

# Contribution of Tibetan Scholars in Indian Pramāṇa Study

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**Abstract:** Buddhism was founded by Lord Buddha in the land of diverse philosophies, India. Buddhism is the only Indian religion that expanded and received high privilege beyond the Indian sub-continent such as China, Tibet, Japan, and Mongolia. Scholars from these countries travelled to India to study Buddhist philosophy, which helped in the systematic development of Buddhism in their countries. Among these countries, Buddhist logic and epistemological study, which is known as the Buddhist pramāṇa study, received the highest popularity in Tibet. Tibetan scholars studied the Buddhist pramāṇa system from Indian masters and spread it to their country. Early Tibetan scholars such as Nog Lotsawa Loden Sherab (Rngog Lo Tsaba Blo Ldan Shes rab), Ma Lotsawa Gebai Lodoe (rMa lo-tsa-ba dge-ba'i blo-gros), Phya-pa Chos-kyi Seng-ge, Sa skya Pandita and Gyaltsab Dharma Rinchen (rGyal-tshab Dar-ma Rin-chen), etc made huge contributions to spread and revive Indian Buddhist pramāṇa system, which was declining in India at that time. Most of the Tibetan rulers encouraged and assisted in expanding the Buddhist Pramāṇa study. For instance, the 8th-century Tibetan king Trisong Detsen (Khri-Song lDe'u-bTsen) not only invited Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita to promote Buddhism but also wrote a pramāṇa text called Kah Yang Daggpai Tshadma ( bKa' yang dag-pa'i tshad-ma). This shows his high interest in Buddhism and Buddhist logic. The translation of Buddhist texts especially Buddhist pramāṇa texts was initiated before the 10<sup>th</sup> century but proper theorizing began in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tibetan translators with the help of Indian scholars initiated the translation of Indian canonical and non-canonical texts and gradually made Tibetan commentary on Indian pramāṇa texts. Those translated and commentarial texts play an eminent role in preserving the writings of ancient Indian scholars, for instance, the original Sanskrit version of Dignāga's Pramāṇasamuccaya text is not available but the translated Tibetan version is available in contemporary times.

Tibetan scholars invented new methods in pramāṇa study, the Tibetan debate method and also invented the Collected topics (bsdus grwa) texts. The collected topics are the basic text of the pramāṇa study, where the summarization of Buddhist logical topics is collected and written. These two are important contributions of Tibetan scholars in the development of Indian pramāṇa study besides translation and commentary. Indian logical texts of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla study in Tibetan monasteries especially Pramāṇavārttikā text of Dharmakīrti, which is a root text for Tibetan pramāṇa study in the contemporary times, are studied and analytically debated in Tibetan monasteries.

Thus, Tibet and its people made a huge contribution in preserving and promoting Buddhism especially the Buddhist pramāṇa system after it was declined in India. In the paper, the author tries to highlight the contribution of Tibetan scholars in the Buddhist pramāṇa study by presenting the work and achievements of Tibetan scholars. It will also focus on proving whether their work genuinely helps in promoting and reviving of Buddhist pramāṇa system of Indian logicians such as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.

**Key Words:** Pramāṇa study, Tibet, India, Scholars, Commentary, Translation.

## Introduction

The word pramāṇa is derived from the root 'mā' (to know) with the prefix 'pra' and the affix 'lyuṭ'. With this affix, the word pramāṇa can literally give us three different meanings, (i) the valid cognition (pramā), when the affix is used in the abstract sense (bhāva), (ii) the cogniser (pramātā) when it is used in the sense of agent (kart) and (iii) the means of valid cognition (sadhana) when it is used in the sense of instrument (karaṇa). (Rani, 2022, p50) According to Tibetan scholar Gyal-tshab (rGyal-tshab), Pra means first or excellent and ma is cognition, which means first cognition. (rGyal-tshab, 2008, p 4) The term Pramāṇa is known as Tshad-ma in the Tibetan language. The literal meaning of the term Tshad-ma is 'Tshad' means to measure, and ma is a suffix. The term Tshad-ma (pramāṇa) can also be used in the broader sense as authority or hetu-vidya in Tibetan. According to David Jackson, there are four uses of term Tshad ma (pramāṇa) (Jackson, 2012, p 88), which are;

1. Tshadma as means of knowledge.
2. Tshadma is synonymous with logical argumentation (*rtog ge, tarka*) or reasoning (*rigs pa, yukti, nyāya*).

3. Tshadma as the name of the epistemological theory or school of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.
4. Tshadma in the sense of “authority” or “standard”.

In the present article, the term *pramāṇa* or Tshadma is used as the epistemological and logical school and study of Dignāga and other Indian Buddhist logicians, which is studied and translated in Tibet. The paper highlights the contribution of Tibetan scholars in the development of writing and the thoughts of Indian *pramāṇa* scholars. For this, it is divided into six sections; Introduction, Buddhist *pramāṇa* school of Ancient India, Tibetan works on *pramāṇa* during the monarchical times, Tibetan scholars’ *Pramāṇa* works after the decline of monarchical rule, Scholarly work of new *Pramāṇa* tradition in Tibet and conclusion.

### **Buddhist Pramāṇa School of Ancient India**

The seeds of Buddhist logical study were established from the time of Buddha that was later developed by his followers, Ācāryas Nāgārjuna (2<sup>nd</sup> century), Ārya Deva (4<sup>th</sup> century), Asaṅga (5<sup>th</sup> century) and Vasubandhu (5<sup>th</sup> century). But the systematic development of the Buddhist *pramāṇa* system happened after the arrival of Indian Buddhist scholar Dignāga (5<sup>th</sup> century), who is popularly known as a founder of Buddhist logic. He wrote short treatises on Buddhist logic such as *Nyāya-mukha* and *Hetu chakra*, which were later assembled in a greater treaty *Pramāṇasammuccaya*. This text is the magnum opus of his writing, which became one of the main sources for Buddhist logical study in India. The original Sanskrit version of this text is unavailable and presents only a restored version of some parts for instance H.R.R. Iyengar’s restoration of *Pramāṇasammuccaya*’s first chapter. The full chapter of *Pramāṇasammuccaya* is available in the Tibetan language with other writing of Dignāga.

Buddhist scholar Dharmakīrti (7<sup>th</sup> century) wrote seven logical texts<sup>1</sup> to give commentary on *Pramāṇasammuccaya*. The most elaborate one is *Pramāṇavārttikā*, where he had not only given a commentary but also gives his own logical analysis and thoughts with an open refutation to the non-Buddhist concept of Logic and Epistemology. Dharmakīrti’s disciples Devendrabuddhi, Śākyabuddhi, Prajñākaragupta, Ravigupta, and Dharmottra wrote a commentary on this text. All seven works of Dharmakīrti and the commentaries are present in the Tibetan language. Apart from them, other famous Buddhist logicians Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla visited Tibet and helps in the further establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. They wrote a famous logical work *Tattvasaṅgraha* and its commentary *Pañjikā* respectively, which is highly revered by Tibetan Logicians.

### **Tibetan Works on Pramāṇa During the Monarchical Times**

Tibet received the *pramāṇa* study after the arrival of Buddhism from India. During the reign of 7<sup>th</sup> century emperor Songtsen Gampo (Srong-tsen Gam-po), he sent Thonmi Sambota and his companions to India to study the art of writing. They shaped thirty Tibetan consonants and four vowels, which became the main language for Tibetan. The form (of these letters) was given a resemblance with the Kashmirian characters. (Butson and Obermiller,1932, page183) That time the Sanskrit texts such as *Karaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, the 100 *Precepts*, the *Ratnamegha-sūtra* and others were translated into Tibetan language.(Butson and Obermiller,1932, page184)

In the eighth century, Trisong Detsen ( Khri-sron lDe'u-btsan), the 38<sup>th</sup> emperor

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on Valid Cognition (Pramāṇavārttikā), Discernment of Valid Cognition (Pramāṇaviniścaya), Drop of Reasoning on Valid Cognition (Nyāyabindu), Drop of Logical Reasoning (Hetubindu), Analysis of Relationship (Sambandhaparīkṣa), Establishing Alternative Continuum (Samtānāntarasiddhi), Science of Debate (Vādanyāya).*

of Tibet, invited many Indian scholars to spread the Buddhist doctrine in Tibet. Nalanda scholar Śāntarakṣita and his student Kamalaśīla, two famous Buddhist logicians, visited Tibet and worked for the spreading of Buddhism in Tibet. Kamalaśīla debated with Chinese Buddhist representatives and won over later through his logical method made a stable position of Indian Buddhism over Tibet. The translation work on Indian Buddhist texts further developed, as it was stated in 2500 years of Buddhism, “another was the preparation of the first catalogue of the translated Buddhist works in Ldandkar palace and a reorganization of the translation activity on sound lines by Śāntarakṣita after his return to Tibet. (Bapat, 2018, p. 65) The arrival of these two logicians influenced Tibet in terms of logical study, which is clearly shown by King Trisong Detsen interest and writing of Buddhist logical text called *Kah Yang Dagpai Tshadma* (*bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma*). During the rule of Tritsuk Detsen (famously known as Tri Ralpacan, 9<sup>th</sup> century), there is a division of translated Buddhist texts into two sections, Hinayana and Mahayana texts. In *the History of Buddhism*, it is stated that “Owing to this there were many different renderings of words and the study of the Doctrine became very difficult. Seeing this, the king issued the following order: -The Aparāntaka teachers Jinamitra, Surendrabodhi, Śilendrabodhi, and Bodhimitra, the Tibetan teachers Ratnarakṣita and Dharmatāśīla, the skilful translators Jānasena, Jayarakṣita, Mañjuśrīvarman, Ratnendraśīla and others are to translate the Hīnayānistic and Mahāyānistic Scriptures into Tibetan directly from the Sanskrit.” (Buston and Obermiller, 1932 page 196)

At the time of these two rulers, many short pramāṇa texts were translated by Tibetan scholars with the help of Indian scholars, for instance Dignāga *Hetucakraḍamaru*<sup>2</sup>, Dignāga's *Hetubindu* and Vintaveda's *Hetubindu-ṭikā*<sup>3</sup>, Kamalaśīla's *Nyāyabindu-pūrvapakṣa-samkṣipta*,<sup>4</sup> Vinitadeva's *Ālambanaparīṣāṭikā*<sup>5</sup>, Dharmakīrti's *Sambandha-parīkṣāprakaraṇa* and its commentary by Vinitadeva *Sambandha-parīkṣāṭikā*,<sup>6</sup> Dharmottara's *Nyāyabindu-ṭikā*.<sup>7</sup>

## Tibetan Scholars' Pramāṇa Works After the Decline of Monarchical Rule

One of the famous Tibetan scholars who worked for the development of pramāṇa system after the end of monarchical rule in Tibet is Ma Gebai Lodeo (rMa dGe-ba'i blo-gros, 11<sup>th</sup> century). He put the Indian pramāṇa theory into the system through teaching and study. This was the beginning of the spread of the teaching of Logic. ('Gos Lo-tsa-ba and Roerich, 1949, p70).

He translated *Pramāṇavārttikā* (*Tshad-ma Rnam-'grel*) and its auto-commentary (*Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti*), Devendrabudhi's commentarial text (*Pramāṇavārtikaṭika*) and Sakyamati commentarial text *Pramāṇavārtikaṭika* and Dharmakīrti's *Vādanyāya*.

## Scholarly Work During New Pramāṇa Tradition in Tibet

Tibetan pramāṇa tradition is divided into two phases, the old pramāṇa tradition and the new pramāṇa tradition. Ma Gepai Lodeo and other previous Tibetan pramāṇa scholars are known as followers of the old pramāṇa tradition. The new pramāṇa tradition was initiated with the

<sup>2</sup> Translated by Dharmasoka (8th century) with the help of Śāntarakṣita

<sup>3</sup> Translated by Zhu-chen dpal-brtsegs-rakṣita (9th century) with the help of Indian pandita Prajñavarman

<sup>4</sup> Translated by Dpal brtsegs with the help of Viśuddhasiṃha

<sup>5</sup> Translated by Ban-dè dpal brtsegs with an assistance of the Indian pandita Sakyasiṃha

<sup>6</sup> Vande Nam-mkha'-skyon (9th cen.) translated with the help of the Indian pandita Jñānagarbha

<sup>7</sup> Zhu-chen chos-kyi snan-ba (9th cen.) translated it with the help of Jñānagarbha

arrival of Nog Loden Sherab (Rngog Blo-Idan Shes-rab) of Gsang phu (Gsang-phu sne'u-thog) monastery. He is known as the founder of this new tradition because of his translation work on Dharmottara and Pranjakaragupata's Pramāṇa works, which brought a new wave in the logical study of Tibet. (Sadhukhan, 1994, p16) His works on pramāṇa are more systematized and more successful in establishing the importance of the topic than the old pramāṇa tradition as it is stated in *Philosophical literature:Tibet*, "The earlier tradition attributed to Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla was favourable to the epistemological approach, but Rgog Blo Ldan Shes rab was far more systematized and more successful in establishing the importance of the topic."(Samuels and Jansen, 2015, p626) Nog's commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya*<sup>8</sup> is one of the first indigenously composed commentaries of Tibet. He also made a short commentary on *Pramāṇavārttikā* text, which is entitled as *Śes-rab 'grel-chun*.<sup>9</sup> The other translated books of him are *Nyāya bindu*, *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and its *ṭikā*, *Pramāṇavārttikā-alaṃkāra* and its *ṭikā*, *pramāṇa-parīkṣā*, *Apohasiddhi and Pratibandha-siddhi*. Beside translation, he also gave teaching on pramāṇa to his followers. Among his assistant preachers (zur chos-pa), fifty five were the preachers of *Alaṃkāra (Pramāṇavārttikā alaṃkāra)* and *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭikā* and two eighty are the expounders of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*. ('Gos Lo-tsa-ba and Roerich, 1949, p 326) There was a continuation of the arrival of many Tibetan scholars and made translations of both short and long texts of Indian Buddhist pramāṇa.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the sixth abbot of Sang phu monastery, Phya-pa Choskyi Seng-ge gave a new shape to Buddhist study by introducing a debate method in Tibetan Buddhist study. The debate method of studying Buddhist philosophy gain high popularity in Tibetan monasteries and still practises at the present time. He composed a logical text called *Tshad-ma 'i bsdus-pa Yid-kyi mun-Sel*, which became the first general summary of Dharmakīrti's thoughts in Tibet. His other contribution to pramāṇa study, which become the most outstanding contribution to Buddhist philosophy and global philosophy was his explication of the theory of Definition (*mtshan-nyid, lakṣana*). (Van der Kuijp, 1983, p 65) Dharmakīrti did not give elaborate writing on the theory of definition (*lakṣana*) as done by Phya pa. Russian scholar Stcherbatsky stated that "The first author to compose an independent work on logic is Chaba Choiky Senge (1109—1169). He is the creator of a special Tibetan logical style on which some remarks will be made in the sequel. He composed a commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and an independent work on logic in mnemonic verse with his own explanations."( Stcherbatsky, 1962, page 55)

In the thirteen century, a celebrated Tibetan Sa skya scholar Kunga Gyaltsen (Rgyal-tsen), famously known as Sa Skya pandita, wrote a masterpiece work on Buddhist pramāṇa, which is called *Tshad-ma Rigpai ter (Rigs-pa'i gter)* along with its auto-commentary *Rig-ter Rangdrel (Rigs gter Rang 'grel)*. In his work, he refuted the pramāṇa concepts asserted by early Tibetan masters, especially Phya- pa. He also made a contribution to the theory of definition by writing a full chapter on it under the name of "Investigation of definition" (*mtshan-nyid brtag-pa*). His student Uh Yugpa Rigpai Senge ('U yug-pa Rigs-pa'i seng-ge) (c.1195–c.1267) wrote a commentary on the *Pramāṇavārttikā* under the name of *Pramāṇavārttikājakośnama (Tshad-ma rNam- 'grel gyi 'grel-pa rigs-pa 'i mdzod)*, which is the

<sup>8</sup> Name of the text *Tsha- ma rnam-nges kyi dka' gnad rnam-bshad*

<sup>9</sup> In *The Blue Annals* (page 698), there is written a name of Blo-Idan Śes-rab's Śes-rab 'grel-chun as the short commentary on *Pramāṇavārttikā* text But I did not find this book and not sure whether Blo-Iden Śes-rab wrote this book or not. If there is an existence of this book, it will become the oldest Tibetan commentary on *Pramāṇavārttikā*.

oldest Tibetan commentary available in present time.

In the fourteenth century, there is a rise of a new school in Tibetan Buddhism, called Gelugpa (Dge Lugs-pa) and the founder of this new school is Jè Tsong kha pa Lobsang Drakpa (Blo-bzang Grags-pa, 1357–1419). He made an elaborate commentary on many Buddhist texts but in the field of pramāṇa study, he gave a short commentary on *Pramāṇavārttika*, under the name of *Tshad-ma'i Brjed-byan Chen-mo*. This short commentarial text was a teaching of Jé rinpoche, which was edited and written by his student Gyaltsab Darma Rinchen (rGyal-tshab Darma Rinchen). Gyaltsab wrote a commentary on *Pramāṇavārttikā*, *Pramāṇavinśicaya*, *Nyayabindu* and *Pramāṇasammuccaya* under the name of *Tshad-ma rnam-'grel-gyi tshig- le'ur byas-pa'i rnam-bsad thar-lam phyin-ci ma-Iog-par gsal-bar byed-pa*, *Bstan-bcos tshad-ma rnam-nes-kyi tik-chen dgons-pa rab-gsal*, *Tshad-ma rigs-thigs-kyi 'grel-pa legs-bsad snin-po'i gter* and *Tshad-ma mdo'i rnam- bsad* respectively. He also made commentary on Skya pandita's text *Tshad ma rigter*. His original work on pramāṇa is *Tshad-ma'i lam-khrid*, *'Gal-'brel- gyi rnam-gzhag*. Tsong kha pa's another student, Khedrub Jé (Mkhas-grub Dge-legs Dpal-bzang) wrote very detailed commentary on *Pramāṇavārttikā*, under the title *Tshad-ma rnam- 'grel ṭik-chen rigs-pa'i rgya-mtsho*, *Ocean of Reasoning*. He made an annotative work on the Seven Treatises of Dharmakīrti in his work *Tshad-ma sde-bdun-gyi rgyan yid-kyi mun-sel* and also wrote a short text on pramāṇa system called *Tsadma'i Lam 'Krid*. The first Dalai Lama Dge 'dun grub made an independent work on pramāṇa under the name of *Tshad-ma rigs-rgyan*.

Tibetan Gelugpa school made a new contribution to the pramāṇa study by writing a short logical text, where all the important Buddhist logical terms are defined with analogy. This text is known as “Collected Topics” (*bsdus grwa*). The earliest text is the Ratoe Due-dra (*Ra bstod bsdus grwa*) of Jamyang Choelha Woeser ('Jam dbyangs mChog lha 'od zer) (1429-1500), subsequently scholars from three great monasteries of Gelugpa school wrote their own collected topics, which is the basic text for beginners of Buddhist logics.

Besides Gelug pa, scholars from other schools Kagyu (bkagyu), Nyingma (rNying ma) and Sa Skya also made commentary on Indian pramāṇa texts specially *Pramāṇavārttikā* text.

## Conclusion

Tibetan scholars play a pivotal role in the development and preservation of ancient Indian Buddhist philosophy, which was declining at the time of its arrival in Tibet. The main work of Tibetan scholars on the development of the ancient Buddhist pramāṇa system are :

1. The most important contribution of Tibetan scholars to Buddhist pramāṇa study is the translation of Indian Buddhist pramāṇa texts. The majority of Indian Buddhist pramāṇa texts were translated by Tibetan scholars with the help of Indian scholars. In ancient times, Tibetan scholars, for instance, Nog Loden Sherab, Lostawa Rinchen Zangpo and Sakya Pandita studied Sanskrit and Buddhist texts from Indian scholars for the better translation and understanding of Buddhist texts before the translation of Indian texts. The translation of Buddhist pramāṇa texts into the Tibetan language helps in preserving the ancient Indian Buddhist pramāṇa system. The loss of original Pramāṇa treatises due to various causes and the presence of Tibetan translations of these helps Indian and Tibetan scholars to know the writing of early Indian pramāṇa scholars. For instance, the translated Text of Dignāga's *Pramāṇasammuccaya* helps in knowing Dignāga's famous logical text, which is not available in Sanskrit at the present time.
2. The application of a new method, the Tibetan debate method, in pramāṇa study leads to the further development of pramāṇa as all the major Tibetan monasteries study

pramāṇa and other Buddhist philosophical texts through this method. In contemporary times, Tibetan schools have initiated this debate method to study Buddhism, Science and other subjects, which shows the interdisciplinary nature of the Tibetan debate method.

3. Tibetan scholars gave more exposition to the difficult terms of the Buddhist pramāṇa system, which is a new achievement of Tibetan scholars in pramāṇa study. For instance, a detailed writing on the theory of Definition by Tibetan scholars Phya pa and Sa Skya Pandita for the comprehensive and proper understanding of logical terms by those who do not know Sanskrit and difficult to get the meaning of different pramāṇa terminology.
4. Another new approach taken for the development of pramāṇa study is the collection of Buddhist logical terms with meaning and analogy in the short text under the name of collected topics “Due-dra (bdus sgra)”. This made an easier and more systematic way for young Tibetan monks and nuns to study Buddhist philosophy at their initial stage of Buddhist education.
5. The commentarial work of Tibetan scholars on pramāṇa treaties made it easier to study ancient pramāṇa texts of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, which is difficult to understand without proper commentary. Tibetan commentarial texts not only described the root texts but also analyse the commentaries made by early Indian scholars and refute them with proper reason If it does not go with root texts.

Thus, the work of Tibetan scholars leads to the preservation and development of ancient Indian philosophical study. As 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama says to his Indian friends, “Indians are Gurus and we (Tibetans) are chelas<sup>10</sup> (students) of Indian Guru.” Tibetan chelas worked hard to preserve ancient Buddhism for centuries and continued the legacy of their Gurus.

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<sup>10</sup> Hindi term for students, followers.

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