of difficult passages, Powers would certainly have profited if he had used Lamotte and Frauwallner. But there is little evidence in this work that he used them at all. Moreover, the Chinese of Xuanzang would also have helped, as we shall try to show, to clarify certain points.

Let us examine a few representative passages from different chapters in some detail, citing the Tibetan, and, where profitable, Lamotte, Frauwallner or the Chinese of Xuanzang.

In Chapter I (Powers p. 12f.) we have an interesting argument which comes back later and which is muddled both times by Powers. Let us look at the details. On Powers's p. 12 we have *brjod pa ni dngos po med pa can yang ma yin te dngos po de yang gang zhe na . . .* Now, Lamotte had it right when he translated (p. 170): "Mais, dira-t-on, une expression ne va pas sans un objet désigné. Quel est donc ici l'objet?" The point is that this whole passage, as Lamotte clearly shows, is an objection which can be summarized as: "But words must have objects, so what is *the* object here?" Powers, however, translated the Tibetan as: "An expression is also not without thingness. What then is a thing?" Granted "thingness" for *dngos po* is gauche, but this is perhaps not the real problem. The real problem is that it is not clear that Powers saw the passage as an objection at all. His rendering of . . . *zhe na* turns the passage into an oddly general question "What is *a* thing?", and the point is lost. Partly responsible for this transformation of the objection into a general question is Powers's rendering of the first occurrence of *yang* as "also"—*yang* should be contrastive here (i. e. "but"), as is clear from Xuanzang's Chinese (T. no. 676. f. 689a5) 然非無事而有所說 ("But there is no expression lacking a thing") which uses 然. In short, we should translate: "But an expression does not lack a thing [which is its object]. What then is that thing?"

Now, let us look at the SNS passage which answers the objection. Here is the Tibetan: *'phags pa rnams kyi 'phags pa'i shes pa dang / 'phags pa'i mthong bas brjod du med par mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas pa gang yin pa ste / brjod du med pa'i chos nyid de nyid mngon par rdzogs par rtogs par bya ba'i phyin 'dus byas zhes ming du btags so /*. Powers's translation on p. 13: "It is that to which the Āryas completely and perfectly awaken without explanation, through their exalted wisdom and exalted vision. Because they have completely and perfectly realized that very reality which is inexpressible, they designate the name 'compounded.'"

What could it mean to say, as Powers would have it, that the Āryas use the word "compounded" *because* they understand the inexpressible reality?

Compare Lamotte (p. 170): “C’est la [réalité] ineffable sur laquelle les Saints, par le saint savoir et la sainte vue, sont parfaitement éclairés; mais pour éclairer les autres sur l’ineffable Nature des choses, ils ont forgé l’appellation «conditionné.»” Lamotte clearly is close to Xuanzang’s Chinese here: . . . 爲欲令他現等覺故假立名想謂之有爲 (f. 689a7-8) “Since they wished to make others understand. . .”. Powers, in effect, should have read a dative for the Tibetan . . . *de nyid mngon par rdzogs par rtogs par bya ba’i phyir*, i. e., “in order that [others] might perfectly understand reality,” rather than an ablative “because they [i. e. the Āryas] understand. . .”. Surely it makes more sense to say that the Āryas understand ineffable reality, *but* that they speak of compounded entities to illuminate *others* who have not yet understood this reality. A mistranslation is all the worse here, because the whole argument repeats itself, *mutatis mutandis*, later on Powers’s pp. 15.1-6: we find the exact same passage, but this time concerning the *asamskṛta* (“un-compounded”).

We now go on to look at a passage in Chapter Five, “The Questions of Viśālamati.” Powers mistranslates an important passage on the *ālayavijñāna* (“storehouse consciousness”) which gives an etymological explanation of the term *ālayavijñāna*, turning on the meaning *ā li, ālīyate* “settle down upon,” “melt,” etc., and hence *ālaya* “abode,” “receptacle,” etc.; various such explanations also figure in Chapter I of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* of Asaṅga as well as in Won ch’uk’s commentary on SNS. Here is the Tibetan and Powers’s translation of the etymological explanation which interests us (Powers 70.7-9): *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa zhes kyang bya ste / ’di ltar de lus ’di la grub pa dang bde ba gcig pa’i don gyis kun tu sbyor ba dang rab tu sbyor bar byed pa’i phyir ro /*; (Powers p. 71) “It is called the ‘basis-consciousness’ because there is the same establishment and abiding within those bodies. Thus they are wholly connected and thoroughly connected.”

Besides having echoes in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, this passage has been discussed by Lambert Schmithausen in his *Ālayavijñāna: On the Origin and Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy* (Tokyo, 1987), who on his p. 22 translates as follows: “[The mind-containing-all-seeds] is also called ‘*ālayavijñāna*,’ because it sticks to and dissolves into or hides in the body, in the sense of sharing its destiny (i. e. becoming closely united with it).”⁵ Powers regrettably missed all this.

5. Cf. Schmithausen’s reconstruction op cit. n. 181 *ālayavijñānam ity apy ucyate, yaduta tasyāsmiṃ kāya ālayanapralayanatām upādāya ekayogakṣemārth-ena*. Xuanzang T. no. 676, f. 692b. 16-17: 亦名阿賴耶識何以故由此識於身攝受

If we look at Powers's understanding of the syntax of the passage, it should be clear that breaking the sentence at *grub pa dang bde ba gcig pa'i don gyis*, not translating the *don gyis* = *arthena* and then starting a new sentence with "Thus . . ." is quite unacceptable: making two arguments here, where there is only one etymological explanation, deforms the passage badly. In fact, SNS passage asserts that the consciousness in question can be called *ālayavijñāna* because it clings to and hides in the body in the sense of sharing the body's same *yogakṣema* ("fate," "welfare," "destiny"). Schmithausen devotes a considerable part of his monograph to the question of just what was this early or even initial conception of the *ālayavijñāna* "sticking to" and "being concealed in" the body.

Why did Powers translate *grub pa dang bde ba gcig pa* = *ekayogakṣema* as "same establishment and abiding"? Right away, the Chinese of Xuanzang, which has *tong anwei* 同安危 here (literally: "same security and danger"), would alert us that Powers's translation might well be odd, and would suggest something more like "same destiny," the *ālayavijñāna* having the same kinds of favorable and unfavorable things happening to it as the body. The term *ekayogakṣema* figures in such texts as Dharmakīrti's *Pramānavārttikasvavṛtti* ad k. 43 in the sense of an identity between *x* and *y* due to an identity of destiny / vicissitudes.⁶ Thus Mookerjee and Nagasaki glossed: "*ekayogakṣema*. This is the commonplace cliché in philosophical parlance. Things supposed to be identical must have identical *yoga* and *kṣema*. *Yoga* means accrual of a new advantage and *kṣema* means the continuity of the status quo. That which has the same incidents, gain or loss with another, is identical with the other."⁷

Interestingly enough, some indigenous Tibetan texts have interpreted *ekayogakṣema* as a type of strict temporal identity, placing the key idea in the context of the typically Abhidharmic schema of the three characters

藏隱同安危義故; Bodhiruci T. no. 675, f. 669a 24-25: 亦名阿梨耶識何以故以彼身中住著故一體相應故) (Paramārtha did not translate ch. 5.) Lamotte p. 185: "Elle est aussi appelée 'Connaissance-réceptacle,' parce qu'elle se joint et s'unit à ce corps dans une commune sécurité et dans un risque commun." Lamotte largely follows Xuanzang, but with an insufficient rendering of 於身攝受藏隱 as "se joint et s'unit à ce corps." Schmithausen in his n. 183 points out that 攝受藏隱 has the sense of "appropriates and lies hidden"; cf. Bodhiruci's 住著 "dwells in and sticks to."

6. R. Gnoli, ed., *The Pramānavārttikam of Dharmakīrti*, Serie Orientale Roma 23 (Rome: 1960) 26.7-8: *na hi yo yadekayogakṣemo na bhavati sa tatsvabhāvo yuktaḥ* l. My thanks to T. Much for reminding me of this passage.

7. S. Mookerjee and H. Nagasaki, *The Pramānavārttikam of Dharmakīrti* (Patna: 1964) 99, n. 1.

(*lakṣaṇa*) of composite things, viz. production (*utpāda*), abiding / duration (*sthiti*) and perishing (*vyaya*). This temporal explanation of *ekayogaṣema* as involving simultaneity in all three characteristics is what we find in Tibetan *bsDus grwa* texts and, hence, in much of the dGe lugs pa philosophical literature, which was so permeated by *bsDus grwa* / *bsDus pa*-style concepts. Indeed, the terms *grub bde gcig* and *grub bde rdzas gcig* and *grub bde dbyer med kyi rdzas gcig* are very frequently used with their basic *bsDus grwa*-style meanings in texts by rGyal tshab rje (e. g. *rNam 'grel thar lam gsal byed*) and mKhas grub rje (*sDe bdun yid kyi mun sel*, etc.), dGe 'dun grub pa (e. g. *Tshad ma rigs rgyan*), etc. etc. Moreover, this *bsDus grwa* interpretation of the term has even been reproduced in modern dictionaries, such as the Tibetan-Tibetan-Chinese dictionary by Zhang Yisun et al. (*Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo; Zanghan da cidian*).⁸ In short, Powers, in his

8. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* vol. 1, p. 404 *grub bde rdzas gcig: gzhi gcig gi steng gi ldog pa rigs mi mtshungs pa rnams mnyam skye mnyam gnas kyi skye gnas 'jig gsum dus mnyam zhing rdzas gcig pa yin pa*. As for *grub bde gcig* and *grub bde (dbyer med) rdzas gcig*, they are not quite the same notions, as we see by the discussion in Yongs 'dzin *bsDus grwa chung* f. 16b. (See T. Kelsang and S. Onoda, *Textbooks of Se-ra Monastery* [Kyoto: 1985] 8-9): *kha gcig na re / grub bde gcig yin na / grub bde rdzas gcig yin pas khyab zer na / tsandan gyi kha dog dang / tsandan gyi dri gnyis chos can . . .* The point is that the color of sandalwood and the smell of sandalwood are *grub bde gcig* because they are established simultaneously, abide simultaneously, and perish simultaneously (*khyod gnyis grub pa dus mnyam / gnas pa dus mnyam / 'jig pa dus mnyam pa'i phyir /*). However, they are not *grub bde rdzas gcig*, simply because they are not “of one substance” (*rdzas gcig = ekadavya*): they have different “substances” (*dravya*) and are perceived as being separate things by direct perceptions. Note that the Tibetan logical manuals speak of *grub pa dus mnyam* (“simultaneously established”) or *skye ba dus mnyam* (“simultaneously arising”) more or less indifferently. Cf. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* s.v. *grub bde dbyer med kyi rdzas gcig: chos gnyis po mnyam skye mnyam gnas kyi skye gnas 'jig gsum dus mnyam zhing . . .*

Finally it should be remarked that the terms *grub pa dang bde ba gcig pa* and *ekayogaṣema* (or something just like them, such as *abhinnayogaṣema*) figure in some Indian *pramāṇa* texts without implying strict temporal identity but rather just “same gain / utility.” *Dharmottarapradīpa* (18,20-23 ed. Malvania) cites the Sanskrit of a passage from Dharmottara's *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā: yadā tu (. . .) prathamenaiva ca pratyakṣānumānakṣaṇenārthakriyāsamārtho vastusantānaḥ pravṛttiviśayīkartuṃ niścayāt śakyate, tadottareṣāṃ tatsantānabhāvinām abhinnayogaṣematayā prāmāṇyam apāsyata iti* “Only the first moment of a perception or inference can, because of *niścaya* (“ascertainment”), make the continuum of the entity (*vastusantāna*), which is causally efficacious (*arthakriyāsamārtha*), an object of practical application. So, we reject the validity

translation, followed that indigenous Tibetan interpretation where *grub bde gcig* means *grub pa* (or *skye ba*) *dus mnyam gnas pa dus mnyam 'jig pa dus mnyam* “established / arising simultaneously, abiding simultaneously and perishing simultaneously.” This interpretation of *grub bde gcig = ekayogakṣema* became so widespread as to become almost good Tibetan common sense. But it is, curiously enough, an un-Indian understanding, as far I can see.⁹

Let us move on to the key chapter on the three nature theory and the application of this theory to the controversial statements of the *Prajñāpārami- (prāmānya)* of the subsequent [moments] which occur in the continuum of this [first moment] without there being any difference in gain / utility / profit (*abhinnayogakṣematayā*) (The Skt. text is given on p. 35 of E. Steinkellner and H. Krasser, *Dharmottaras Exkurs zur Definition gültiger Erkenntnis im Pramānavi- niścaya* [Vienna: 1989]; see their translation p. 79; see also H. Krasser’s *Dharmottaras kurze Untersuchung der Gültigkeit einer Erkenntnis, Laghuprāmānya- parikṣā* [Vienna: 1991] 46, n. 69.) Steinkellner and Krasser translate the term *yogakṣema* in this context as “der Nutzen.” This is possible for *yogakṣema* and makes good sense in the philosophical argument which Dharmottara is developing, which is *grosso modo* the problem of *grhītagrahaṇa* (“an understanding of something already understood”) not being a *pramāṇa*. Such a *grhītagrahaṇa* is not valid (*pramāṇa*) because it brings nothing new: there is nothing different which it “gains,” from what is “gained” by the first moment of the cognition. For our purposes, what is noteworthy is that it would seem that two things can be *ekayogakṣema / abhinnayogakṣema* without being rigorously simultaneous, for a *pramāṇa* and a subsequent cognition are certainly not simultaneous.

9. Let us speculate a little bit on what happened to this term, which seems to have come from Sanskrit and then taken a different meaning amongst *bsDus pa*-inspired writers. It is clear that *grub bde* equals *yogakṣema* and that the Tibetans took it as a conjunctive compound (*grub pa dang bde ba*). If we take the individual members of the *dvandva* compound, it could be understood as something along the lines of *yoga* = “advantage”; “acquisition” and *kṣema* = “continuity of the status quo”; “abiding at ease.” Tibetans however seem to have taken *grub pa* as being like its more usual equivalent *siddha* “established,” which is not far from the idea of *skye ba* (“production”; “arise”), but is certainly different from *yoga* in the sense of “advantage” / “acquisition.” They then took *bde ba* as meaning simply “abiding” (*sthiti = gnas pa*), which is however not a natural Tibetan understanding at all, given that *bde ba* means “pleasure,” “happiness” to 99.9% of Tibetans. Finally, it should be stressed that Tibetans, in speaking of *grub pa / skye ba, gnas pa* and *'jig pa* are not providing just a paraphrase: this is what they took the parts of the compound to mean. The strained character of this interpretation is brought out by the fact that although the compound *grub bde (yogakṣema)* has only two members, they were obliged to somehow add *'jig pa (vyaya)* to come up with the Abhidharmic trio of characters.

tāsūtras about *niḥsvabhāvatā*, etc., in other words, the seventh chapter, entitled “Questions of Paramārthasamudgata” (henceforth “P”). We will first focus on a passage which gives similes for *lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā*, *utpattiniḥsvabhāvatā* and then goes on to describe the two sorts of *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, the lack of own-nature which pertains to the “perfect nature” (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*) of dharmas. The passage is difficult in Tibetan, especially because of a rather odd double use of *gcig* (“one”), employing *gcig . . . gcig* in the sense of “one aspect / part . . . another aspect / part.” In fact, it is really only with the aid of the Chinese, which uses 一分 . . . 一分 (“one part . . . one part”), that this use of *gcig . . . gcig* becomes clear, as Lamotte had pointed out in notes 7 and 8 (pp. 194-5) to his translation. The Tibetan otherwise remains obscure. Frauwallner (p. 292) also understood the text in this way translating by “ein Teil . . . ein Teil.” Powers, however, translated the first *gcig* in an impossible way and the second by taking a kind of face value reading. Neither of the two work out right. Although I think that the last sentence of the passage is slightly different in Tibetan and in Chinese, we can use Lamotte’s and Frauwallner’s leads and Xuanzang to do a significantly better translation than what Powers did.

Tibetan (Powers p. 100.12-102.2; Lamotte p. 69):

*don dam yang dag 'phags de la 'di lta ste dper na / nam mkha'i me tog ji lta ba de lta bur ni mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa nyid lta bar bya'o // don dam yang dag 'phags de la 'di lta ste dper na / sgyu ma byas pa ji lta ba de lta bur ni skye ba ngo bo nyid med pa nyid kyang blta bar bya / don dam pa ngo bo nyid med pa nyid de las gcig kyang blta bar bya'o // don dam yang dag 'phags de la 'di lta ste dper na / nam mkha'i gzugs kyi ngo bo nyid med pa nyid tsam gyis rab tu phye ba dang / thams cad du song ba ji lta ba de lta bur ni don dam pa ngo bo nyid med pa nyid las chos bdag med pas rab tu phye ba dang thams cad du song ba gcig blta bar bya ste /.*¹⁰

Powers’s translation (pp. 101-103):

P, for example, you should view lack of own-being in terms of character as being like a sky-flower. For example, P, you should also view the lack of own-being in terms of production as being like a magical apparition. [New paragraph in Powers:] The ultimate lack of own-being should be viewed as *being something other than those [first two characters]*. For example, P, just

10. Xuanzang’s Chinese T. no. 676, f.694b1-6: 善男子譬如空華相無自性性當知亦爾譬如幻像生無自性性當知亦爾一分勝無自性性當知亦爾譬如虛空惟是衆色無性顯遍一切處一分勝無自性性當知亦爾法無我性之所顯故遍一切故 . . .

as [space] is distinguished by being just the lack of own-being of forms in space and as pervading everywhere, in the same way the ultimate lack of own-being is distinguished by being the selflessness of phenomena and should be viewed as all pervasive and *unitary*. (The italics are mine.)

Lamotte (pp. 194-195):

C'est à une fleur de l'air qu'il faut comparer l'Irréalité de caractère; à une magie, l'Irréalité de naissance; de même aussi l'Irréalité absolue *sous un de ses aspects*. C'est à l'espace manifesté seulement par l'absence de matière et omniprésent, qu'il faut comparer l'Irréalité absolue qui, *sous un autre aspect*, est manifestée par la Non-substantialité des choses et omniprésente. (Our italics.)

The first part of Lamotte's translation describing *lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā* and *utpattiniḥsvabhāvatā* involves some ellipsis, but it is accurate; Powers's is too, more or less. Afterwards, Powers badly mistranslates the passage concerning *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, because he did not understand *don dam ngo bo nyid med pa nyid de las gcig kyang blta bar bya* (i. e. 一分勝義無事自性當知亦爾), translating it wrongly as "The ultimate lack of own-being should be viewed as being something other than those [first two characters]." The real problem was that he translated *de las gcig* by "being something other than those [first two characters]." This is impossible: no-one who understands Tibetan could understand *de las gcig* in this way, nor for that matter could anyone understand the Chinese construction 一分 . . . in that way either. The Tibetan literally says: "one also from that *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā* has to be regarded . . ." And that means "one also from [among the two types of] *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā* has to be regarded as being like [a magical apparition]," or less literally, "*paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, in one of its aspects, is also to be likened [to a magical apparition]." For the moment, suffice it to say that it is when the compound *paramārthaniḥsvabhāva(tā)* is to be understood as referring to *paratantra* that *paramārthaniḥsvabhāva* is comparable to a magical apparition. The two interpretations of the compound will be explained in more detail below.

Now, let us take up the second aspect of *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā* described in this passage. Again we have the construction *don dam ngo bo nyid med pa nyid las . . . gcig lta bar bya* (i. e. 一分勝義無事自性當知亦爾): "*paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, in one of its aspects, should be regarded . . ." the point being that here the sūtra is talking about the other aspect of the two-aspected *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, the sort which pertains to *pariṇiṣpanna*. Powers translated this second occurrence of *gcig* (= 一分) by the word "unitary," which destroys any parallel with the earlier *gcig*. His

translation here is plainly no more than a guess.

Let us try to give what is at least a syntactically more accurate translation of the whole passage: "P, one should liken *lakṣaṇaniḥsvabhāvatā* to flowers in the sky; P, one should liken *utpattiniḥsvabhāvatā* to magical apparitions; *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, in one of its aspects, is also to be likened [to a magical apparition]; P, *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, in its other aspect, is to be likened to space,¹¹ which stands out by its mere lack of material nature and which is present everywhere, because it [i. e., *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*] stands out as being the selflessness of dharmas (*dharmānairātmya*) and because it [too] is present everywhere."¹²

Our translation of the last sentence using two "because-clauses" is obviously inspired by the Chinese 無我性之所顯故遍一切故. Frauwallner also adopts this solution. Remaining closer to the Tibetan (. . .) *chos bdag med pas rab tu phye ba dang thams cad du song ba gcig blta bar bya*, however, would yield something like: "P, *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, in its other aspect, which stands out by being the selflessness of dharmas and which is present everywhere, is to be likened to space, which stands out by its mere lack of material nature and which is present everywhere."

Later on in Chapter VII (Powers p. 131ff.), the SNS again takes up the theme of two sorts of *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, once again using the expressions *de las gcig* two times (Powers Tib. pp. 130.16 and 132.5) to designate the respective sorts. The section was translated competently by Lamotte on pp. 203-204, who had in his note 7 on p. 194 already referred us to this passage as a development of the earlier theme of the two ways of interpreting *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*. Powers, on the other hand, missed this fact. (He translated the two *de las gcig* here in a completely different way from what we saw in the earlier passage discussed above. This time it becomes "additionally.") Ironically, not only had Lamotte spoken of these two sorts, but Louis de la Vallée Poussin, on p. 556 of *La Siddhi de Hiuan-Tsang* (Paris, 1929), had translated a passage from SNS which tells us about one type of *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*, namely the type which

11. The Tibetan has the genitive *nam mkha'i*, which is somewhat odd. The Chinese just has 譬如虚空 followed by the appositions 惟是衆色無性顯遍一切處 "which stands out (= Tib. *rab tu phye ba*, Skt. *prabhāvita*) by the mere lack of material nature and which is present everywhere (= Tib. *thams cad du song ba*)."

12. Cf. Frauwallner *op. cit.* p. 292: "Und wie der Raum, der aus der blossen Wesenlosigkeit (= dem Nichtvorhandsein) der Materie hervorgeht und sich überallhin erstreckt, so ist ein Teil der Wesenlosigkeit der höchsten Wahrheit nach anzusehen, insofern sie aus der Ichlosigkeit der Gegebenheiten hervorgeht und sich überallhin erstreckt."

pertains to conditioned phenomena (*paratantra*)—his translation is substantially in agreement with that of Lamotte.¹³ The passage is also translated in the first paragraph on p. 101 of Powers. But, alas, Powers does not seem to have adequately consulted his predecessors' work.

Briefly, the point, in fact, seems to be that there is one sort of *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā* which pertains to *paratantra* and another which pertains to *pariniṣpanna*, depending upon how we understand the compound *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*. To take the first sort, the SNS tells us that it is the Ultimate (*paramārtha*) which is the "pure object" (*nam par dag pa'i dmigs pa*. Cf. De la Vallée Poussin: *vyavadānā lambana* "l'objet de connaissance qui comporte purification"; Lamotte "l'Objet pur"), but that conditioned things (*paratantra*) are not themselves this pure object and thus lack this pure nature. Hence conditioned things are *paramārthaniḥsvabhāva* in that they lack the own-nature which is ultimate: on this interpretation we thus have a "lack of ultimate own-nature." The other interpretation of the compound is to say that *pariniṣpanna* is the lack of conceptual and linguistically imagined (*parikalpita*) natures and that *pariniṣpanna* is ultimate: it is thus an "ultimate lack of own-nature." Powers's presentation of this double aspected *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā* does not come clear. In fact, there is no evidence in the translation or in the notes that Powers was aware that the SNS spoke of two sorts of *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā* at all.

It is time to conclude. I have up to now, as is obvious, focused exclusively on problems in Powers's translation. We should stress that much of the text of the SNS is more or less correctly rendered into readable English by Powers and that the Anglophone reader will thus have access to the SNS (although he should exercise caution and healthy skepticism.) On the whole, however, Powers's work is not a step forward from that of Lamotte. It lacks sufficient accuracy, rigour and philological analysis. Simply translating commentarial passages, as Powers often does in his notes, does not replace penetrating analysis of philological or philosophical problems. In sum, someone should do a better job on this important text.

13. *Siddhi* vol. II, p. 556: "Ce qui, dans les Dharmas, est le *vyavadānā lambana* (l'objet de connaissance qui comporte purification), je déclare que c'est *paramārtha*. Or le *paratantralakṣaṇa* n'est pas cet *ālambana*; donc il est *paramārthaniḥsvabhāvatā*." Cf. Frauwallner *op. cit.* p. 291.