

Remarks on the term *tshad ma'i skyes bu* and the notion of novelty of valid cognition in the bKa' brgyud tradition

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The definition of valid cognition is usually explained in terms of the philosophical system it is a part of. This is however, not the only approach. Analyzing the bKa' brgyud tradition, I would like to show another approach, which throws some new light on our understanding of the definition of *pramāṇa* and the related notion of *tshad ma'i skyes bu*. I rely mainly on two texts that, so far, were not the object of any academic research in the West: the *Tshad ma rigs gzhung rgya mtsho*, the commentary to Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*, written by the 7th Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho, and the *sKye dgu'i bdag po la rigs lam* by rNam rgyal grags pa, who was the principal teacher [*yongs 'dzin*] of the 9th Karma pa dBang phyug rdo rje.¹

Buddha as *pramāṇa*

The Tibetan term *tshad ma'i skyes bu* has already attracted a lot of scholarly interest, it was however analyzed mainly within the dGe lugs tradition.² In the bKa' brgyud tradition, the term can be found in the *sKye dgu'i bdag po la rigs lam gsal byed*, which dates back to the second half of the 16th century. The book was written by Yongs 'dzin rNam rgyal grags pa for the 9th Karma pa dBang phyug rdo rje (1555–1603), as an introduction to the *pramāṇa* system, which in this tradition is to a large extent based on the *Tshad ma rigs gter*. Thus appearing in such a book the term must have been quite popular outside the dGe lugs system. Already, much earlier — at the end of the 15th century — it was also used by the 7th Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506) in his

¹ Between these two authors there is a gap in *tshad ma* literature in the bKa' brgyud tradition, which anyway was never interested in elaborating on *tshad ma*. A bit later the 6th Zhwa mar, Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630), who wrote a short *tshad ma* text, meant as an easy to memorize introduction into Buddhist epistemology entitled *bsDus sbyor gyi snying po kun bsdus rig pa'i mdzod*.

² Cf. van der Kuijp 1999 and Steinkellner 1983 where it is shown that the term was introduced for the sake of combining *lam rims* theory with *tshad ma* theory. Jonathan Silk elaborated a lot on possible Indian sources of this term, cf. Silk 2002.

fundamental commentary to *Pramāṇavārttika* as a synonym of *pramāṇabhūta* [*tshad mar gyur pa*].³

At the beginning of the *blo rigs* chapter in his handbook, rNam rgyal grags pa puts the term *tshad ma'i skyes bu* in the context of an interesting division of *pramāṇa*. Thus he says:

Generally, concerning that *pramāṇa* there are the two: essential *pramāṇa* and exemplary *pramāṇa*. Essential *pramāṇa* is the embodiment of *pramāṇa* [*tshad ma'i skyes bu*]. Exemplary *pramāṇa* is direct perception and inference.⁴

The opening word “generally”, suggests that he considers this division quite common and for him as a follower of the bKa’ brgyud tradition, the source of it is most probably the *Tshad ma rigs gzhung rgya mtsho* by the 7th Karma pa. Embodiment of *pramāṇa* – as I decided to translate the term *tshad ma'i skyes bu* for the reasons explained further – is literally called the essential *pramāṇa*. This essential *pramāṇa* is contrasted with an exemplary *pramāṇa*, which is just a copy, simile or exemplification of the original, real *pramāṇa*. The above statement that the embodiment of *pramāṇa* is the very *pramāṇa* or *pramāṇa* in itself, suggest that the genitive construction *tshad ma'i skyes bu*, should not be read so much as a phrase, where valid cognition is attributed to a person as his/her quality or feature, even though this is the most natural reading. We should rather understand it the same way as, for example, the genitive construction: *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa* meaning the *pāramitā*, which is knowledge or the knowledge which is *pāramitā*. General *paramita*, that was specified with the term *shes rab*, turns out to be the knowledge itself and similarly a person is classified as somebody who literally is *pramāṇa*, no matter how strange it seems at first sight. Being quite a normal construction in Tibetan, *tshad ma'i skyes bu* however sounds a bit strange when translated into European languages: how can a man be called a means of valid cognition or even valid cognition itself? What can be easily said in Tibetan seems unnatural in translation, and that is probably why Ernst Steinkellner proposes to translate it not even as “a person of *pramāṇa*” but as “a person of authority”, even though he admits that a person is literally *pramāṇa*:

The genitive characterizing the compound is simply attributive; the word literally means, therefore, that the person (*skyes bu*) is a means

³ See quotation given later in the text from Karma pa (1999), p. 20. Go rams pa - also in the quotation given below - treats these two terms as synonyms as well.

⁴ rNam rgyal grags pa (2009), p. 88: *spyir tshad ma de la don gyi tshad ma dang dpe'i tshad ma gnyis/ don gyi tshad ma ni/ tshad ma'i skyes bu la byed/ dpe'i tshad ma ni/ mngon sum dang rjes dpag gnyis la byed.*

of valid cognition (*tshad ma*), and I translate the term as "a person of authority". The word designates the Buddha, of course, the authority par excellence and thus the final source and judge of any validity and usefulness in any kind of cognition.⁵

The text of rNam rgyal grags pa says even, that Buddha is not only a person who literally is *pramāṇa*, thus being *tshad ma'i skyes bu*, but also this embodiment of *pramāṇa* is again the very *pramāṇa*. Thus, the person of *pramāṇa* becomes less and less a person and more and more *pramāṇa* itself. In comparison to that very *pramāṇa* in itself, direct perception and inference are only lesser *pramāṇa*, an exemplary *pramāṇa* being just a reflection or mere shadow of the essential *pramāṇa*. What is usually considered to be *pramāṇa*, namely *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*, turn out to be mere resemblance of the original *pramāṇa* Buddha embodies. The text of rNam rgyal grags pa insists on taking Buddha as *pramāṇa* as literally as possible, not even as the source of the two types of *pramāṇa*, not even as an authority or point of reference, but as a real *pramāṇa* in itself (which unenlightened beings can only imitate imperfectly by way of *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*).

The approach of rNam rgyal grags pa (as a bKa' brgyud scholar) is most probably rooted in *Tshad ma rigs gzhung rgya mtsho* by the 7th Karma pa. Here we find a similar division in similar context with the explanation of the relation between the two types of *pramāṇa*. The 7th Karma pa says:

With the essential *pramāṇa* which is to be achieved there is associated a conventional *pramāṇa* as a means of achieving it. The particular case of faultless eye cognition grasping a form shows what is *pramāṇa*, since it is non-deceptive cognition [grasping] a form for the first time.⁶

The essential *pramāṇa* is contrasted here with a conventional one. In the case of the latter, the 7th Karma pa uses also the term *mtshan gzhi* having in mind a particular object referred to by the definition. That is probably the origin of the epithet "exemplary" referred by rNam rgyal grags pa to *pramāṇa* understood as *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*. The 7th Karma pa continues with the following description of Buddha as the ideal *pramāṇa*:

He knows directly all dharmas as objects to be cognized in what they are and how they are. Determining that one can successfully liberate all beings without exception because of having the unique

⁵ Steinkellner (1983), p. 276.

⁶ Karma pa (1999), p. 23: *bsgrub bya don gyi tshad ma de nyid sgrub byed tha snyed pa'i tshad ma dang sbyar na/ gzugs 'dzin mig shes ma 'khrul ba mtshan gzhi tshad mar mtshon/ gzugs la dang por bslu ba med pa can gyi shes pa yin pas so.*

consciousness which is non-erroneous, is the reasoning establishing that Bhagavān is valid cognition being the non-erroneous refuge. Or else, Bhagavān is *pramāṇa* [for the following reason:] he does not let beings make errors because of being familiar with great compassion that works for the benefit of all beings; he has abandoned two veils and showed the path to higher rebirths and unquestionable perfection which is the method of achieving the state of Sugata [which was not known before] recognizing the very nature. He obtained the unique cognition that has the power to protect from perversion from [the above mentioned states] and through diverse states of mind he acts for the temporal and ultimate benefit of beings. Having the ability to achieve the goal through the cause which is the path in its abundance, he is the stable and non-erroneous refuge.⁷

The term “essential *pramāṇa*” the 7th Karma pa used before refers, of course, to Buddha himself. In the non-erroneous way Buddha leads beings directly to the ultimate goal and thus is literally *pramāṇa*, which is essential and much higher than exemplary or conventional *pramāṇa*. Buddha is a perfect state of mind showing compassionately the way things ultimately are. Both *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* are mere similitudes of that state, thus not essential. Buddha as the essential *pramāṇa* is described by the 7th Karma pa as: full recognition of the Four Noble Truths that were not known before; he then continues “Here one has to add also the exemplary *pramāṇa* which shows what should be shown.”⁸ What should be shown is ultimately the state of Buddha. Exemplary *pramāṇa* leads to that state showing all that is needed for achieving it and once that state is achieved, the Four Noble Truths are revealed through the act of essential *pramāṇa* Buddha is capable of.

When the 7th Karma pa gives the whole list of the qualities that make Buddha *tshad ma'i skyes bu* and thus essential *pramāṇa*, none of them are an ideal form of *anumāna* and *pramāṇa*. This is in fact the approach of Dignāga, which is very different form that of Dharmakīrti (stressed very often in Tibetan commentaries):

⁷ Karma pa (1999), p. 23: *shes bya ji lta ba dang ji snyed pa'i chos thams cad mngon sum du mkhyen pa la bslu ba med pa can gyi shes pa khyad par can dang ldan pas na 'gro ba ma lus pa 'khor ba las sgröl ba'i don byed nus pa dngos po'i gnas tshul la grubs pa de ni bcom ldan 'das mi bslu ba'i skyabs gnas tshad mar sgrub pa'i rigs pa yin no/ yang na bcom ldan 'das ni tshad ma yin te/ 'gro na thams cad la phan par bzhed pa'i thugs rje chen po goms pa'i dbang gis 'gro ba rnam bslu ba med par rang nyid gyis sgrub gnyis spangs shing gnas lugs rtogs pa'i bde bar gshegs pa de thob pa'i thabs mngon mtho nges legs kyi lam bstan nas de'i mi mthun phyogs las skyob par nus pas can gyi shes pa khyad par can dang ldan cing bsam pa phun sum tshogs pa'i sgo nas 'gro ba'i gnas skabs dang mthar thug gi don thams cad byed/ lam sbyor ba phun tshogs kyi rgyu las don de thob nus par gnas pa de ni gtan du mi bslu ba'i skyob par grub pa'i phyir.*

⁸ Karma pa (1999), p. 30: *'di ni mtshon bya mtshon byed dpe'i tshad ma la yang sbyor bar bya ste.*

Generally according to the tradition of texts on reasoning [*rtog ge*] it means that first after identifying what is known as valid cognition for those that have a philosophical system and those who do not have one, there comes the moment for proving that the teacher similar to that is the embodiment of valid cognition; because after identifying that [valid cognition as] non-erroneous [*mi bslu*] clarifying of the object not known before, later it is said [by Dharmakīrti] that “Bhagavān that has it is valid cognition itself.”⁹

Here, Go rams pa summarizes the approach of Dharmakīrti from the *pramāṇasiddhi* chapter, where he first describes valid cognition and then claims that Buddha having the above mentioned qualities can be called *pramāṇa* (PV II 7 a). This is also the reason for Go rams pa to call him *tshad ma'i skyes bu*. Dignāga, however, gives another reason for calling Buddha *pramāṇa* or, as the 7th Karma pa would say, the essential *pramāṇa*:

Because of His perfection in cause (*hetu*) and effect (*phala*), is to be regarded as the personification of the means of cognition (*pramāṇa-bhūta*).¹⁰

And it is noteworthy that no type of *pramāṇa* is referred to in the explanation of this statement, in Dignāga's autocommentary which runs as follows:

‘Cause’ means perfection of intention (*āśaya*) and perfection in practice (*prayoga*). Perfection of intention means the [Buddha's] taking as His purpose the benefit of [all] living beings (*jaḡad-dhitaṣitā*). Perfection in practice means [His] being the [true] teacher (*śāstṛtva*) because He teaches all people. ‘Effect’ means the attainment of his own objectives (*svārtha*) as well as those of others (*parārtha*). Attainment of His own objectives is [evidenced] by [His] being *sugata* in the following three senses: (i) that of being praiseworthy (*praśastatva*), as is a handsome person (*surūpa*), (ii) the sense of being beyond a return [to *saiṃsāra*] (*apunar-āvṛtṭy-ārtha*), as one who is fully cured of fever (*sunāṣṭa-jvara*), and (iii) the sense of being complete (*niḥśeṣārtha*), as is a jar wholly filled (*supūrṇa-ghaṭa*). [...] Attainment of the objectives of others is [seen from His] being a protector (*tāyitva*) in the sense of [His] saving the world.¹¹

⁹ Go rams pa (2006), p. 45: *spyir rtog ge'i gzhung lugs las/ dang po grub mtha' la zhugs thams cad la grags pa'i tshad ma ngos bzung nas/ de dang 'dra ba'i ston pa tshad ma'i skyes bur bsgrub pa skabs kyi don yin te/ mi bslu ma shes don gsal ngos bzung nas/ de'i 'og tul de ldan bcom ldan tshad ma nyid ces gsungs pa'i phyir.*

¹⁰ Hattori (1968), p. 23.

¹¹ Hattori (1968), p. 23.

As we can see, there are many reasons for calling Buddha *pramāṇa*, but none of them is *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*. None of the two *pramāṇas* makes Buddha the embodiment of *pramāṇa*. What makes Buddha a person who is *pramāṇa* is his intention to realize the benefit of all beings, his being a perfect teacher, and his attainment.¹² According to these characteristics *pramāṇa* is impartial and universal, in the sense that it aims at realizing the benefit of all beings and that it can be a guidance for all people (the perfect teacher is the one who can teach everybody), and guarantees the attainment of the goal (here defined as one's own objectives and others' objectives).

In the light of the above considerations we can thus distinguish two approaches:

1. Buddha as embodiment of valid cognition explained in terms of valid cognition.
2. Valid cognition is explained in terms of Buddha as essential valid cognition or *pramāṇabhūta*.

These two approaches are very important when analyzing the definition of valid cognition. In the first approach, the question about definition of valid cognition, namely why valid cognition has two essential qualities of non-erroneousness and novelty, can be answered only in terms of the epistemological system in which they play a crucial role. And then, as a consequence, Buddha is called *pramāṇabhūta*, since he has two types of *pramāṇa*: *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*.

In the second approach, valid cognition as *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* is actually defined in terms of Buddha himself as essential *pramāṇa*. If the Buddha as essential *pramāṇa*, was explained in terms of *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* (as in the first approach), thus in terms of exemplary *pramāṇa*, he would not be essential *pramāṇa* anymore. The primal category would be *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* thus becoming essential *pramāṇa*, in light of which one can understand Buddha as *tshad ma'i skyes bu*. Thus, in the second approach the definition of valid cognition - as the copy of Buddha as essential *pramāṇa* - is the way it is because Buddha as the original, essential *pramāṇa* is the way he is. That is why in this approach the explanation of novelty in the definition of valid cognition should primarily refer not to the epistemology of *pramāṇa* system but to the Buddha himself.

¹² Here we have strong premises to take Buddhist *pramāṇa* system as a part of Buddhist eschatological project. Cf. Jackson (1994).

Novelty of *pramāṇa* in Western research

In the Western research on *pramāṇa*, the notion of novelty was so far either taken for granted as obvious or explained only according to the first above mentioned approach, as a kind of necessary requirement of the *pramāṇa* system.

In 1975, Satkari Mookerjee's *The Buddhist philosophy of Universal Flux* wrote:

The function of an accredited instrument of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is completed when the object is apprehended. The volitional urge and the attainment follow as necessary consequences. It follows, therefore, that an instrument of knowledge fulfils itself by making known an object which is not cognized before.¹³

Despite the claim of the author, from the fact that knowledge is completed when the object is apprehended, it does not follow at all that the object mentioned must be the one and only the one that is not known before. Every next proper apprehension of the object presents the very same content and in this sense is equally informative and equally correct. If you do not know something more and new but you comprehend the same, you are not misled and still you know. This was actually the line of argument of Akalaṅka from *Tattoārtharājavārtika* refuting the requirement of novelty, by giving the example of a lamp illuminating again the same object – the lamp remains the same and does exactly the same; so should be the case with *pramāṇa*.

And the fact that cognition can be considered valid not only when it is non-erroneous, but also when the object grasped was not cognized before, is quite surprising for the Western reader. As in Western philosophy, as long as cognition presents an object properly without mistakes, it is considered valid no matter how many times the same object is grasped.

Professor Katsura in his *Dharmakīrti's Theory of Truth* suggests that the origin of the idea of novelty can be just common sense or, as a Buddhist philosopher would say, worldly opinion:

According to Dharmakīrti, the object of *pramāṇa* should be something new. This idea is probably derived from a sort of common sense belief that knowledge is meaningless unless it contains some new information.¹⁴

¹³ Mookerjee (1975), p. 273.

¹⁴ Katsura (1984), p. 224.

With conjecture however, it is hard to discuss and unfortunately, Professor Katsura does not offer any hint supporting this hypothesis. Since the above mentioned Akalañka criticized the idea of novelty with such a common sense example, as a lamp again and again illuminating the same thing, maybe equally probable would be the conjecture that the opposite is the case.

And even though novelty could be a kind of common idea concerning cognition, it still does not explain introducing this kind of common view into any philosophical system, which is very often counter-intuitive for common sense (like vijñānavāda for example). If, however, a philosopher decides to follow some common-sense intuitions anyway, he must have some philosophical reasons to introduce them into his philosophical system. It also seems improbable that such a strict philosopher as Dharmakīrti follows common sense to such extent that he nonchalantly introduces a second – obvious – definition of *pramāṇa* (as cognition presenting the object unknown before) that has caused so many problems for interpreters.

When Georges B.J. Dreyfus addresses the question of novelty in Dharmakīrti's system he explains novelty as a necessary requirement of that *pramāṇa* system. He says:

The requirement of novelty as stated by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti was not meant to exclude the second moment of perception from being valid but the conceptual judgments that follow perceptions. The Nyāya take such judgments to be perceptual. Hence, their exclusion from validity is important for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti in maintaining the integrity of their system. The definition of *valid cognition* as newly nondeceptive cognition and the discussion of whether the second moment of perception should be excluded from being valid are new developments not directly related to the refutation of the Nyāya view.¹⁵

The requirement of novelty is shown by Dreyfus to be justified in terms of the role it plays in the Buddhist *pramāṇa* system; this notion was thus introduced for strictly philosophical purposes, being exclusion of conceptual judgments following perceptions. And later for some philosophers, it became the argument for refuting the second moment of perception. Thus, Dreyfus interpreting the definition of valid cognition, does not refer to Buddha as the essential valid cognition. He takes a systematic approach restricted to the analysis of the philosophical system of *pramāṇa* and concludes:

¹⁵ Dreyfus (1997), p. 304.

For Dharmakīrti, however, novelty is not part of the definition of valid cognition. It is simply a consequence of his view of perception. We find confirmation that Dharmakīrti requires novelty in *Drop of Reason*, where he also defines *valid cognition*: “With respect to this, valid cognition is only that which first sees an uncommon object.” Dharmakīrti further states that “Because [a recollection] apprehends an [already] completely seen aspect, it is not a valid cognition. [This is so for the following reason:] having seen the uncommon [real thing] one states ‘ [this is] an uncommon thing’ [but such a judgment] does not realize any previously unrealized object.” As we saw while examining Dharmakīrti’s ontology, real things are individual objects that fulfill strict identity conditions explained in terms of spatio-temporal location and entity. These are the objects perception apprehends, a process that in turn induces perceptual judgments. These judgments realize already perceived objects and do not bring any new information to the cognitive process. Hence, they are not valid. Thus, there is clear evidence that for Dharmakīrti validity entails novelty, although novelty is not a definitional requirement for validity.¹⁶

Therefore, according to Dreyfus novelty was a result of developing the system of *pramāṇa*, and it had to be introduced as an important factor in defining validity. Novelty is thus explained in terms of the system it is a part of – the outline and aim of the *pramāṇa* theory required introducing the notion of novelty in order to refute Nyāya. However, the quotation from Dharmakīrti given above by Dreyfus saying “valid cognition is only that which first sees an uncommon object”, looks very much just like defining *pramāṇa* in terms of novelty. The fact that novelty is very much connected with validity or even that validity entails novelty, does not necessarily prove that novelty was introduced as a consequence of the concept of validity. It is also possible that assuming novelty at the outset, Dharmakīrti could formulate his theory of validity the way it includes novelty.

The systematic approach, as that of Dreyfus,¹⁷ showing novelty as a result of developing the system of *pramāṇa*, is philosophically

¹⁶ Dreyfus (1997), pp. 303-4. The same is claimed by Dunne: “This way of defining an instrumental cognition later comes under attack, for subsequent commentators, probably including Śākyabuddhi, maintaining that since only novel cognitions are trustworthy, an explicit statement of novelty is not necessary. Without going into details of such arguments, we need only to note that such interpretations do not abandon the criterion of novelty; they simply subsume it under trustworthiness.” Dunne (2004), p. 309.

¹⁷ Similar approach to Dreyfus’ one is taken up by Dunne who also tries to justify novelty by showing it as necessary part in *pramāṇa* system: “Thus, if we can combine Devendrabuddhi’s interpretation with what we know of Dharmakīrti’s soteriology, novelty plays a crucial role in Dharmakīrti’s theory of instrumentality, for it preserves the instrumentality of a class of inferences that are central to his soteriology. This is certainly Devendrabuddhi’s opinion, and for him the overall

consistent, but ignores certain historical determinants of development as highlighted by the 7th Karma pa. And the obvious historical determinant was the understanding of situation of Buddha himself as *pramāṇabhūta*.

Novelty in the 7th Karma pa's commentary

In his commentary, the 7th Karma pa gives another reason for introducing the requirement of novelty. The reason is a historical one and so far has not been discussed in Western literature. It is explained when the 7th Karma pa discusses the problem of two definitions of *pramāṇa*. Contrary to the Sa skya tradition (that was the main inspiration for the bKa' brgyud *pramāṇa* system), the 7th Karma pa maintains two definitions of valid cognition and shows its historical background:

The meaning and intention of giving the two definitions by learned [Dharmakīrti] is as follows. The followers of Śiva say that Śiva is permanent and is self-arisen *pramāṇa*; that is why in order to refute them [Dharmakīrti] said that our Bhagavān is the one who possesses the valid cognition that clarifies the object previously unknown. He talked about clarifying the object [previously] unknown to show that that our teacher is the embodiment of *pramāṇa* since by the power of meditation he recognized for the first time the nature of the Four [Noble] Truths that were the object unknown at the time when he was an ordinary being. By way of these teachings he showed that Bhagavān is particularly higher than Śiva described as the permanent and self-arisen knowledge, since they do not claim that Śiva can cognize for the first time the nature of things not known before. A statement of non-erroneousness [of cognition] can not undermine this kind of wrong conceptions, since they claim that Śiva is without error.¹⁸

definition of an instrumental cognition therefore has two aspects: first, an instrumental cognition is a trustworthy awareness; this warrants the claim that an instrumental cognition is 'what makes one obtain' (*prāpaka*) one's aim. And second, an instrumental cognition must 'reveal what has not been known (*ajñātārthaprakāśa*); this warrants the claim that an instrumental cognition is what "motivates action" (*pravartaka*)." Dunne (2004), pp. 308-9.

¹⁸ Karma pa (1999), pp. 19-20: *dbang phyug pa dag dbang phyug rtag pa rang byung gi tshad mar 'dod pas/ de dag sun dbyung bar bya ba'i phyir du nged kyi bcom ldan 'das ni sngar ma shes pa'i don gsal bar byed pa'i tshad ma dang ldan pa'ang yin tel/ sngar so so skye bo'i dus na ma shes pa'i don bden pa bzhi'i gnas lugs sgom stobs kyi gsar du shes pa'i phyir na kho bo cag gi ston pa tshad ma'i skyes bu'o zhes bstan pa'i phyir na shes don gsal smos la/ de ltar bstan pas dbang phyug rang byung gi rtag pa'i tshad mar 'dod pa las bcom ldan 'das khyad par du 'phag par bstan par 'gyur tel/ dbang phyug gis de kho na nyid ma shes pa gsar du shes par mi 'dod pa'i phyir ro/ blus med can smos pas ni de lta bu'i log rtog sel bar mi nus tel/ dbang phyug kyang bslu ba med par 'dod pa'i phyir ro.*

The reason for introducing the notion of novelty into the definition of *pramāṇa* is rooted in the polemical situation Buddhism found itself in.¹⁹ Buddha and later Buddhist masters did not teach in a philosophical vacuum, but within a strong philosophical-religious culture, this situation made it necessary to show his teachings as a new development. In his first teachings in Sarnath, Buddha repeats quite a few times that his teachings are the ones that were not heard before, which obviously is the first hint for introducing the notion of novelty into Buddhist epistemology. It seems that novelty was probably even more important in this particular historical situation, since every serious philosophical tradition cannot do without an obvious claim to non-erroneousness. Thus Buddhist teachings must have been not only non-erroneous but also new.

Giving the first formula in order to eliminate everything which is not relevant [to the concept of *pramāṇa*], he proved that valid cognition is non-erroneous, and since this is the opinion widespread all over the world, he gave the definition which is relevant to worldly opinion. Giving the second formula in order to eliminate wrong conceptions, he gave the definition relevant to the etymology of the term *pramāṇa*, since it means: first appraisal. That is why each of them can demonstrate [what is the valid cognition itself].²⁰

It is worth noticing that it is not the notion of novelty that is referred to here as a common sense widespread concept, but the idea of non-erroneousness. Novelty is what makes Buddhist *pramāṇa* so exceptional among all epistemological systems claiming non-erroneousness, and it is novelty that in the end makes Buddhist epistemology real *pramāṇa*. For, as the 7th Karma pa says, novelty was introduced for the sake of eliminating wrong conceptions [*log rtog*], which at first sight seems a more fitting description of non-erroneousness. Novelty is thus shown to be an argument for non-erroneousness. What is at play here is probably a kind of philosophical rhetoric aimed at showing that non-Buddhist philosophical systems are erroneous, because of following wrong conceptions that can be eliminated by *pramāṇa* incorporating novelty. For if Śivaist *pramāṇa* was as perfect as Buddhist, it would proclaim the Four Noble Truths. Buddhist *pramāṇa* is non-erroneous,

¹⁹ In Western literature I found only one mention about it in the footnote in Hattori (1968), p. 74, where he refers to Jinendrabuddhi's interpretation of the term *pramāṇabhūta*.

²⁰ Karma pa (1999), p. 20: *snga ma ni rigs mi mthun sel ba'i dbang du byas nas/ tshad ma tshad ma ni bslus ba med pa can du rigs pas grub cing/ 'jig rten du yang grags pa'i phyir 'jig rten grags pa dang mthun pa'i mtshan nyid bstan pa yin la/ phyi ma ni log rtog sel ba'i dbag du byas nas/ pra ma Na dang por 'jal ba la 'jug pas sgra bshad dang mthun pa'i mtshan nyid bstan pa yin pas gang rung re res kyang mtshon par nus so.*

since it discovered the Four Noble Truths for the first time; and it discovered the Four Noble Truths for the first time because in fact it is first non-erroneous *pramāṇa*. We can see that novelty and non-erroneousness are in fact two interconnected notions, but the reason for that is more the historical situation. Thus, the systematic relationship of these two notions in the definition of valid cognition does not seem to be the result of purely philosophical speculation. At least this is the picture shown in the bKa' brgyud tradition.

The 7th Karma pa's approach to the definition of *pramāṇa*

Such an approach also throws some light on the approach to the two definitions of *pramāṇa* given by Dharmakīrti. The 7th Karma pa agrees with Sa skya Pa76ita, that having two different definitions would amount to having two different objects defined. Nevertheless, he follows Devendrabuddhi with his two definitions - against Prajñākara-gupta²¹ - claiming that:

There is no fault in Devendrabuddhi's claim, since firstly, non-erroneous knowledge and clarifying the object not cognized before are not definitions of different meaning.²²

For the 7th Karma pa both definitions have the same meaning, one cannot even treat them as two formulas, being parts of one definition, since this is also the view he rejects. In the historical approach they were shown to be inseparable. Thus, each of them can demonstrate *pramāṇa* which is a quite obvious view, when we remember that the real *pramāṇa* is Buddha himself as *tshad ma'i skyes bu*. He is simply one and the same person, who essentially cognizes non-erroneously the Four Noble Truths for the first time. Since *pramāṇabhūta* is this way, how could *pramāṇa* be the other way round?

Buddha as the essential *pramāṇa* determines the shape of any exemplary *pramāṇa* as possessing two crucial qualities of non-erroneousness and novelty. To say that Buddha is the *pramāṇa* because of characteristics of non-erroneous cognition and making clear the object not cognized before, is not so much proof of him being a *pramāṇa*, but more explanation of what is meant by that. The real proof of Buddha being the *pramāṇa* is described by the 7th Karma pa as follows:

²¹ Analysis of *pramāṇa* definitions given by them cf. Dreyfus (1991).

²² Karma pa (1999), p. 19: *slob dpon lha dbang blo'i bzhed pa de la skyon med de/ dang por mi bslu ba'i rig pa dang/ ma shes don gsal gyi rig pa gnyis mtshan nyid don gzhan ma yin pa'i phyir dang.*

Determining that one can successfully liberate all beings without exception because of having special consciousness which is non-erroneous, is the reasoning establishing that Bhagavān is the valid cognition being non-erroneous refuge. Or else, Bhagavān is the *pramāṇa* [for the following reason:] he does not let the beings make errors because of being familiar with great compassion that works for the benefit of all beings; he has abandoned two veils and showed the path to higher rebirths and unquestionable perfection which is the method of achieving the state of Sugata [which was not known before] recognizing the very nature.²³

The reason why Buddha has two characteristics of non-erroneousness and novelty so crucial for the exemplary *pramāṇa* as *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*, is the fact that he is the essential *pramāṇa* in the first place. Thus, explaining the definition of *pramāṇa* solely in terms of a philosophical system does not give the whole picture. It can be non-erroneous when it is coherent with Dharmakīrti's philosophical presuppositions, but is not complete, since it ignores other determinants that can be traced when analyzing *tshad ma'i skyes bu* as essential *pramāṇa*. That is probably why only by joining the two approaches discussed here can one acquire a proper point of departure for fully understanding the Buddhist *pramāṇa* system. This is at least the view taken by the 7th Karma pa at the beginning of his commentary:

Since he has those two characteristics of *pramāṇa*: non-erroneous cognition and making clear the object not cognized [before], he is established as the very *pramāṇa*. Adding here the essential *pramāṇa* which is to be achieved, since he taught the most perfect path to temporary higher rebirths and the ultimate because of the reason that he developed the rich motivation of benefitting non-erroneously all beings, he provides refuge from lower rebirths, samsara and misery. Showing an abundance [of methods] to the ones who didn't cognize this path before, he made disciples newly cognize Sugata [state] not known before. That is why having two characteristics of *pramāṇa* Bhagavān is established as the *pramāṇa*. *The Ornament*²⁴ puts it as follows:

²³ Karma pa (1999), p. 23: *bslu ba med pa can gyi shes pa khyad par can ldan pas na 'gro ba ma lus pa 'khor ba las sgröl ba'i don byed nus pa dngos po'i gnas tshul la grub pa de ni bcom ldan 'das mi bslu ba'i skyabs gnas tshad mar sgrub pa'i rigs pa yin no/ yang na bcom ldan 'das ni tshad ma yin te/ 'gro ba thams cad la phan par bzhed pa'i thugs rjes chen po goms pa'i dbang gis 'gro ba rnams bslu ba med par rang nyid kyis sgrub gnyis spangs shing gnas lugs rtogs pa'i bde bar gshegs pa de thobs mngon mtho nges legs kyi lam bstan.*

²⁴ The text meant here is *Tshad ma ste bdun rgyan gyi me tog* by bCom ldan rig pa'i ral gri (1250–1330). Confirming quotation from bCom ldan rig pa'i ral gri is just one of many proofs of strong influence of the *Sa skya* tradition on the *bKa' brgyud pramāṇa* system, even though there are places in the Karma pa's commentary where he criticizes Sa skya Pa76ita himself. The study of these differences would

Bhagavān also perceives impeccably these two characteristics, since giving the teachings he made [disciples] see the path to higher rebirths, purification and liberation, and he showed only what was not seen by Viṣṇu, Śiva etc.²⁵

Starting with both: explaining Buddha himself in terms of *pramāṇa* and explaining *pramāṇa* in terms of Buddha as the essential *pramāṇa* seems to be a vicious circle. Modern hermeneutics teaches, however, that this kind of situation is sometimes not only unavoidable, but also fruitful. It can bring us not only to a better understanding of the very definition of valid cognition, but also of Buddhist epistemology with its eschatological commitments.²⁶

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be probably much more interesting research than tracing points of convergence. Cf. Przybyslawski (2016).

²⁵ Karma pa (1999), p. 31: *dang por bslu ba med pa'i shes pa dang ma shes don gyi gsal byed de tshad ma'i mtshan nyid de gnyis dang ldan pas na bcom ldan 'das tshad ma nyid du grub bo/ bsgrub bya don gyi tshad ma la sbyar nas 'gro ba thams cad la bslu ba med par phan par bzhed pa'i bsam pa phun sum tshogs pa'i rgyu las gnas skabs mngon mtho dang/ mthar thug nges par legs pa'i lam gsungs pas/ sngon 'gro dang srid pa dang dman pa las skyob par mdzad pa'i phyir dang/ sngar lam de lta bu ma shes pa sbyor ba phun sum tshogs pa ston pas rang nyid kyiis dang por mkhyen pa'i bde bar gshegs pa gdul bya la gsar du gsal bar shes par mdzad pas tshad ma'i mtshan nyid de gnyis ka dang ldan pa'i phyir bcom ldan 'das tshad ma nyid du grub bo/ ji skad du rgyan las/ mtshan nyid gnyis po 'di ni bcom ldan 'das la yang ma god par snang stel/ ji ltar nye bar bstan pas mtho ris dang byang grol gyi lam mthong bar mdzad pa'i phyir dang/ khyab 'jug dang dbang phyug la sogs pas ma mthong ba de kho na ston par mdzad pa'i phyir ro/ zhes so.*

²⁶ Cf. Jackson (1994).

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