ON THE ASSIMILATION
OF INDIC GRAMMATICAL LITERATURE
INTO INDIGENOUS TIBETAN SCHOLARSHIP[1]

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In 1994 Pieter Cornelis Verhagen published the first volume of his *History of Sanskrit Grammatical Literature in Tibet*, subtitled "The Transmission of the Canonical literature." There Verhagen focused upon the Tibetan translations of Indian texts on the formal grammatical description *(vyākaraṇa)* of the Sanskrit language. He presented forty-seven of such texts on grammar, provided summaries of terminology and translational practices, and enabled specialists and non-specialists alike to form an overview of the extensive Indic grammatical literature preserved in the Tibetan canon, i.e., the *bsTan 'gyur*. In 2001 Verhagen published the second (and probably, as he tells us, the last) volume of his *History,* subtitled this time, "Assimilation into Indigenous Scholarship." It is this volume that will be the focus of the present review article. As the subtitle suggests, the volume takes up the assimilation and integration of Indic *Vyākaraṇa* into the indigenous Tibetan intellectual milieu and thus deals with, *inter alia,* the thorny question of the origins of the grammatical notions used by Tibetan authors in their description of their own language. Let us try to provide a working idea of the rich contents of this volume before taking up a number of points for discussion.

The first chapter, entitled "Indigenous and Extra-canonical Tibetan Literature on Sanskrit Grammar," is organized into sub-chapters treating of the "pre-classical period", the "classical period" and the "post-classical period", by which Verhagen means respectively (as explained in the first volume of the *History*) the period of the Tibetan royal empire and first dissemination of Buddhism from the mid-seventh until the mid-ninth century C.E., the period

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[1]   The present article is a review of Verhagen (2001). In citing passages from this and other works, I have changed the transcriptions to accord with the Wylie system that I have adopted. For the bibliographical details of the first volume, see the entry for Verhagen (1994). An abridged version of this paper constituted a lecture that I gave in the Linguistics Department of the University of Tübingen. My thanks go to Bettina Zeisler for some helpful and stimulating conversations.

from the eleventh through fourteenth century and the period from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. Verhagen discusses and summarizes sixty-one texts of various sorts. These range from *bsTan 'gyur* texts on the "eight great [linguistic] topics" *(gnas brgyad chen po)* and Sanskrit nominal inflexion by the ninth century Tibetan, lCe Khyi 'brug, to the famous *Smra sgo* quite possibly composed in Tibetan by Smṛtijñānakīrti, as well as the treatises by Sa skya pa authors, the revised extra-canonical translations of *Candravyākaraṇa, Sarasvatī-vyākaraṇa, Kātantra* and other Indic texts. Included in this chapter are also summaries of numerous indigenous extra-canonical Tibetan works on such topics as *Smra sgo*, the *Kātantra* and on the fine details of the exegesis of Sanskrit *mantra*s and *dhāraṇī*s.

The second chapter, entitled "Indic Models of Description in Tibetan Indigenous Grammar," discusses Indic antecedent terms, concepts and models in indigenous Tibetan grammatical literature. This indigenous literature is known as *Sum rtags,* as it stems from the two fundamental texts, *Sum cu pa* and *rTags kyi 'jug pa,* attributed traditionally to the seventh century author, Thon mi Saṁbhoṭa. Verhagen first presents a number of clearly attested Tibetan translational equivalents of Sanskrit *Vyākaraṇa* terms, and then proceeds to the list of *Sum rtags* terms that seem to be without discernible (or at least convincingly discernible) Indic antecedents, such as *sngon 'jug, rjes 'jug* ("prefixes and suffixes")*,* as well the notorious terms *bdag* ("self") and *gzhan* ("other") that have on several occasions led western writers to unhelpfully "discover" *ātmanepada* ("middle voice") and *parasmaipada* ("active voice") in Tibetan.[2] After a section comparing the organisation and style of Pāṇinian *Vyākaraṇa* and that of the two Tibetan treatises, Verhagen, building on the work of N. Simonsson, gives a lucid analysis of two competing Indic positions on *ming (nāman)* and *tshig (pada)* that were taken over into Tibetan works and that led to some tension and hence complex attempts at synthesis. It turns out that the Indian grammatical literature's interpretation of *nāman* as being a simple, or free, lexical word form without case suffixes and *pada* as being a free lexical

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2   First and foremost is Berthold Laufer (1898), p. 543 who saw *bdag* as the Tibetan
     equivalent of the Sanskrit *ātmanepada* ("middle voice") and *gzhan* as the Tibetan equivalent
     of the Sanskrit *parasmaipada* ("active voice"). Against this, see Tillemans (1988), p. 494,
     Tillemans and Herforth (1989), p. 11-13, Verhagen (1991) p. 209 and Verhagen (2001), p.
     297-300. Interestingly enough, there are passages in Si tu where the Tibetan grammarian
     seems to recognize a clear connection between *bdag/gzhan* and active and passive voices.
     But *bdag* is taken as the active and *gzhan* is taken as the passive! It's the exact opposite of
     Laufer's naiive attempt at equivalences. For the passage from Si tu, see Verhagen (2001) p.
     298-300.

word form *with* such a suffix is what we find when indigenous Tibetan grammarians closely follow *Candravyākaraṇa* or *Kātantra*. On the other hand, in *Sum rtags* as well as in *Smra sgo*-inspired literature, *ming* and *tshig* are frequently understood along the Buddhist model of *Abhidharmakośa* II.47, which gives the triple division of *vyañjanakāya* ("collection of speech sounds/phonemes"), *nāmakāya* ("collection of words") and *padakāya* ("collection of phrases"). On this latter version, *ming/nāman* is a word or term (like "lotus") that results from phonemes being conjoined, while *tshig/pada* is a phrase (like "blue lotus") composed of two or more *ming/nāman.* Verhagen is no doubt right in stressing the importance of the second model in Tibetan literature. In fact, the Abhidharmic model, in one form or another, is pretty much exclusively what we find in Tibetan philosophical works, be it Abhidharma commentaries, the doxographical literature *(grub mtha')*, or manuals on epistemology *(tshad ma)* and classification of valid cognition *(blo rig(s)),* and even Madhyamaka. It is also what dominates in the *rTags kyi 'jug pa,* notably verse 32, a fact which, as Verhagen points out in some detail, posed serious difficulties to the commentator Si tu paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699-1774), who had a net preference for the *Vyākaraṇa*-inspired model.[3]

The chapter continues by comparing the Indic phonological terminology with that found in Tibetan *Sum rtags;* there are numerous clear and unsurprising equivalences, a big debt to *Kātantra* and perhaps some influences from Tantra (as we will discuss below). In the remaining section of the second chapter, Verhagen takes up "Syntax and Case Grammar," looking at the use of the six *kāraka*s in Sanskrit *Vyākaraṇa* and Tibetan *Sum rtags,* and then taking up in detail the *bdag* (self) / *gzhan* (other) dichotomy that figures so prominently in *Sum rtags,* notably in the *rTags kyi 'jug pa* and its commentaries. In this section he discusses in considerable detail the work of Tom Tillemans and Derek Herforth and that of Roy A. Miller, and offers some of his own views and suggestions on these issues, arguing, *inter alia*, that a key term like *dngos po* is not being used in the usual Indian grammatical sense of *bhāva,* but that nevertheless a probable ancestry from specific Indic grammatical terms and concepts is still traceable . We will take this up in detail below.

After the concluding observations in which Verhagen summarizes his results and stresses that *Sum rtags* has a "Buddhist stance" (largely because of elements derived from Abhidharma and Tantra), we are provided with no less than eleven excellent appendices, with *inter alia* the following contents: the catalogue on Sanskrit grammatical texts of Akhu rin po che; some other title lists

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3   Verhagen (2001) p. 240-251.

on *sgra rig pa* ("science of sounds"), *Kātantra*, etc.; *capita selecta* on Sanskrit case grammar from Indic and Tibetan sources; the text and translation of Chos grub's short work on the eight Sanskrit cases; *addenda* to Verhagen's 1994 publication, i.e., the first volume of the *History*.

This much will have to suffice as a summary of the contents of the second volume of Verhagen's *History of Sanskrit Grammatical Literature in Tibet*. We may now be in a better position to take up two points in some detail, although the work contains so much original research that it is extremely difficult to do justice to its breadth and importance. While one may be doubtful, or even be in quite strong opposition, about some matters—as I am—Verhagen's two volumes are extraordinarily well-informed and, in my view, constitute the most significant contribution that has been made on the subject of Indic *Vyākaraṇa* texts in Tibet and the assimilation of this literature into indigenous Tibetan scholarship. This book and the earlier volume are genuinely impressive achievements, showing a high level of competence in Sanskrit and Tibetan. They will remain reference works for all future research in this area.

1.   Tantric influences upon the *Sum cu pa* and *rTags kyi 'jug pa*

Verhagen, although relatively skeptical of many of Roy Miller's claims of Tantric influences upon *Sum rtags*, does nevertheless think that there are *some* such influences and that they are important. Granted, as Miller had maintained, we do find the use of the pair of terms *āli* and *kāli* (for vowels and consonants respectively) that seem to have been adopted by the *Sum cu pa* from Indian Tantric traditions.[4] On the other hand, it is much less convincing to me when Verhagen opines that the *rTags kyi 'jug pa*'s use of "gender terminology" like *pho* ("masculine") and *mo* ("feminine") to classify consonants and vowels is also a significant Tantric influence.[5] Curiously enough, if I have Verhagen right, it is pretty much the fact of there *being* gender opposition in phonological description that suggests to him Tantric origins, *because the masculine-feminine polarity is so important and pervasive in Tantra*. The nerve of the argument seems to be expressed in the following passage:

> The background of this 'gender' terminology in the *klog thabs* literature can of course be found in the Tantristic schemata of polarity symbolism in terms of sexual opposition. This

4   This borrowing from Tantra had been pointed out in Miller (1966).
5   Verhagen (2001), p. 262ff.

symbolism is a pervasive feature in Tantrism in general. For Buddhist Tantrism the following scheme of correspondences can be set up:

Female = *prajñā* / *śūnyatā* / moon / *padma* / *lalanā* / *bhaga* / left / static-passive, etc.

Male = *upāya* / *karuṇā* / sun / *vajra* / *rasanā* / *liṅga* / right / dynamic-active, etc.[6]

To be fair, things are a bit more complicated than I depict them to be because this argument is stated not directly in connection with the use of *pho-mo* and *ma ning* (neuter) terminology in *Sum rtags,* but rather in connection with that terminology as it is found in Tibetan *Klog thabs* literature (pronunciation manuals of *mantras*). However, Verhagen himself makes the link with *Sum rtags,* saying on the next page:

> The twofold 'gender' categorization of the Tibetan phonemes in TKJ [i.e., *rTags kyi 'jug pa*] 1, mentioned above, is an exact reflection of this Buddhist Tantristic model. It seems fair to conclude that the Tibetan grammarians have derived this 'gender' labelling in general, as well as the correlations vowel = feminine and consonant = masculine, from this Tantristic idiom.[7]

This inference from the gender polarity of *pho* and *mo* to the Tantric origins of this *Sum rtags* scheme is then supposedly reinforced by another important thread in Verhagen's argument, namely, that certain relatively late commentaries, notably that of Si tu paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, glossed *pho* and *mo* in terms of the schema of the masculine being identified with "means" *(upāya)* and the feminine with "insight"/"wisdom" *(prajñā).* Here is how Verhagen put it:

> In fact, Si tu Paṇ chen makes this connection with the polarity symbolism of the Tantras explicit in his commentary anent the masculine / feminine dichotomy of phonemes, sub TKJ [i.e., *rTags kyi 'jug pa*] 1, where an additional characterization is added: the feminine phonemes, the vowels, he designates as *shes rab kyi rang bzhin* 'having the nature of *prajñā*' and the masculine consonants as *thabs kyi rang bzhin* 'having the nature of *upāya.*'[8]

All this looks doubtful to me. First of all, some of the gender-related terminology in *Sum rtags,* like *mo gsham* ("barren feminine") and *shin tu mo* ("extremely feminine"), is not clearly Tantric, inspite of its seeming connection with "femininity" or "sexuality."[9] Secondly, Si tu's use of the *prajñā-upāya*

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6   Ibid. p. 265.
7   Ibid. p. 266.
8   Ibid. p. 266.
9   Here Verhagen's speculations about Tantra's "distinction of various types within the female sex, primarily in connection with the sexual practices associated with the higher classes of Tantra" (p. 267) can hardly be considered convincing.

duality here may well be little more than the usual scholastic penchant for synthesis, where a commentator uses concepts from other significant, but potentially quite alien, contexts. It's difficult to deduce much from this commentarial stratagem to what lay behind the *pho-mo* "gender terminology" for the author(s) of the *rTags kyi 'jug pa*. To take a parallel, elsewhere in the *mKhas pa'i mgul rgyan*, Si tu also makes a few remarks showing that he wants to use the *apoha* theory of meaning to explain some points of grammar. But from the mere fact of Si tu's occasionally talking about "particulars" *(rang mtshan = svalakṣaṇa)* and "conceptual exclusions constituting universals" *(spyi ldog, ldog = vyāvṛtti)* it would be absurd to conclude anything about supposed *apohavāda* in the *rTags kyi 'jug pa*.[10]

But these are perhaps comparatively minor objections. What is much more seriously telling against Verhagen's point of view is that there are undoubtedly many features and doctrines which are important, even vital, to Tantric Buddhism but are not themselves specifically, or essentially, Tantric at all. Masculine-feminine imagery connected with *prajñā, upāya, karuṇā, śūnyatā,* etc., while obviously important to Tantra, is also very important to much of the Mahāyāna, so that it is very hard to say that such imagery is somehow a mark of Tantrism. Indeed, José Cabezón, in an article entitled "Mother Wisdom, Father Love: Gender Based Imagery in Mahayana Buddhist Thought," describes the widespread Mahāyāna portrayal of wisdom as female, or as the mother, and means as the father. Here is how Cabezón describes the thesis of his article:

> In what follows we shall examine the use of gender categories (female and male) as symbols for the two most important concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, wisdom *(prajñā)*-gnosis *(jñāna)* on the one hand, and method *(upāya)*-compassion *(karuṇā)* on the other.[11]

Any of the passages from the Mahāyāna texts cited in Cabezón will, I think, quite possibly suffice to show the inconclusiveness of male-female imagery being evidence of Tantrism. Probably one of the clearest is the passage from the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* that speaks of the perfection of wisdom as being the mother of bodhisattvas and skill in means as being their father. In a similar vein, Cabezón cites the opening verse of Maitreya's *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, a scholastic text of Mahāyāna Buddhism which begins by paying homage to the perfection of

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10   *mKhas pa'i mgul rgyan* p. 206 (Dharamsala edition) : *shin tu zhib mor dpyod pa'i tshe dngos po rnams kyi rang mtshan so so nas rang gi rang la bya ba 'gal yang spyi ldog rags pa nas tha snyad tsam la 'jig rten gyi grags pa dang mthun par rang gis rang la bya ba 'byung ba'ang dgos so //.*

11   Cabezón (1992), p. 183.

wisdom *(prajñāpāramitā)* as the "mother" of spiritual practitioners.[12] Finally it is worth noting that Tibetans frequently divide the Mahāyāna teachings into two, the wisdom lineage stemming from Nāgārjuna and the lineage of skill in means stemming from Asaṅga.

The mere fact that gender opposition appears in *Klog thabs* texts devoted to Tantric subjects, like *mantras,* is therefore not probative at all for a conclusion about the origins of *pho-mo* in *Sum rtags,* nor even probably about the Tantristic origins of the *pho-mo* scheme used in *Klog thabs.* Oddly enough, in an earlier publication Verhagen tells us that

> So far I have not found other examples of the 'gender' terminology [i.e., classifying phonemes in terms of masculine, feminine and neuter] in the Vajrayāna literature.[13]

It looks like there are no real reasons for ascribing specifically Tantric origins to this 'gendered' classification of phonemes in *Sum rtags* other than the general and well-known importance of sexual imagery in Tantra—but this, as I have argued, is not conclusive at all. As for *prajñā-upāya* duality in Si tu being seen as evidence of Tantrism, *the prajñā-upāya scheme is not exclusively, nor even predominantly, Tantric at all, even though it is very important to Tantra.* The *prajñā-upāya* duality with its gender associations is as much a feature of the Mahāyāna Buddhism of *sūtras* and the scholastic as of Tantric texts. I can't see how the fact that Si tu spoke of *shes rab kyi rang bzhin* ("having the nature of *prajñā*") and *thabs kyi rang bzhin* ("having the nature of *upāya*") would come close to proving what Verhagen wishes it to prove.

Apart from the terms *āli-kāli* and the inconclusive *pho-mo* opposition, one is hard pressed to see anything else that counts as significant evidence of Tantric influence on *Sum rtags.* Verhagen himself seems reluctant to attach much importance to correspondences of phonemes with the elements and is skeptical about Miller's claims that the description of graphs is traceable to Tantra or to Tantra's predilection for the iconographical.[14] And as Verhagen himself seems

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12   See ibid. n. 14 and p. 185-186.

13   Verhagen (1993), p. 334.

14   Cf. Verhagen (2001), p. 273-274: "Beyond this terminological correspondence, I would hesitate to speculate on a relation between these *Vajrayāna* phoneme-categories in terms of 'elements' and the symbolical function (or rather interpretation) of the phonemes in the Sanskrit alphabet that we find in the *Śaiva* Tantrism." As for the descriptions of the graphs' forms being evidence of Tantrism, Verhagen's remarks on p. 275-276 are particularly relevant. I quote them in full: "Parenthetically I would like to add that the description of morphonemes in terms of their graphical form, as occurring in Tibetan indigenous linguistics, need not per se be traced to an origin in the Tantristic jargon, or to a Tantristic

to recognize,[15] the other phenomena that have been advanced by Roy Miller as evidence of Tantrism—such as the use of the schema *sgra* and *don* ("word and meaning/object") and the use of fourfold classifications, as well as the supposed sexual connotations in *'jug pa, sbyor ba* and *ming gzhi*—are hardly worth much serious consideration. Fourfold classifications are ubiquitous in Buddhism and Indian philosophy; as I had argued elsewhere, the use of *sgra don* is ubiquitous in Tibetan scholastic literature.[16] As for the supposed sexual connotations in *'jug pa*, etc., Verhagen says all he needs to when he diplomatically states:

> The observations [by Miller] on the 'rich tantristic play-of-metaphor inherent in' the technical terms *'jug pa* (also meaning 'to lie with a woman') and *sbyor-ba* (also 'to copulate') in Miller (1993: 56 n. 39) and the juxtaposition of *ming-gzhi* with *g'yang-gzhi* 'an orgie in Tantric mysticism [...]' in Miller (1993: 58 n. 41) are somewhat too trivial to be convincing.[17]

In fact, the general impression that I have is that looking for influences of Tantrism in *Sum rtags* has been, and continues to be, a dead end. Indeed, would-be significant "Tantristic influence upon the *Sum rtags*" looks suspiciously as if it might well be one of those pieces of hyperbole that have been so repeated in academic circles that people end up thinking that they are true and of real consequence.[18] The actual slimness of the evidence is worth stressing here

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predilection for the visual, the iconographical. We find such descriptions, in terms of the visual form of the graph, in *vyākaraṇa* as well, most notably in Durgasiṁha's *Kātantra-vṛtti* when it describes *visarga, jihvāmūlīya* and *upadhmānīya* (two allophones of *visarga*), and *anusvāra*, as 'having the form of a pair of girl's breasts,' 'having the form of a *vajra*,' 'having the form of an elephant's frontal globes,' and 'being a mere drop.' The Tibetan commentators on *Kātantra* either take over this terminology, or—particularly in the later periods—adapt it to the form of the graph used in the Tibetan transcription."

15   See, e.g., ibid. n. 609: "The erroneous standpoint that the dichotomy between *sgra* 'words, phrases etc.' and *don* 'propositional content, purpose of a speech-act' is an essentially and typically Tantristic notion [...]" See also ibid. p. 334: "I am not wholly convinced that this predilection for fourfold grouping must necessarily be a specifically Tantristic notion. Note, for instance, the so-called *catuṣkoṭi*, the matrix of four complementary logical positions, which is Buddhist in origin—elsewhere proposed by Miller as a possible exemplar for certain aspects of *Sum rtags*, cf. infra—but which has no connection with Tantrism whatsoever."

16   See Tillemans (1994), p. 129.

17   Verhagen (2001), n. 609. The references are to Roy A. Miller, *Prolegomena to the First Two Tibetan Grammatical Treatises*. Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 30, Vienna, 1993.

18   The idea figures repeatedly in Miller's writings and also in those of Verhagen so that I suspect that there is a type of build-up and reinforcement by repetition. See e.g., Verhagen

because later in the conclusions to his *History,* Verhagen too will, inspite of a guarded skepticism about most of Miller's claims, invoke the presence of Tantric influences as one of his major reasons for saying that Tibetan indigenous grammar has a "genuinely Buddhist stance."[19] At most I would grant the presence of Buddhist elements in the use of the Abhidharmic interpretation of *ming* and *tshig* and in one or two curious terminological affinities with Tantra. That said, it's hard to see that the *view* of language underlying or developed by *Sum rtags* has anything more than an incidental and minor connection with Buddhism, let alone Buddhist Tantra. There is no notable role of any major Buddhist *doctrine* here, be it the semantic theory of *apoha,* momentariness, voidness or dependent arising, nor of course is there any *significant* Buddhist Tantric doctrine or theme, like the two stages of *anuttarayogatantra,* deity propitiation, *mantra*s, Tantric moral discipline, vows, guru devotion, etc.

2. *bdag, gzhan* and *dngos po*

Verhagen has a long, interesting and informed discussion about the possible Indic background for *bdag* ("self"), *gzhan* ("other") and *dngos po* ("entity", "object", "quality", "domain", "thing", etc.) in *Sum rtags* commentaries' accounts of the use of Tibetan prefixes *(sngon 'jug)*. He could well be on the right track when he discerns in *bdag* and *gzhan* the implicit Indic principle of agents and active verbs being labeled similarly as *kartr* ("agent") and objects and passive verbs being labeled similarly as *karman* ("direct object"). Here is how Verhagen puts it:

> I assume that specifically the functioning of the *kāraka*-system in the labeling of predicate, agent and direct object in active and passive clauses may have served as the model, or perhaps rather the inspiration, for the *bdag / gzhan* description. Compare the identical syntactic-semantic labeling of agent and active VP (viz. *kartr*), and of the direct object and passive VP (viz. *karman*) in the *kāraka* system of Sanskrit grammar, with the analogous processes of categorizing agent (and instrument) and present (and imperative) tense VP identically as *bdag,* and direct object and future (and perfect?) tense VP as *gzhan* in Tibetan grammar.[20]

(1996), p. 427 where the Tantric origin of the *pho-mo* terminology is now referred to as having recently "come to light."

19 Cf. Verhagen (2001), p. 332: "However, the author(s) of *Sum rtags* seem to have taken a genuinely Buddhist stance in their linguistic description."

20 Ibid. p. 298.

Verhagen will then argue in his discussion on p. 301ff., that it is in the light of this similarity of labeling that the use of the term *dngos po* in the definitions and explanations of *bdag* and *gzhan* is also to be situated. The point of saying that both the *byed pa / byed las* and the *dngos po* are termed *bdag* is, to take Verhagen's formulation, that both the "performed action" and "the nominal element [occupying the syntactic position] of the agent" are to be classified under the same label.[21] Verhagen thus chooses to translate *dngos po* as the "nominal element" occupying a certain syntactic position; he rejects Tillemans and Herforth's rendition of *dngos po* by "entity"; he also rejects Miller's attempt to see *dngos po* as being the *bhāva,* or "verbal action per se," discussed in the Indic grammatical traditions.[22]

I think that translating *dngos po* as the "nominal element" is justifiable with regard to Si tu and A kya Yongs 'dzin, although as we shall show, it looks ill-adapted to some other grammarians' version of *dngos po,* where a whole panoply of translations (including "thing", "entity, "domain", etc.) end up partially justifiable depending upon which Tibetan author one follows. Against equivalences with *bhāva,* Verhagen argues that *dngos po* in *Sum rtags* does not have the sense of "meaning of a (Sanskrit) root or of the derived nominals"; like Tillemans (1994), he also rejects these attempts to see any connection here with so-called action nouns like *pāka* ("cooking"), etc. derived from roots like *PAC,* etc.; he too rejects Miller's attempt to identity the *bdag* and *gzhan* of *Sum rtags* with (respectively) the rather *recherché* notions of *ābhyantara-* and *bāhya-bhāva* ("internal and external action per se") that crop up occasionally in the *Mahā-bhāṣya* of Patañjali but hardly anywhere else.[23]

Verhagen, however, seems to want to go a bit further, at least if I have read him correctly. After noting several different uses of *dngos po* in *Sum rtags,* he ends up putting forth the hypothesis that the Indic grammatical source for the term in the *rTags kyi 'jug pa* commentaries is quite possibly *dravya,* i.e., the

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21   See ibid. p. 307-308. As for the translation of *byed pa* as "performed action", cf. p. 308: "In particular the translations 'performed action' and 'undergone action' for *byed pa* and *bya ba* should be regarded as tentative. I take *byed pa* as the VP-expressed action which is primarily correlated with the agent and which emphasizes the active aspect of the action, whereas *bya ba* is the VP-expressed action primarily connected with the direct object and representing the passive aspect. In many respects my interpretation of these terms approaches that of Tillemans and Herforth who passim translate *byed pa'i las* as 'act-qua-doing' and *bya ba'i las* as 'act-qua-thing-done,' or 'A[gent]-prominent action' and 'P[a-tient]-prominent action' respectively."

22   Ibid. p. 309-313.

23   Ibid. p. 312-313. See Miller (1992) and my reply in Tillemans (1994).

substance or concrete object often contrasted with *kriyā*, "action". He argues that the equivalence, *dngos po = dravya(tā)*, is attested on occasion and that this identification would also be compatible with the use of the word *dngos po* in the *Sum cu pa* 20, where we find a treatment of several objects being described by the pronoun *de* ("that").[24]

Let me first attempt to take stock of what seems to me to emerge *validly* from his discussions.

(1) Verhagen has, I think, laid to rest a number of spurious side-tracks concerning *dngos po*, notably the equivalences with *bhāva* "verbal action per se", as well as the attempts at equivalences between *dngos po bdag, dngos po gzhan* and *ābhyantara-* and *bāhya-bhāva* respectively. I think there is no question about this.

(2) He has found a potentially important parallel in Indic grammar's similar labeling of agents / objects and active / passive verb phrases. I would note in support of Verhagen that his explanation would also begin to explain Si tu's insistence that actions and *dngos po* are classified together as *bdag* or *gzhan* because they are of "similar force" *(shed mtshungs pa, stobs mtshungs pa)*.[25] It is interesting that the key term "similar force" in this context is never, as far as I can see, significantly explained by the Tibetans in anything other than paraphrases and synonyms, so that one suspects that *shed mtshungs pa* was also somewhat mysterious for them. It would be understandable that the Indic context of similar labeling was not sufficiently clear to most commentators and that they therefore simply could not give much of a gloss on *shed mtshungs pa*. In any case, their rather minimalist interpretation of "similarity" is certainly not incompatible with that of Verhagen, and it would even seem that Verhagen's version fleshes out what they could have (or should have) said.

What remains is to look at the relation between the Indic *dravya* and *dngos po* more critically. In fact, it is not clear to me if Verhagen actually wishes to assert that *dngos po* in *bdag / gzhan* contexts is the equivalent of *dravya* (just as, e.g.,

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24 Ibid. n. 315.

25 See, e.g., Si tu Paṇ chen's *mKhas pa'i mgul rgyan*, translated in Tillemans and Herforth (1989) p. 62, §4: *de'i zhar las bdag gzhan dang 'brel ba'i bya byed kyi tshig phan tshun shes mtshungs pa rnams kyang bsdus pa yin no /.* "In the process [of providing for the agent and the focus of the action], he also included [in the categories self / other] those words expressing [acts-qua-] thing done and [acts-qua-] doing (*bya byed kyi tshig*), which are related to self and other and which have the same force [as self and other]."

las is for *karman*). Some passages in Verhagen's chapter on *dngos po* do suggest this view, such as when he states,

> It seems quite plausible, if we insist on applying an Indic gloss to the term *dngos po* in this context, to choose *dravya* in the sense of '[element expressing] substance', i.e. a nominal (compare the term "substantive") or an NP, here related to a specific syntactic function.[26]

Other characterizations, such as *dravya* simply being a "possible model, or perhaps more aptly inspiration, for this *dngos po* concept"[27] seem to advance a much looser connection, and I am not sure that I actually understand what this connection is. In the crucial places, the argument is probably *too* cautious.

The unclarity needs to be better resolved if this type of argument about terminological ancestry is to have much weight. Let us for our purposes distinguish between a modest and a stronger claim. The modest claim would be that the idea of *dravya* somehow made its way into *Sum rtags* and somehow served as a "model" or "inspiration"—this would be in keeping with Verhagen's earlier characterization of the influence of the Indic similar labeling principle on *bdag* and *gzhan* as being an "inspiration." Seeing some antecedent *inspiration* for *dngos po* in the Indic grammarians' notion of *dravya* might be an acceptable, albeit extremely vague, modest claim, if what was meant was simply that there were some interesting / significant parallel ideas and principles lying behind the *dngos po* in some or several *Sum rtags* texts and the *dravya* of *Vyākaraṇa*. Of course, it will remain beyond us to say how this "inspirational" process actually worked in history and came to influence Tibetan grammarians. But leave that aside: it is in any case quite something else to make the stronger and more precise claim, to which Verhagen seems to lean on occasion, that *dngos po* in the *Sum cu pa* 20 and in the commentaries on the *rTags kyi 'jug pa's* account of prefixes and suffixes is the Tibetan equivalent of a particular use of *dravya*. The equivalence *dngos po* = *dravya* is relatively rare and the equivalence *rdzas* = *dravya* so very common that if one wants to argue for the applicability in *Sum rtags* of this rare equivalence one has to find some strong textual evidence from some type of well-known Sanskrit grammatical or philosophical literature translated into Tibetan and having a clear influence on *Sum rtags*. Verhagen doesn't do that. He gives parallels between the concepts involved—which would perhaps partially corroborate what I'm terming the "modest claim"—but nothing much to support the stronger claim, except one entry from the *Mahāvyutpatti* (i.e., 8510) and the fact that S.C. Das and Tshe ring dbang rgyal (ed. Bacot) gave

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26   Verhagen (2001), p. 314.
27   Ibid. n. 314.

this equivalence in their dictionaries (that date from the 1930's and before).[28] This is inadequate evidence upon which to base the stronger claim.

In fact, I doubt that the vaguer "modest claim" about terminological inspiration is ever going to be convincing unless someone can adequately explain why *dngos po,* in several perfectly competent grammarians' accounts, is not *just* used for agents and objects, but is *also* used for actions, i.e., for what an Indian grammarian would term *kriyā*—in fact, as we shall see, there seems to be a rather striking lack of consensus about its use amongst Tibetan grammarians. As Verhagen himself stated, recognizing the potential problem in his own account:

> In any case, once we assume that the *dngos po* categorization can (at least occasionally) include the verbal argument as well, it is evident that the translations 'entity', as proposed by Tillemans and Herforth, or 'nominal element [associated with a specific syntactical position]', as I have suggested, for *dngos po* will not be adequate to cover each and every instance of the use of the term anymore.[29]

Verhagen will later on dismiss these problematic occurences of *dngos po* as "sporadic," or as due to imprecise usage of polysemic and "multivalent terminology,"[30] and hence of relative insignificance, sticking with his earlier argument that "in Si tu's definitions of *bdag* and *gzhan,* as well as in the other available exegesis of these concepts, the term *dngos* po is unmistakably primarily related to the syntactic functions of 'agent', 'instrument' and 'direct object', functions typically and exclusively attributed to nominal elements."[31]

Let us try to be fair to the data from Tibetan texts. There is quite a mind-boggling variety in the uses of *dngos po* in the *bdag* and *gzhan* context that is not due to the polysemy of the term, or looseness of usage, but rather is due to different grammarians having different *ideas* about what *dngos po* is in this context. The English translations could thus differ considerably depending upon which of the differing theories we adopt as being the right one. There are, for

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28   Ibid. n. 539.

29   Ibid. p. 317.

30   Ibid. p. 317: "However, such use of the term *dngos po* for both nominal and verbal arguments is sporadic. And, of course, polysemy or multifunctionality of technical terms and the unannounced switching of codes and meanings, are frequent phenomena within *Sum rtags.* In the light of this tendency of multivalent terminology, and, especially, on account of the clearly predominant use of the term *dngos po* for the nominal category, it is justified, in my opinion, to maintain the hypotheses that I have set forth here with regard to the meaning of the term *dngos po* and the assumption of an Indic model in the term *dravya.*"

31   Ibid. p. 311.

example, important writers, like the dNgul chu Dharmabhadra (1772-1851), dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje (1809-1887), and, I think, quite a few modern Tibetan grammarians[32], who *do* use *dngos po* to designate actions. dNgul chu and dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje, for example, classify *both (gnyis, gnyis po)* the agent *(byed pa po)* and the act-qua-doing *(byed las)* as *dngos po bdag* and *both* the direct object, i.e., the focus of the action *(bya ba'i yul)*, and the act-qua-thing-done *(bya las)* as *dngos po gzhan*.[33] The contemporary grammarian, sKal bzang 'gyur med, whose work has been (in part) translated by Heather Stoddard and Nicolas Tournadre, does something quite similar, adapting the usual definition of *bdag* and *gzhan* in Si tu so that instead of saying that the agents, objects and actions "[…] are called *bdag/gzhan (bdag ces bya/gzhan ces bya)"*, it says that the agents, objects and actions are "called *dngos po bdag/dngos po gzhan*".[34] Not without justification, Stoddard and Tournadre end up translating sKal bzang 'gyur med's use of *dngos po bdag gzhan* as "les domaines agentif et

32 For example, the modern grammarian, dMu dge bsam gtan, in his *Bod kyi yi ge'i spyi rnam blo gsal 'jug ngogs,* when explaining the prefixes *da, ga,* and *'a,* uses *dngos po bdag* and *dngos po gzhan* with no more specificity than just what is expressed by *bdag* and *gzhan.* See his p. 92: *sngon 'jug gi ma ning ga dang da gnyis ni / dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis dang / dus da lta ba ston pa'i ched du 'jug (/) sngon 'jug gi mo 'a yig ni / dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis las gtso cher bdag la 'jug pa dang / dus gsum las da lta ba dang ma 'ongs pa ston pa'i ched du 'jug go // sngon 'jug gi shin tu mo ma yig ni dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis dang / dus gsum ga la khyad med du mnyam par 'jug pa yin no //.*

33 See e.g., dNgul chu's *Si tu'i zhal lung* p. 51 where he explains the use of *ga* and *da* prefixed forms to show *dngos po bdag* and *dngos po gzhan*—here he clearly includes under *dngos po bdag / dngos po gzhan* numerous verbal forms, like *gcod par byed, gcod do, dgag go* etc., along with the usual nominal forms like *gcod pa po, gcad bya, gcod byed,* etc. The text is as follows: *sngon 'jug gi ma ning ga da dag ni shing gcod pa po / gcod byed / skyon dgag pa po / dgag byed lta bu byed pa po'i dngos po dang / gcod par byed / gcod do / dgag par byed / dgag go / lta bu byed pa po dang 'brel ba'i byed las gsal byed kyi sgra gnyis bdag gi dngos po dang / gdam pa / gzung ba / gcad bya / gcad par bya ba / gcad bya'i shing / dgag bya / dgag par bya bya / dgag bya'i skyon lta bu byed pa po gzhan dang dngos su 'brel ba'i bya ba'i yul gyi dngos po dang / gcad par bya / gcad do / dgag par bya / dgag go / lta bu bya ba'i yul dang 'brel ba'i bya ba gsal byed kyi sgra gnyis gzhan gyi dngos po ste /.* See also dByang can grub pa'i rdo rje *rTags 'jug dka' gnad gsal ba'i me long,* p. 81: *las gang zhig la byed pa po / gzhan dang dngos su 'brel ba yi / dbang du byas nas byed po dang / de yi byed pa gnis po ni / dngos po bdag yin bya yul dang / bya ba gnyis po dngos po gzhan /*

34 For Si tu's definition, see Tillemans and Herforth (1989), p. 62-63, §1; Verhagen (2001), p. 307. For sKal bzang 'gyur med's version, see his p. 377-378: *bdag gzhan gyi go don – bya ba gang zhig byed pa po gzhan dang dngos su 'brel ba'i dbang du byas nas / byed pa po'i dngos po de nyid dang / de'i byed pa / de dang 'brel ba'i byed las da lta ba bcas la dngos po bdag ces bya zhing / byed pa po bsgrub par bya ba'i yul gyi dngos po dang las kyi dngos po / de dang 'brel ba'i bya las ma 'ongs pa bcas la dngos po gzhan zhes bya'o //*

objectif".[35] One may quibble as to whether "domaine" is the best solution, but one thing that is clear is that sKal bzang 'gyur med, dNul chu and dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje are not just speaking of nominal elements when they use *dngos po*. As we shall see in a passage from a nineteenth century grammarian translated below, there were most likely *several* grammatical schools who in one way or another endorsed the applicability of *dngos po* to actions.

In short, the use of *dngos po* for actions does, I think, need to be taken much more seriously than saying it is simply "sporadic" or loose. I think Verhagen is right in stressing that *dngos po,* in Si tu and A kya Yongs 'dzin, is predominantly, or primarily, the agent and object. No problem about that. But he is on much shakier ground when he talks about this being so in "other available exegesis of these concepts."

In a note to my introduction to Tillemans and Herforth (1989), I had said that we focussed on Si tu and A kya Yongs 'dzin's position for the sake of simplicity—I felt we had to deliberately simplify in order to be comprehensible.[36] Thus we concentrated on these two important authors' understanding, all the while acknowledging at least some of the differences here and there in a footnote and in the glossary. Probably I should have expressed more caution and warnings than just a long footnote about the complexity of the historical positions on *dngos po. Mea culpa.* Below we'll look again at the details of the positions on *dngos po* that seem to occur in Tibetan grammatical writings. In any case, I think it will be apparent that while simplification for expository purposes is one thing, saying that the doctrine of *dngos po* is such and so and that the rest is sporadic and to be discounted is another. The problem is that Verhagen, in his argument about Indic terminological ancestry, has to satisfactorily *explain away* the several major differences amongst Tibetan authors. After all, the nerve of his evidence is just that *dngos po* in the Tibetan grammatical contexts is essentially similar to *dravya.*

I can perhaps imagine the following possible Verhagen-style attempt at such an explanation: using *dngos po* for actions may well be similar to what happens in general in *bdag* and *gzhan,* i.e., the terms apply primarily to agents and objects and then derivatively or by "similar force" *(shed mtshungs pa)* to the respective actions. In short we may well have here with *dngos po* another variant upon the similar labeling of nominal and verbal elements that Verhagen noticed in *Vyākaraṇa* and hence in *bdag* and *gzhan:* agents, objects and also (on

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35   Stoddard and Tournadre (1992), p. 262 et sq.
36   Tillemans and Herforth (1989), p. 6-7, n. 11.

occasion) actions will be termed *dngos po* because of a similar labeling of the nominal and verbal.

This would be a valiant try and it is about as far as I can, or want to, go in trying to save *dravya* as the ancestor, inspiration, model, etc., of *dngos po*. It would be *too* much of an attempt to save the theory over the refuting data. The real point I want to make, after this rather long excursus about strong and modest claims, is that the attempt to understand the *bdag, gzhan* concepts via Indic antecedent terms is by and large a failure, no matter which claim we adopt. Although the method of finding Indic antecedent terms works very well in some areas of *Sum rtags*—as Verhagen skillfully shows—it sinks into speculative quicksand when we get to *bdag* and *gzhan*. Berthold Laufer had "seen" *ātmanepada* and *parasmaipada* as the origins, Roy Miller had "seen" *ābhyantara/bāhyabhāva*, and I would tend to say that speculation about *dravya* is going down the same route: the data does not fit here either. *The most we can say is that on such and such a grammarian's interpretation, bdag and gzhan concepts and terms may start to look more recognizably similar to Indian terminological antecedents, but that as soon as we shift to another grammarian these Indic antecedents often start to look less plausible and sometimes look impossible.*

Let me support this largely pessimistic assessment with some sobering passages showing the incredible diversity of positions that one finds amongst Tibetan grammarians, not just with regard to *dngos po,* but also with regard to key terms like *bya ba'i yul,* and hence also the basics of *bdag* and *gzhan*. Because the positions are so different it becomes impossible to find one adequate translation for all these understandings of *dngos po*—be it "thing", "entity", "domain", "nominal element". I thus have no choice but to bite the bullet and leave *dngos po* in Tibetan. The passages to be analysed come from the celebrated late nineteenth century-early twentieth century scholar, dKar lebs drung yig Pad ma rdo rje, a.k.a. O rgyan rdo rje, who has a long and very valuable explanation of the history of Tibetan accounts of *bdag* and *gzhan* and *dngos po* in his *rTags 'jug dka' gnad snying po rabs gsal gyi 'grel pa mtha' dpyod dvangs shel me long* (henceforth *Dvangs shel me long*). I should mention straight off that this text is the one that had been partially, and badly, translated by Jacques Durr in 1950 and attributed by him to a certain Don 'grub (a kind of Tibetan "Joe" or "Fred"), who supposedly, according to Durr's mis-understanding of the colophon, lived in the 18th century.[37] In fairness, however, it should be said that Durr's effort was genuinely pioneering in a period where

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37   See Tillemans and Herforth (1989), p. 10, n. 18.

very little was available, and that the Tibetan text which he used shows considerable differences from the one we now have at our disposal. The text we are using is that edited by Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshog and Ma grong Mi 'gyur rdo rje, and published in a collection of this grammarian's works grouped under the general title *dKar lebs sum rtags dka' 'grel*. Let us first begin with a passage where dKar lebs drung yig Pad ma rdo rje (henceforth just "Pad ma rdo rje") summarizes four positions, or perhaps even four "schools of thought" *(lugs)*, on *dngos po*.

ci yin zhe na 'grel pa la lar byed pa po'i dngos po de nyid dang / bya ba'i yul gyi dngos po bya ba dang bcas pa zhes dang / dper brjod skabs / byed pa po bdag gi dngos po'i sgra ni / sgrub pa po / sgrub byed ces sogs / byed po dang bya ba gnyis dngos por bzhed pa'i lugs gcig (/) yang la lar / dngos po bdag dang / dngos po gzhan dang / dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis ka dang / bya ba'i yul gyi dngos po zhes sogs bzhir bzhed pa'i lugs gcig / yang la lar byed po dang byed pa gnyis ka dngos po bdag dang / bya yul dang bya ba gnyis ka dngos po gzhan zhes byed po dang / byed pa / bya yul / bya gzhi dang / shugs kyis byed las dang / bya las bcas dngos po drug tu bzhed pa'i lugs gcig / yang la lar byed pa po mi'i dngos po de nyid dang / yul gyi dngos po shing de zhes sogs dngos po bzhir bzhed la de'ang mi'i dngos po de nyid ces pa mi kho rang la zer ram / rdzas dngos la zer ci yin nges pa med pa'i lugs gcig bcas snang ba [...] Why [do people misunderstand *dngos po*]? (1) One position is that in one commentary [i.e., Si tu], it is said "the *dngos po* of [or: which is] the agent itself and the *dngos po* of [or: which is] the focus of the action *(bya ba'i yul)* along with the undergone action *(bya ba)*" and when [Si tu] gives examples he says "the expressions for the agent, i.e., for the *bdag gi dngos po,* are: 'establisher' and 'means of establishing'," and so on and so forth. [According to this position] the agent *(byed po)* and the undergone action *(bya ba)* are both held to be *dngos po*. (2) Another position is that in another [commentary] it is said "the *dngos po* which is self *(dngos po bdag),* the *dngos po* which is other *(dngos po gzhan),* the *dngos po* which is both self and other *(dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis ka)* and the *dngos po* of [or: which is] the focus of the action *(bya ba'i yul gyi dngos po)*" and so on. [According to this position] it [i.e., *dngos po*] is held to be fourfold. (3) Another position is that in yet another [commentary] it is said, "the agent *(byed po),* the instrument *(byed pa)* are both the *dngos po* which is self *(dngos po bdag),* while the focus of the action *(bya ba'i yul)* and the undergone action *(bya ba)* are both the *dngos po* which is other *(dngos po gzhan)*". [According to this position], the agent, instrument, the focus of the action, the basis of the action *(bya gzhi)* and by implication the act-qua-doing *(byed las)* and act-qua-thing-done *(bya las)* are held to constitute six *dngos po*. (4) And another position is that in yet another [commentary] it is said "the very *dngos po* of [or: which is] the person who is the agent *(byed pa po mi'i dngos po de nyid)* and the *dngos po* of [or: which is] the focus, i.e., the wood" and so forth. [According to this position] *dngos po* is held to be fourfold. But when it says "the very *dngos po* of [or: which is] the person" there is no certainty whether

[the text] is talking about the person himself *(mi kho rang)* or the thing *(rdzas dngos)* [belonging to him]. There seem to be all these [four positions].[38]

The passage cited in position (1) is recognizably from the section on *bdag* and *gzhan* in Si tu Paṇ chen's *mKhas pa'i mgul rgyan*, so that we can say that, at least following Pad ma rdo rje, this supposedly presents Si tu's view on the matter.[39] As for (2) we can be confident that this is the position of Ri bo mDangs mkhan rin po che, who was, according to Pad ma rdo rje, one of the "great intermediate period scholars" *(bar skabs kyi mkhas pa chen po)*, in the same period as Si tu, dNgul chu, dNgul chu's disciple dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje, and mKhas dbang lhag bsam.[40] I unfortunately have no exact dates or precise titles for the text(s) of this author, but at least we can see that earlier in the *Dvangs shel me long,* Pad ma rdo rje cites part of this same verse from a text of mDangs mkhan rin po che.[41] As for the other two positions, I cannot ascertain who held them; their attribution will have to remain open. Ironically, one of the terms that Pad ma rdo rje uses in (4) is *rdzas dngos.* That said, it is obvious that the term is not being used in the technical *Vyākaraṇa* sense of *dravya,* but rather to formulate a simple dichotomy between people *(mi)* and inanimate things *(rdzas dngos).* Note that Pad ma rdo rje himself, in his own account of woodcutting and *dngos po* (that we will translate below) clearly holds that the *dngos po* is indeed just the inanimate thing, i.e., the axe or knife.

It is worth mentioning that elsewhere in his *Dvangs shel me long* Pad ma rdo rje distinguishes three schools of thought on *dngos po* and classifies the positions of numerous writers, from dBus pa blo gsal (first half of 14th C.) and Śākya mchog ldan (1428-1507) to Si tu and dNgul chu, in this threefold schema. Again the panoply of positions is quite extraordinary.[42] For our purposes, what immediately emerges from this passage and the one translated above is the utter

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38   *Dvangs shel me long*, p. 81. Note that, in the passage, the interpretation of the genitive case linking *dngos po* to *byed pa po, bya ba'i yul,* etc., is unclear, so that either a possessive or an appositive rendering is possible.

39   See the text and translation in Tillemans and Herforth (1989), p. 62-63, §1.

40   See *Dvang shel me long* p. 60: *bar skabs kyi mkhas pa chen po kun mkhyen Si tu / rje dNgul chu ba yab sras / mDangs can mkhan rin po che / mKhas dbang lhag bsam pa bcas [...].*

41   Interestingly enough, Pad ma rdo rje states that Si tu, dNgul chu and lHag bsam held pretty much the same position that agents and instruments were *dngos po bdag* and the focus *(yul)* and the action *(bya ba)* were *dngos po gzhan. Dvangs shel me long* p. 62: *Si dNgul lHag bsam byed po dang byed pa la dngos po bdag dang / bya yul dang bya ba la dngos po gzhan du bzhed kyang / mDangs mkhan rin po ches tshigs bcad du / dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis ka dang bya ba'i yul dang rnam pa bzhi / zhes bzhi ru'ang bzhed do //.*

42   The relevant passage is translated in Tillemans and Herforth (1989), p. 9-10.

lack of consensus in Tibetan grammarians' use and explanation of *dngos po.* That said, it is at least quite clear that several major writers are said to classify actions as *dngos po.* I think the consequences of taking Pad ma rdo rje's account seriously would thus be twofold: (1) The term *dngos po* would, as I said earlier, be impossible to translate in a way which would meaningfully capture all the major Tibetan positions; (2) The potential problem which Verhagen sees with his own account of *dngos po* and *dravya* (viz., the fact that *dngos po* is sometimes used for verbal elements and not just nominal elements) would remain and would be accentuated.

Finally, let us look at Pad ma rdo rje's own take on the infamous wood-cutting example that is invariably at the heart of these discussions. It should be apparent that not only is *dngos po* taken in a peculiar way, but so is *bya ba'i yul.*

bcad 'di la bltos nas bdag gzhan dus gsum du dbye dgos te / dper na shing gcod mkhan / shing gcod pa po / shing gcod po rnams don gcig ste byed pa po dang / gcod byed ces pa gri'am sta re sogs byed pa po'i dngos po de yin / shing gcod par byed ces pa byed po bdag la yod pa'i las sta re shing la rdeg stangs kyi 'du byed de yin / gcod par byed ces pa byed po'i dngos po sta re ma gsal ba'i byed las gsal byed rnams la bdag ces bya zhing / shing gcad bya'i yul / gcad rgyu'i sa cha / shing gcad sa rnams don gcig ste lcang ra'am nags tshal lta bu / gcad bya'i shing / gcad bya / gcad rgyu zhes pa rnams don gcig ste bya ba'i dngos po shing sdong lta bu dang / shing gcad par bya[43] *zhes pa bya ba gzhi la yod pa'i las yin ste sta re shing la zug shul nas shing shog brul ba'i nyag ltong gi rnam 'gyur de'o //.* Looking at "to cut," we should distinguish it according to self *(bdag),* other *(gzhan)* and the three times. For example, the terms [for "woodcutter"] *shing gcod mkhan, shing gcod pa po* and *shing gcod po* all mean the same, i.e., the agent *(byed pa po).* Moreover, the *gcod byed* ("means of cutting"), viz., a knife or an axe, etc., is the *byed pa po'i dngos po* ("concrete entity belonging to the agent"). *Shing gcod par byed* ("he/it cuts the wood") is the act belonging to the agent, i.e., to *bdag,* namely, it is the conditioning factor consisting in the manner the axe strikes the wood. We term *bdag* the expressions for the act-qua-doing *(byed las)* that do not express the agent's *dngos po* ("concrete entity"), the axe, such as *shing gcod par byed.* The terms [for "the place where the wood is to be cut"] *shing gcad bya'i yul, gcad rgyu'i sa cha, shing gcad sa* all mean the same, viz., the grove or the forest. The terms [for "the wood to be cut"] *gcad bya'i shing, gcad bya, gcad rgyu* all mean the same, i.e., the *bya ba'i dngos po* ("concrete entity pertaining to / belonging to the undergone action"), namely, the tree. And when one says *shing gcad par bya* ("the wood is cut / is to be cut") this [expresses] the act that belongs to the action's basis, that is to say, this is the transformation into the shavings which fell as woodchips after the axe had peirced the wood."[44]

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43 The text reads *bcad par bya,* which is surely wrong.

44 *Dvangs shel me long,* p. 69-70. The translation of *dngos po* as "concrete entity" here is in keeping with Pad ma rjo rje's own position that *dngos po* is a thing, like an axe or a tree.

A number of things emerge. First, Pad ma rdo rje adheres to the general idea that *dngos po* is only a thing or substance (represented by a noun), but instead of saying that agent (e.g. the woodcutter) and the instrument (e.g., the axe) are *dngos po*, he says it is just the instrument (e.g., the axe) that is classified as *dngos po*—in the case of *gzhan* it is just the thing acted upon (e.g., the wood) that is *dngos po*. Pad ma rdo rje, in effect, seems to take the genitive in the specification *byed pa po'i dngos po* in Si tu's definition of *bdag* and *gzhan* as being a simple possessive. The meaning is then "the concrete entity / thing *of, or belonging to,* the agent", or if we take the woodcutting example, it is just the axe *of* the woodcutter.

Second, Pad ma rdo rje includes under *gzhan* the place where the action happens—e.g., the place for woodcutting (*shing gcad sa, gcad rgyu'i sa cha*), viz., the forest—in addition to the direct object (the wood) and the action which the wood undergoes. This is no minor point, and in fact sKal bzang 'gyur med has the same position. In effect, these grammarians are interpreting the term *bya ba'i yul*—which we had translated as "focus of the action" and which on A kya Yongs 'dzin's interpretation meant simply the direct object (i.e., the wood)—as meaning the "place of the action". In fact, while A kya Yongs 'dzin and others, like dNgul chu and dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje[45], take *bya ba'i yul* as meaning the same as *las* ("the direct object", *karman*), sKal bzang 'gyur med explicitly argues against that view, saying that the *bya ba'i yul* will take a *la* particle (indicating a locative) and that the *las* will not.[46] Although sKal bzang 'gyur med does not explicitly acknowledge where his own position came from, it certainly appears to at least go back to Pad ma rdo rje, and probably considerably further. In any case, Pad ma rdo rje too inveighs against those who confuse *bya ba'i yul* and *las*. I shall leave open the historical investigation as to who was behind Pad ma rdo rje's own position. One thing that should be stressed here, however, is that this inclusion of "the place of the action" in *gzhan* is probably going to muddy the waters when we try to see a correspondence between *bya ba'i yul* and *bya ba / bya las* being similarly labeled *gzhan,* and the Indic idea of direct objects and passive verbs having a similar labeling as *karman*. It would be nice if the inclusion of *bya ba'i yul* taken as a locative was just "sporadic" too, but I think it is not.

It is time to conclude this somewhat deliberately provoked series of confusions and arrive at a methodological principle: *bdag* and *gzhan* is not a subject whose

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45   See n. 33 above.

46   See Tillemans and Herforth (1989), p. 101, s.v. *bya ba'i yul.*

mysteries will be significantly elucidated by the usual Indological methods of tracing Sanskrit original terms. The temptation has been great (and probably still is great) to find "essential" uses of *bdag, gzhan* and *dngos po* and dismiss the others by finding *the right* Indic antecedent—we feel we can then cut to the essence and dismiss the rest as irrelevant or as some type of confusion or loose usage. This type of methodology needs to be better seen for what it is—a natural *a priori* of an Indologically educated reader of Tibetan texts. Of course looking for *the right* Sanskrit term is not *always* a waste of time—far from it. But it is a strategy that often needs serious challenging, case by case. It is my contention that while it may work in many areas of Tibetan grammar, in dealing with the most recalcitrant subjects, like *bdag, gzhan* and *dngos po,* it has been and continues to be, more self-stultifying than fertile. What we can say is that there were a few Tibetan grammarians, like Si tu, who explicitly recognized a connection between *bdag* and *gzhan* and Sanskrit voices[47] and that there may well be a similar labeling principle at work, but the search for the actual terminological ancestry in India continues to come up short.

The case of *dngos po* and *dravya* should be instructive, for if we are true to the Tibetan texts in their variety, we cannot reasonably come up with Indic ancestors like *dravya, especially if the only argument we have to offer is some supposedly striking similarity between the use of* dravya *in* Vyākaraṇa *and the use of* dngos po *in* Sum rtags *literature.* The upshot is that genuine under-standing of what were traditionally called the "difficult points" *(dka' gnad)* of the *rTags kyi 'jug pa* (viz. *bdag, gzhan* and related notions) is to be gained primarily by Tibetological methods. There is no substitute for carefully reading, translating and comparing a lot of different Tibetan *Sum rtags* treatises, trying to discern patterns and identify indigenous schools with their indigenous debates. When the going gets hard on these "difficult points," India has surprisingly little help to offer.

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47   See Verhagen (2001) p. 299.

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