

REJOINDER TO JEFFREY HOPKINS

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Jeffrey Hopkins certainly has written a spirited reply (*Journal of the Tibet Society*, Volume 5, 1985 [though appearing in 1988]) to my review that came in Volume 3, 1983 issue of this Journal, devoted to his portion of translation from the *Sngags rim chen mo* under the title *The Yoga of Tibet*. Since he refers to a previous review of a book of mine, the last two sections of the *Lam rim chen mo*, reported as by Geshe Sopa, referring to my reply, with the further reply by the Geshe that appeared in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 3, 1980, Hopkins evidently thinks that my review of his book was a kind of "tit for tat". Hopkins makes a purblind remark (reply, p. 80) that I did not consult with Tibetan scholars on my own work. My reply is that no one in this world accomplishes tasks by himself. However, when one takes a long time to accomplish something, the group that was involved is not as obvious as when one does something quickly with the help of competent advisors; and I do applaud Hopkins for consulting with learned lamas in his work. Therefore, a few remarks are in order about book reviews in general or particular.

Nowadays it is difficult for journals to get competent reviews of books. Those who especially know subjects often do not want to get involved, either to praise an unworthy book, or to sharply criticize a book deserving of it. The book reviewing is usually left to persons who when faced with a work beyond their own feasible abilities merely make a few surly remarks, or simply list the table of contents. Therefore, when a journal does manage to get a review by someone who supposedly knows the topic, it is a kind of plus. It must have seemed so to readers of that *JLABS*, 3, 1980, because surely Geshe Sopa knows the topic, and should write an 'accurate' (Hopkin's word) review. The trouble with the review was that the English was unexpectedly good for a Tibetan learned in his own traditions and so undoubtedly able to write a fine review if he could suitably express himself. When in my

reply I made a remark about the standard of English, the then editors of that Journal cut out my remark, thereby becoming a party to a partial deception; but I am not at liberty to mention who was the most deceived. It does not matter to me if mistakes are rightly or wrongly attributed to a translation of mine, because to occupy oneself with this great Tibetan literature in the Golden Age of mastery of these topics is sufficient reward for having worked at it with whatever intelligence and endeavor we possess. If a reviewer is out to discredit a work—as Hopkins thinks I was trying to do with his book—well, then, why not agree that the reviewer has done the book’s author a favor—as Tsong-kha-pa himself points out in the *kṣānti* portion of the Bodhisattva section of the *Lam rim chen mo*? Then, it would be asked of me: Why weren’t you satisfied with Geshe Sopa’s review? The answer, and relevant to mention, is simple: That review was the kind where the reviewer (whoever it really was) finds one mistake—and it really was such—then makes allegations of other things done wrong and without giving an example, takes some passage and shows how the reviewer would rather have translated it, using words that the reviewer likes to use; for example, speaking generally, where one person uses the expression “shared with” someone else prefers “in common with”—using up much space with these preferred renditions and then, the reviewer tries to give the impression to the reader that this space devoted to preferred renderings—although not justified as superior—has somehow pointed out that the book under review is full of mistakes. But such reviews are frequent; there is no spiritual superiority in writing like that. Indeed, it takes some sophistication to write such a review; and so when one came under the authorship, as stated, of Geshe Sopa, I responded in a manner that Hopkins calls ‘acerbic’. But I was not responding to the Geshe, but to the unknown author(s).

So, if Hopkins believes I am trying to do the same to his book, showing non-appreciation and misrepresentation, he would follow the course he did, which is to metaphorically tip his hat to me for finding the one mistake, and then to complain that the rest of my review was given over to allegations that are either unsupported by valid research, or simply wrong. But my attitude seems to have eluded Hopkins, and perhaps it is my own fault not to have clarified the fact that for me the original text is what is important, the translator’s book being probably inferior to the original. When I was criticizing Hopkins’ renderings it was because I honestly felt by reason of what I happen to know of this subject, that he was misleading the reader, not doing justice to Tsong-kha-pa’s original text, and making out-and-out

misrenderings of Tibetan verses. And it also seems to me, reading his reply to me, that he cannot find enough English words to express his scorn, for either I am "mostly wrong", have "disregarded" (what should have been regarded), am "misunderstanding", have "surmises" (albeit incorrect), "a dismal display of his (i.e. my) own ability either to read Tibetan grammar or to appreciate the basic points being made," and so on. If Hopkins is right in all these charges, I should go hang my head in shame. But my answer to all of these tirades is that the reader now can see why, if a reviewer is able to evaluate a work such as Hopkins', he would do better to tell the journal to get someone else to review it, since if he tells the truth about the book, this is what he can expect in return. But is this just a way of trying to squeeze out of an uncomfortable corner? No, but to treat all of Hopkin's points would be unfair to the journal because of the inordinate space required, and would take more time and writing than I find the topic merits. And besides, a few examples if properly supported should show my position sufficiently.

(1) About the translation of the Sanskrit term *akṣara* by *yi ge*. I had criticized Hopkins for not noticing that the Tibetan translators had in the *Vairocanābhisambodhi-tantra*, Chap. V, mis-rendered the Skt. term *akṣara* by *yi ge* in a place where it meant *mi 'gyur ba*, inferentially that Tsong-kha-pa had noticed this, and deliberately quoted other passages that got the situation right. First, we must correct Hopkins about the translators of Buddhaguhya's great commentary on the *Vairocana-tantra*. He says (reply, p. 76) that the same translators who translated the *Tantra* translated Buddhaguhya's great commentary. False! Neither the catalogue of the Peking Kanjur-Tanjur nor P. Cordier's catalogue of the Tanjur at the Bibliothèque Nationale, p. 291, mentions the translators of the great commentary. Those translators of the *Tantra* translated Buddhaguhya's *Pinḍārtha*; and in fact did it a generation after Buddhaguhya's great commentary was translated into Tibetan, possible under Buddhaguhya's own direction. If there was an earlier translation of the *Tantra* in the Kanjur, it is no longer extant. The evidence of the Derge edition is of no use, because this edition omits the old ('unedited') version of the great commentary and only has the later revision which changes the order of the chapters of the commentary to agree with the present Kanjur *Tantra*. Thus, Hopkins' attempt to defend his position citing commentary along with the *Tantra* as though the same translators were involved, is beside the point. And Hopkins cites the commentary in the revised form by Gzhon-nu-dpal, which is

almost the same, but has *las* for the *la* in the “unrevised” form of the text, in fact, in the commentary on the chapter “Samādhi of the Gods”. For the Tibetan see Hopkins (reply, Tib. p. 88, line 5). Furthermore, Hopkins omits perhaps the most important statement (reply, Tib. p. 88, line 6, omission indicated by three dots) which is in the “unrevised” edition, PTT, Vol. 77, p. 210–4–1: /’di skad du gsungs [Gzhon-nu-dpal, erroneously: ’di lta] /de bzhin gshegs pa rnam byung yang rung ma byung yang rung chos rnam kyi chos nyid (de ni) ye nas gnas pa ’di lta ste / sngags kyi chos nyid do zhes pa’i phyir ro/ (“Whether Tathāgatas arise or do not arise, that true nature of the *dharma*s remains immemorially, because it is the true nature of the *mantra*s”). And because the reading is *la* rather than *las*, Hopkins erroneously translates (reply, p. 76, in the Commentary): “do not change *from* the nature of indicating the release of conventional and ultimate deities”. Thus, one should translate the Tibetan: “Among them, the ‘sound’ is the syllables of the *mantra*; thereby is shown the release of the conventional and ultimate deities. It is immutable because not changing from self-existence (*svabhāva*).” The citation about the Tathāgatas is from the *Vairocana-tantra*, Chap. II. Hopkins had charged that I was making criticisms without having done the proper research. We see here that it is he who has not done the proper research.

It would take much more space to tell what all this is about. But briefly speaking, it is the *bodhicitta* which is termed *akṣara*, when among the two kinds of *bodhicitta* (Thought of Enlightenment) as are explained by Kamalaśīla in the first two of his *Bhāvanākrama*, namely, the *paramārtha* kind of *bodhicitta*, as occurs in the first pages of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. In this Tantra the absolute kind of *bodhicitta* is imagined as a moon-disk in the heart. On this is placed a syllable, but this syllable is not referred to as immutable. The passage about the Tathāgatas means, according to Buddhaguhya’s commentary on Chapter II of the *Tantra*, that *mantra* power is independent of them, but they know how to use it. So even in the Tibetan passage which Hopkins cites (reply, Tib. p. 88, top line) we can see that the Tibetan translators ran into trouble in rendering the Sanskrit. So instead of what Hopkins thought the passage was saying (reply, p. 76), it really goes like this: “*Akṣara* is the letter (*tshig*) that does not change from self-existence. And that *akṣara* is also of two kinds: sound and the *bodhicitta*.” Sound is the *akṣara* because *akṣara* means ‘syllable’: *Bodhicitta* is the *akṣara* when it is *a-kṣara* (incessant). So I shall repeat what I pointed out in my review of Hopkins’ book, that the translators of the *Tantra*, Chap. V had put *yi ge* in a place where *mi ’gyur* was

indicated. If Hopkins wants to set aside my conclusion, let him improve his own research and his own understanding of the topic. Hurling insults at the reviewer won't help.

(2) Translation of a verse (Hopkins' reply, p. 74). Admitting an ambiguity, Hopkins still could not accept my 'improvement' that in the phrase *brtul zhugs bzang po khyod*, *brtul zhugs bzang po* is vocative; so Hopkins decides he was right to translate it as 'nominative' (*sic.*), but he actually translates it as being in the accusative case. Let me admit at the outset that I do not claim a superiority over Hopkins in reading these verses, especially if he gets the advice of knowledgeable lamas. Indeed, these verses have difficulty for almost everybody; and so it was common practice in Tibet when studying any of the concentrated verse texts like the *Abhidharmakośa* to read it together with the commentary. Learned Tibetans were very aware of such problems because the canon has two translations of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and two translations of Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, in both cases showing considerable divergences in the Tibetan renderings. Tsong-kha-pa's biography mentions that at one point he studied with a lama-translator. Tsong-kha-pa himself exhibits a remarkable talent at verses, and would accordingly applaud my practice of getting the original Sanskrit whenever possible to use along with the Tibetan. In an article published in Japan for a Kōbō-daishi anniversary I myself edited in Sanskrit a number of verses from the *Vairocana-tantra*. Admittedly, however, the verse in question above is not among those for which the Sanskrit has been found. The reason the verse must be translated in the way I suggested, to wit, with the vocative, is that so translated it agrees with Tsong-kha-pa's code of Vajrayāna morality, namely, that unless the Bodhisattva vow is already in the person, the Mantra vow cannot be born. The verse shows this. The tantric pledges (*samaya*) can be given to this disciple because he is already 'vowed', i.e. has the Bodhisattva vow. Hence, my translation of the two verses, Chap. Two, 238–239:

From this day on you must not abandon the
Illustrious Dharma and the Mind of Enlightenment,
even for your life. You must not have envy, or do
harm to sentient beings. O well avowed one, these
pledges are given to you by the Buddha. In the same
way as you would guard your life, so you must guard
these.^[a]

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that any learned lama, especially one of the Dge-lugs-pa order, who respects Tsong-kha-pa's insistence on this priority of the Bodhisattva vow to the

Mantra vow, must agree with me that this is the way to translate the verse in question.

(3) The Tibetan expression *slar sdud pa*. Hopkins scorns my suggestion that in the given context, this expression means 'repetition', and keeps on insisting that it means 'withdrawal'. As to the grammatical point, Hopkins cites Si-tu, the famous Tibetan grammarian on *slar bsdu ba'i sgra* to show it means a conclusive particle. Of course, the expression does mean that, because according to the old Tibetan grammar *sdud pa* means to tie on, to augment (cf. Johannes Schubert, *Tibetische Nationalgrammatik*, 1928, p. 12); and *slar bsdu ba* can certainly be employed that way. But Hopkins himself does not believe the relevance of the grammatical usage in the tantric context, since he claims it means 'withdrawal'. Unfortunately for his case, neither the Tibetan dictionary *Ming tshig gsal ba* by Geshe Choskyi-grags-pa, nor the more recent three-volume Tibetan dictionary *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* recognizes the meaning 'withdrawal'. The first of these dictionaries exhibits Si-tu's *rdzogs tshig* with such examples as *go ngo*, *do no*, and so on. Some of these are reiteration, for example, *bdag go*, *bzang ngo*. This same dictionary has a separate entry *slar bsdu* noted to mean *zla sdud*, which seems to mean the very 'mantra reiteration' that I have claimed. The three-volume dictionary has further evidence of reiteration under *slar bsdu*. Thus, beside such augments as the *da-drag* ("heavy *d* of old Tibetan") and conclusive particles like *go*, it illustrates the added expression that acts as a gloss, e.g. *skyo skyo sems pa skyo 'o*; *rmongs rmongs blo sems rmongs so*. In the example, *'dar 'dar lus sems 'dar ro*, the intended meaning is "shudders, i.e. shudders in body and mind". In contrast, when in the tantras it is wished to express "withdrawal", there is the Sanskrit term *pratyāhara*, translated into Tibetan *sor sdud* (abbrev. of *so sor sdud pa*), where the *sdud pa* is employed but not the *slar*. This term is employed because "withdrawal" is respective (*so sor*), namely, from each sensory and other orifice. Thus, I was not off-base in insisting that the usage of the term *slar sdud pa* has a grammatical reference, suggesting "reiteration", since the augment even in the classical examples was a kind of repetition. In the grammar this type of repetition was placed at the end, but the Tantra generalizes to allow the repetition without restriction to location. In the light of the foregoing evidence, I repeat my conclusion that in the context of discussion, I was right that in the particular passage of contention, reiteration of the mantra is what is meant: this was declared necessary for restraining the mind. It is good that Hopkins found that passage of

Buddhaguhya about *slar sdud pa*. I agree with him that here Buddhaguhya is using the term equivalently to the *sor sdud* of other Tantras. Hopkins is therefore justified in saying the term can be used that way, but not justified in claiming that in the contended passage, such a meaning applies. Even more, because even in the passage of Buddhaguhya he cites, it is possible to interpret the passage as intending a double meaning, to wit, "mantra repetition" and "withdrawal". That is to say, the meaning "mantra repetition" is basic; the author wants it also to mean "withdrawal".

(4) About "yoga of signs" and "signless yoga". Hopkins (reply, pp. 82, ff) is much in disagreement with me on the "four members" and on signless yoga, etc. It seems useless to expatiate on such matters, using up much space. If Hopkins' way of expounding the subject makes sense to the reader, then by all means believe him! If my way of putting forth the topic makes sense to anybody, then let him read further in my writings on the topic. Hopkins (reply, pp. 85–86) claims that a reference to this matter in the work which F.D. Lessing and I put out many years ago, *Mkhas grub rje's Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras*, p. 207, exhibits a text corruption. Hopkins may well be right, but certainly has not done what is necessary in text critique for solving a problem. In fact, the basic passage about the two kinds of yoga is extant in Sanskrit, and is a citation from the *Vairocana-tantra* in the commentary on the *Guhyasamājatantra* called *Pradīpoddyotana*. From the Bihar MS of this commentary, long ago I edited a portion including this citation; and it is in my book *Yoga of the Guhyasamājatantra*. Tsong-kha-pa has a wonderful *Mchan 'grel* (annotation commentary) on the *Pradīpoddyotana* in its Tibetan version, and so has discussed the passage in its place of citation. Therefore, if one wishes to pursue the topic in depth, even from the standpoint of text critique, more is needed to be done than Hopkins evidences in support of his contentions.

As to anything else in Hopkins' reply, I shall add no further comment. Reading his way of replying is not a pleasant occupation; and I do not say this—as a reader might think—simply because he disagrees with me. It is rather—and I would prefer it not be the case—that a somewhat remarkable conclusion can be drawn about the attitude that prompted Hopkins' manner of reply. He so fights over every little word, makes such a big deal over every passage, as though protecting the Magenot line. One has to wonder if in the end it is Tsong-kha-pa's text that he is fighting for: is it not the case that for him his translation is more important than the text being translated?

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