

A Tibetan History of Lesser Knowledge: The Coming of Poetry in The Five Minor Fields of Learning

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Introduction

In an intellectual tradition that is deeply grounded in Buddhist philosophy and spiritual practices, philological pursuits like the study of poetics, prosody, and poetry, particularly from a medieval perspective, might appear mundane and distraction to one's spiritual life and rhythm. However, Tibetan polymath like Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltsen (hereafter, Sapaṅ, 1182-1251) introduced a wide range of texts and treatises on Indic rhetorical arts that were held as models of classical antiquity to be emulated in literary Tibetan. This turn to Indic rhetorical tradition in Tibet left an indelible mark on Tibetan writing, literature and literary theory. Indic poetic forms, meters, and figures of speech, gave birth to an Indic-inspired genre of writing ornate poetry and prose known widely in Tibetan as *snyan ngag* or *nyé ngak* ("pleasant speech")—a term, which has later come to associate with the entire genre of poetry.

The whole scholarly engagement with Indic literary arts is elevated in Tibetan scholasticism as the five minor fields of learning (*rig gnas chung ba lnga*), following the Indic tradition of classifying knowledge such the five major sciences, eighteen sciences, and sixty-four different 'arts' and 'crafts.' While much has been written about the five major and other categories of knowledge, a discussion on the history and development of the five minor fields of learning has not been closely studied.¹ There is no extensive analysis either on the overall historiography of the five minor fields of learning or on each of the subjects of

¹ My initial inquiry on this topic was a result of my interests in Tibetan commentarial literature on Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*. Since most of these Tibetan commentaries open with a discussion on various forms of knowledge categories in the Indic tradition, I felt the need to provide a historiography of the five minor fields of learning with a focus on the emergence of poetry in this knowledge category. I would like to thank Jonathan Schlesinger, Gedun Rabsal, and Stacy Van Vleet for their contribution to this paper. I presented this article at the Association for Asian Studies conference held in Denver, Colorado, March 21-24, 2019, and I would like to thank

the five minor categories. This paper, therefore, traces the origin of the five minor fields of learning with a specific focus on how “poetry” or *nyé ngak* as a form of knowledge emerged in this Tibetan Buddhist classification of knowledge. Using eighteenth century Khamtrul Tenzin Choekyi Nyima’s (Khams sprul bstan ‘dzin chos kyi nyi ma, 1730-1779/1780) argument that instead of “poetry” (*nyé ngak*) it should be “poetics” (Tib. *tshig rgyan*; Skt. *alaṃkāra*)² in the five minor fields of learning, I argue that the enumeration of the five minor fields of learning underwent several iterations before arriving at what we now know as: *snyan ngag* (poetry, *kāvya*), *sdeb sbyor* (prosody, *chandaḥ*), *mngon brjod* (lexicography, *abhidhāna*), *skar rtsis* (astrology, *jyotiṣa*), and *zlos gar* (dramaturgy, *nāṭaka*).³ Although, Tibetans attribute Sapaṇ as the founder of the five minor fields of learning, there is no philological reference in Sapaṇ’s works about the comparative category of five major and minor fields. From what I have found, Pang Lotsāwa’s (1276-1342) classification of the five minor fields of learning is the earliest—and probably closest to the original Indian classification. Later Tibetan intellectuals from the post-Pang restructured and reformulated these five minor fields of knowledge starting from Narthang Lotsāwa’s (15th century), who excluded “poetics” and included “poetry”. In this essay, I first discuss secondary scholarship on the five minor fields of learning in English that shows the different enumeration of the five minor fields of learning, and then explore when exactly did this comparative category of the five major sciences and minor fields of learning appear in the Tibetan intellectual tradition by going through some of the earliest works on the historiography of Tibetan literary arts (*rig gnas*, hereafter, *rikné*) by Taktsang Lotsāwa (Stag tshang lo tsā ba shes rab rin chen, 1405-1477), Dartod (‘Dar stod dgra ‘dul dbang po, date unknown but active in the 16th-17th century), and Kālapāda (Dus ‘khor zhabs drung, 17th century), and bringing these texts in conversation with the Tibetan commentarial literature on Indic poetic treatise *Kāvyaḍarśa* (hereafter, *The Mirror*).

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² I am translating *alaṃkāra* as poetics for the Tibetan word *tshig rgyan*, but traditionally poetics in the Indic tradition was known by several different names at several different times, such as *kriyākalpa* or *kāvya-kriyākalpa*. See Warder 1989:9. A more detailed analysis on the Tibetan word *tshig rgyan* or *tshig gi rgyan* remains to be done.

³ In the five minor fields of learning, the term is commonly used as a Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit term *nāṭaka* (drama or play). Different characters in classical Sanskrit drama speak different Prakrit dialects as opposed to the protagonists who speak the “refined” Sanskrit language. See K. Mishra and Kapstein 2009. For more on the term *zlos gar* see Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy 2017.

Rikné: The Domains of Knowledge

The Tibetan classification of knowledge springs from the Indic knowledge system commonly known as *Vidyāsthana Pañcavidyā* (*rig pa'i gnas lnga*); the actual provenance of this knowledge category, whether in Hinduism or Buddhism is not clear to me.⁴ The Tibetan term *rig gnas* (*rikné*) is commonly used as a contraction of the phrase *rig pa'i gnas*, which means the domain or location or seats (*gnas*) of 'knowledge' (*rig pa*), and it is a direct rendering of the Sanskrit term *Vidyāsthana*. This term *rikné* first appeared in Tibetan sources in the eighth century lexicography *Mahāvīyutpatti* (*Bye brag tu rtoḡs par byed pa chen po*)⁵ that was compiled to help standardize Tibetan translations of the Sanskrit Buddhist texts:

- 1) The science of language (*śabda vidyā* Tib. *sgra rig pa*) 声明⁶
- 2) The science of logic (*hetu vidyā* Tib. *tshad ma rig pa*) 因明
- 3) The science of medicine (*cikitsā vidyā* Tib. *gso ba rig pa*) 医方明
- 4) The science of fine arts and crafts (*śilpa-karma-sthāna vidyā* Tib. *bzo rig pa*) 工巧明
- 5) The science of spirituality (*adhyātma vidyā* Tib. *nang don rig pa*) 内明

While talking about the five sciences, authors in this tradition often quote the Sanskrit Buddhist text *Mahāyāna Sūtrālamkāra kārīkā*, where Asaṅga (fl. 4th century C.E.) wrote that the three purposes for the study of these five sciences are: a) to refute others (by studying grammar and logic), b) to help others (by studying medicine and fine arts and crafts), and c) to achieve omniscience (by studying Buddhism).⁷ In the Tibetan tradition, the first four sciences is also referred to as a 'common fields of learning' (*thun mong rig gnas*) i.e. to be studied across various

⁴ According to Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, the classification of Five Major Sciences is a uniquely Mahayana Buddhist tradition of classifying knowledge. See, Rinpoche 2012:116–17.

⁵ This lexicography contains 285 topics with more than nine thousand entries.

⁶ The Chinese translation was added along with the Mongolian and the Machu entries in the late eighteenth century under the auspices of the Third Changkya Rolpai Dorjee (Lcangs skya Qutugtu Lcangs rgya rol pa'i rdo rje, 1717-1786) at the Qing court. It is interesting to note that the Chinese word *ming* (明) is used for the translation of the Tibetan term *rig pa*, instead of *xue* (学). See *Bstan 'gyur las sgra bye brag rtoḡs byed chen mo bod rgya shan sbyar ma*. 藏汉对照丹珠尔佛学分类词典 Anon 2001:93, 217.

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on this five major sciences, see Gold 2007:15.

Indic religious traditions while the fifth is 'exclusive' (*thung mong min pa'i rig gnas*) to the Buddhist tradition.⁸ It is generally believed that there are no forms of 'knowledge' that lie outside the domains of the five major sciences (*rig gnas che ba lnga*); as a matter of fact, all branches of traditional knowledge including the five minor fields of learning, eighteen sciences, fall under the umbrella of the five major sciences.⁹ Entries on the five sciences, and the eighteen sciences (*rig pa'i gnas bco brgyad*) in this Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicography¹⁰ makes the earliest reference of the *rikné* category in Tibetan literary tradition. However, with regard to the five minor fields of learning there was no mention of it in this Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicography, if this classification of knowledge was in practice in the Indic tradition. In fact, none of these major or minor classifications can be found in this eighth-century lexicography. So, when did this comparative category emerge? Who was the first Tibetan scholar to introduce this term the five minor fields of learning? Did Tibetans invent this classification of knowledge? And most importantly what is the historiography of the five minor fields of learning? These questions enrich our understanding about the history and development of this knowledge category in Tibet, and shed light on how Tibetan intellectuals set out to reconfigure and, later, attempt to formalize this knowledge category. Before going into the primary Tibetan sources let us take a quick look at the secondary scholarship on the five minor fields of learning in both English and secondary Tibetan sources.

Western scholarship on various aspects of Tibetan civilization peaked in the last several decades but there is no scholarship dedicated to the historiography of five minor fields of learning. Furthermore, when it comes to the enumeration of the five minor fields of learning, scholars have simply reproduced the following enumeration and there are very few discussions on what constitutes as the five minor fields of learning and how it changed over time. From Giuseppe Tucci up to now, Tibetan and Buddhist studies scholars listed slightly different enumeration of the five minor fields of learning:

⁸ KUN-SHES, p. 2.

⁹ ZHU-CHEN-RIG-GNAS, p. 8.

¹⁰ See *Bye brag tu rtogs par byed pa chen po* in the miscellaneous volume 115 of the Tibetan Canon. Anon 2004:66, 150–52.

Table 1.1 Five Minor Fields of Learning as listed in English Sources

	Giuseppe Tucci ¹¹	David Jackson ¹²	Lhundup Sopa, José Cabezón and Roger Jackson ¹³	Ekaterina Sobkovyak ¹⁴
1	Grammar (sgra)	Grammar (sgra)	Grammar (sgra)	Poetics (<i>snyan ngag</i>)
2	Rhetoric (<i>snyan ngag</i>)	Poetics (<i>snyan ngag</i>)	Poetics (<i>snyan ngag</i>)	Synonyms (mngon brjod)
3	Lexicon (mngon brjod)	Lexicography (mngon brjod)	Lexicography (mngon brjod)	Metrics (sdeb sbyor)
4	Drama (zlos gar)	Drama (zlos gar)	Drama (zlos gar)	Drama (zlos gar)
5	Astrology (skar rtsis)	Metrics (sdeb sbyor)	Metrics (sdeb sbyor)	Astrology (skar rtsis)

These enumerations differ because enumeration in the primary Tibetan tradition changed over time. In English, Tucci was probably the first western scholar to enumerate the five minor fields of learning in the context of various subjects the Fifth Dalai Lama studied. David Jackson, Geshe Lhundup Sopa, José Cabezón and Roger Jackson used the sixteenth century Sakya master Panchen Shakya Chogden's (Mchog ldan dri med legs pa'i blo gros) enumeration given in his commentary of Sapaṅ's *The Entrance Gate for the Wise*, this is probably closest to the original enumeration of the five minor fields of learning that was quoted by early Sakyapa scholars like Pang Lotsāwa.¹⁵ Sobkovyak listed what Longdol Lama (Klong rdol bla ma, 1719-1794) mentioned that was based off Palkhang Lotsāwa's (1456-1539) enumeration that included 'astrology' in place of 'grammar' which is currently taught across various Tibetan schools, universities, and monasteries. And this

¹¹ Tucci translated *rig gnas chung ba lnga* (five minor fields of learning) as "ancillary sciences," see Tucci 1980:94.

¹² Jackson and Sa-skya Panḍi-ta Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan 1987.

¹³ Lhundup Sopa, Cabezón, and Jackson 1996.

¹⁴ Sobkovyak 2015.

¹⁵ Taktsang (KUN-SHES, 10) and Dartod (THA-SNYAD, 458) listed *snyan ngag* (poetry) instead of *tshig rgyan* (poetics).

version is most likely the enumeration that was formulated and standardized during the Fifth Dalai Lama's time: *snyan ngag* (poetry), *mngon brjod* (synonyms), *sdeb sbyor* (prosody), *skar rtsis* (astrology), and *zlos gar* (drama).

However, one major setback that we encounter in charting the historiography of five minor fields of learning is the lack of original reference in Indic sources. With regard to its origin, both Ulrike Roesler and Sobkovyak highlighted the actual parallels between the five minor fields of learning and the Six Vedāṅga of the Indian Vedic tradition¹⁶ and cited Khar'kova, who traced the origin to the Vedāṅga tradition.¹⁷ Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy suggested that this knowledge category is a Tibetan addition to the five major sciences.¹⁸ Contemporary Tibetan scholars like Samdhong Rinpoche calls for more research to find out whether this category of knowledge originated from India or if it is purely a Tibetan invention.¹⁹ While there are some similarities with the Vedāṅga tradition,²⁰ I argue here that the five minor fields of learning was not adopted from the Vedāṅga tradition. Buddhism in general is known for coming up with a list for everything like the four noble truths, the eightfold paths, and the ten Bodhisattva grounds.²¹ It is therefore crucial to go through some of the earliest literature on Indic literary arts in Tibetan, particularly the Sakyapa scholars.

Sapaṅ and the Five Minor Fields of Learning

In the history of Tibetan literary learning and its curricula there are very few moments of rupture and one such moment is the introduction of Indic rhetorical studies by Sapaṅ. Since the development of Tibetan writing system in the seventh century by Thon mi sam bho ta (Thonmi Sambhota) until the twelfth century, much of Tibetan scholasticism remained within the Buddhist orbit. But, from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, for the first time in Tibetan intellectual history, Sapaṅ introduced, translated, and paraphrased series of treatises and texts on Indic rhetorical arts ushering a golden age of philological studies in Tibet rooted in Indic antiquities. As Mathew Kapstein has suggested Indic branches of learning that Sapaṅ introduced in Tibet

¹⁶ Roesler 2015:37.

¹⁷ Sobkovyak 2015:61.

¹⁸ Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy 2017:190.

¹⁹ Samdhong Rinpoche's commentary of *lvā Na dbus bod kyi gtsug lag slob gnyer khang gi rigs glu rtsa 'grel*. See Rinpoche 2012:120; Naga 2006.

²⁰ They are: 1) śikṣā; phonetics, phonology 2) chandaḥ: prosody 3) vyākaraṇa: grammar 4) nirukta: etymology 5) kalpa: ritual instruction 6) jyotiṣa: astrology

²¹ Gethin 1992:149.

reflects Sapaṅ's "ideals of literary learning."²² Interests on Indic literary arts slowly became ideals of beauty par excellence and Indic poetic forms, meter, and aesthetics were imitated and modelled. Sapaṅ himself certainly did not shy away from expressing his erudition in Indic literary studies in his sixty-quatrains poem *Nga brgyad ma* ("Eight Ego Poem"):²³

I am the Grammarian, I am the dialectician
 Among vanquishers of sophists, peerless I am.
 I am learned in metrics. I stand alone in poetics.
 In explaining synonymics, unrivaled I am.
 I know celestial calculation. In exo- and esoteric science
 I have a discerning intellect equaled by none.
 Who can this be? Sakya alone!
 Other scholars are my reflected forms.
 (Mathew Kapstein, 2000)

Sapaṅ is, therefore, seen here displaying the full spectrum of literary arts that he introduced in Tibet, and, it is not an exaggeration to say that, by introducing these new fields of knowledge, Sapaṅ revolutionized curriculum in Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism just like what Europe had experienced during the Italian Renaissance, when Italian humanists revolutionized the pre-existing curriculum by training students in Latin, rhetoric, and poetry.²⁴ Like any other fields of learning, studies on these Indic rhetorical traditions are also framed within the Buddhist rhetoric of omniscience by Tibetan Buddhist literati²⁵ and gradually became an indispensable part of larger Buddhist curriculum in Tibet. At the beginning, Sapaṅ lamented the lack of interests shown by the Tibetans in studying poetry (Tib. *nyé ngak*);²⁶ however, in the post-Sapaṅ period, his lineage holders like Shong and Pang solidified

²² Kapstein 2003:776.

²³ Mathew Kapstein loosely translated as Eight Ego Poem, see Kapstein 2003; but Mathew Kapstein and Prof. Kameshwar Nath Mishra failed to comment on the strict metrical arrangement of fifteen syllables per line with a pattern of even and odd syllables (2, 2, 4, 2, 2, and 3—every foot ends in odd syllables). A marvelous Tibetan poet, yet unknown until now, Gungthang Dewai Lodoe gave *seng ge rnam par rol ba* (a lion's roar or merriment) as the formal name for this poetic device with fifteen syllables per foot; see *Snyan nga gi tshigs su bcad pa dang bstan bcos la sogs pa brtsam pa la nye bar 'jug pa sdeb sbyor pad ma gyas pa'i dga' tshal*, 179 in Gung thang bde ba'i blo gros 2016:179. Sapaṅ later wrote a self-commentary to the above poem and clarified that the above verse was not composed out of his ego but to invoke interests among his readers on Indic literary arts. See Mishra 2015.

²⁴ See Grendler 1989.

²⁵ Gold 2007.

²⁶ MKH, 408. *bod snyan ngag gi tshul la blo ma 'jug pas*. I would like to thank my friend Ngawang Thokmey at Central University for Tibetan Studies, Sarnath for giving me this citation.

this legacy.

This turn to Indic literary studies marked the beginning and diffusion of Indic influenced literary studies in Tibet. The first detailed historiography of this literary studies in Tibet did not appear almost two hundred years after Sapaṅ. Taktsang Lotsāwa, one of the most important literary figures, Sanskritists, and translators of the fifteenth century, in his versified text KUN-SHES²⁷ summarized that until Sapaṅ “there was no tradition of the five minor fields of learning, and until the thirteenth century translator Tharpa Nyima Gyaltzen (Thar pa lo tsA ba nyi ma rgyal mtshan), there was no translation of Sanskrit grammatical text(s) (*sgra mdo*) in Tibet.”²⁸ This oft-cited assessment of Sapaṅ as the founder of ten sciences was later quoted by Dartod (active in the 16th-17th centuries), and most of the later Tibetan scholars. Dartod in his important text on *rikné* THA-SNYAD added more historical depth to the development and diffusion of *rikné* studies in Tibet with a focus on key historical figures that go back to the beginning of the writing system in Tibet. He consolidated the history of *rikné* into three periods: 1) Thonmi Sambhota and the beginning of the Tibetan grammar; 2) the role of three great translators Ska ba dpal brtsegs (9th century), Cog ro klu’i rgyal mtshan, and Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) in leading the three stages of standardization efforts in translating Sanskrit terminologies into Tibetan; 3) the dissemination of *rikné* by Sapaṅ, Shong, (b. 13th century), and Pang.²⁹ What actually sets this periodization apart from the previous works on *rikné* is Dartod’s ability to adopt a long-term view of the historical developments of *rikné* studies in Tibet. Sapaṅ, and most of the thirteenth-fourteenth century scholars, did not give much importance to Thonmi Sambhota other than a mere reference that he developed the Tibetan alphabet.³⁰ Although, Sapaṅ and Taktsang acknowledged Thonmi’s contribution in developing the Tibetan alphabets, they did not accord any place to Thonmi in the overall development of *rikné* studies in Tibet. Regarding the Taktsang’s claim that Sapaṅ was the founder of *rikné* studies in Tibet, Dartod clarified that this does not mean that there were no *rikné* studies in the pre-

²⁷ Since most of the texts composed by Taktsang have the title *kun shes* (“the all-knowing”), the one that is under discussion here *Rig gnas kun shes*.

²⁸ KUN-SHES, 61; THA-SNYAD, 432.

²⁹ THA-SNYAD, 423.

³⁰ However, for Dartod, Thonmi is equally important and rightfully deserves a place in the historiography of *rikné* in Tibet. THA-SNYAD, 423. As illustrated by Roy Andrew Miller in his important work on Tibetan grammar, it appears that for Sapaṅ and intellectuals around his time, they did not have full access to Thonmi’s works and as a result, Thonmi’s contribution was not acclaimed as it was done by Dartod and later intellectuals. For more on the question of the historicity of Thonmi and the actual authorship of the Tibetan grammatical treatises *Lung ston pa rta ba sum cu pa* and *Rtags kyi ’jug pa* see Miller 1976, Miller 1993.

Sapaṅ era as “some aspects of these studies did exist in Tibet either in the form of translations (*gyur*) or explanations (*bshad pa*), but [what Sapaṅ did was] Sapaṅ explicated extensively on each of these ten sciences.”³¹ Sapaṅ is therefore credited as someone who “started” (*srol che*) the formulation of the “ten” sciences in Tibet, and this was expressed using the simile of a jewelry—a diamond necklace: “just like there were precious stones before, but only Sapaṅ strung those gemstones together without which gods and mortals cannot wear it as necklace.”³²

So, one would naturally assume Sapaṅ had written explicitly about “ten sciences” (five major and the five minor), as he was the first Tibetan intellectual to discuss and introduce subjects such as Sanskrit poetic, poetry, prosody, and dramaturgy. However, browsing through Sapaṅ’s works, one fails to find the term five minor fields of learning (*rig gnas chung ba lnga*); in fact, Sapaṅ only used the term ‘five sciences’ (*rig gnas lnga*). Sapaṅ was not only silent about the category of five minor fields of learning but this comparative category of major (*rig gnas che ba lnga*) and minor fields of learning (*rig gnas chung ba lnga*) do not have any written sources in Sapaṅ’s writings; although this may very well have been in his mind (as I will show later in this article about the Indic origin of this knowledge category). The following table shows us various enumerations of sciences or fields of learning as they appeared in Sapaṅ’s collected works.

Table 1.2 Various enumeration of fields of knowledge as appeared in Sapaṅ’s collected works

	MKH ³³	MKH 1 ³⁴	NGA-BRGYAD ³⁵	TSIG-GTER ³⁶	METOK ³⁷	LEGS-BSHAD ³⁸
1	grammar	grammar	grammar	grammar	grammar	grammar
2	logic	prosody	logic	logic	logic	logic
3	poetry	poetry	prosody	prosody	prosody	prosody
4	prosody	Lexicography and etc.	poetic	poetry	poetry	poetry

³¹ THA-SNYAD, 440-441.

³² *Bod du rig gnas rnam pa bcu'i srol gang zag gcig nyid kyi dang por phye ba ni bdag nyid chen po sa paṅdita kho na ste.* THA-SNYAD, 440-441.

³³ MKH, 2 (v).

³⁴ MKH, 42 (r).

³⁵ NGA-BRGYAD, 16 (r).

³⁶ TSIG-GTER, 15 (r).

³⁷ METOK, 35 (r).

³⁸ LEGS-BSHAD, 25 (r).

5	poetics		lexicography	poetics	poetics	poetics
6	lexicography		astrology	lexicography	<i>tshig rnam par sbyar ba (?)</i>	Buddhist teaching
7	drama		external: crafts and medicine	astrology		
8	medicine		internal: Buddhist philosophy	medicine		
9	crafts			crafts		
10	astrology					
11	Buddhism					

So based on the above table, if we are to extract what constitute as the five minor fields of learning then the enumerations differ greatly. This lack of uniformity is understandable as Sapaṅ presented these in the contexts of various subjects he had studied and mastered and did not mention anything about the categories of five minor fields of learning or for that matter ten sciences. In speaking of 'poetry' (*snyan ngag*) and 'poetics' (*tshig rgyan*), what is unique with the above enumeration is, Sapaṅ enumerated these two subjects as two separate fields of learning. But, later Tibetan intellectuals from Narthang Lotsāwa, and Taktsang, dropped 'poetics' and only included 'poetry' in the five minor fields of learning. Especially in the post-Sakyapa period, Tibetan intellectuals began to treat 'poetry' and 'poetics' as synonyms, and by doing this, perhaps, mistakenly enhanced the usage and domain of poetry (*snyan ngag*) while displacing poetics (*tshig rgyan*).³⁹ It was only in the eighteenth century that Khamtrul pointed out this distinction and argued that treatise on poetic (*tshig rgyan gyi bstan bcos / alaṃkāra śāstra*) like *The Mirror* was mistakenly referred as a treatise on poetry (*snyan ngag gi bstan bcos / kāvya śāstra*)⁴⁰— while *The Mirror per se* is definitely a work of art and poetry, it cannot be called a treatise on poetry, according to Khamtrul. Even in the existing secondary literature, Tibetan and Western scholars have overlooked the actual inclusion of *poetry* (*snyan ngag*) and exclusion of *poetics*, and thus taken for granted that *snyan ngag* (poetry) was there from the very inception of the classification of five minor fields of learning. This intervention by Khamtrul was not simply an eighteenth century invention; actually, if we are to look at the writings of Pang Lotsāwa, one of the greatest Tibetan literary scholars born almost a century after Sapaṅ, we can see Khamtrul was simply reiterating the original enumeration.

⁴⁰ KHAMS-DREL, 21.

Pang and the Five Minor Fields of Learning (*Laghu Vidyā*)

As the five minor fields of learning is deeply rooted in Sanskrit language and learning, Pang's contribution to Sanskrit learning and philological studies in Tibet is unrivalled. Unfortunately, since these literary works are considered auxiliary to the dominant religious texts, not many scholars paid attention to Pang's works on *rikné*, and this is reflected as many of his works were not published onto woodblocks but simply handed down in manuscript form. As Pang did not leave any autobiography, Dartod's brief account of Pang in THA-SNYED becomes one of the important sources on Pang's biography besides Gos Lotsāwa gzhon nu dpal's (1392-1481) *The Blue Annals*.⁴¹ Pang is considered one of the most important figures in the dissemination of *rikné* studies in Tibet. As a scholar, he earned the title 'Great translator' (*lo chen*) and travelled to Nepal seven times to study Sanskrit and Buddhism—one of the last few Tibetans to travel to South Asia in the fourteenth century.⁴² He produced the first Tibetan commentary of *The Mirror* that is widely regarded as one of the most authentic and closest to the original Sanskrit.⁴³ Relying on this commentary and other works by Pang, I have found that Pang seems to be the first Tibetan to explicitly refer or introduce this comparative term 'five major' (*rig gnas che ba lnga*) and 'five minor fields of learning' (*chung ba lnga*) in his commentary of *The Mirror*, PANG-DREL.⁴⁴ According to Pang, this tradition of five minor fields of learning existed in India, as Indian paṇḍitas quote:⁴⁵

if you know the grammar (*sgra*), you will not be ignorant about meaning (*don*)
 if you know lexicography (*mngon brjod*) you will not be ignorant about names (*ming*)
 if you know prosody (*sdeb sbyor*) then you will not be ignorant about verse (*tshig bcad*)
 if you know poetics (*tshig rgyan*) you will not be ignorant about poetry

⁴¹ Both these works recount Pang for his sharp mind and tell an anecdote where Pang piqued that after his mother died, when he was a baby, fools raised him on sheep's milk instead of cow's milk which dimmed his intellect a little bit and earned a nickname 'lug gu' or 'lamb.' THA-SNYED, 446. As pointed out by José Cabezón, George Roerich mistook Pang as the brother of Shong ston rdo rje rgyal mtshan. George Roerich and Gendün Chöphel 1976:786. It is also confusing at times since many of these early Sakya-pa scholars were all uncles and nephews.

⁴² George Roerich and Gendün Chöphel 1976.

⁴³ Pang's commentary was more or less a Tibetan translation of Ratnashri's commentary of *The Mirror*. For more on this, see van der Kuijp 1985; Dragomir Dimitrov 2009.

⁴⁴ Pang uses the term '*rig pa'i gnas chung ngu lnga*.' PANG-DREL, 2 (r).

⁴⁵ PANG-DREL, 2 (r).

(*snyan ngag*)

if you know drama (*zlos gar*) then you will not be ignorant about languages (*skad rigs*)

Based on what Pang was quoting, this tradition of enumerating five minor fields of learning can be traced to Indian origin, and this puts to rest qualms among scholars who believe that this might be a Tibetan invention. According to many contemporary Tibetan scholars, one reason to call these five minor fields of learning a purely Tibetan invention was the lack of philological reference in the Indian tradition. It is true that we do not have any direct textual reference in the Indian sources, but we can reconstruct the term back in Sanskrit since the Tibetan translations still exist. For instance, Narthang Lotsāwa in his commentary of *The Mirror* in the fifteenth century wrote that according to the Indian tradition, *paN chung* (Minor / Assistant / Junior Paṇḍita) is used for someone who had mastered the five minor fields of learning.⁴⁶ Similarly, an important work on *rikné* by the seventeenth century scholar Kālapāda⁴⁷ wrote that the Great or Mahā Paṇḍita (*paN chen*) is used for someone who had mastered the five major sciences; and Minor Paṇḍita⁴⁸ for someone who had mastered the five minor fields of learning. Since there is a tradition in Sanskrit of using the term *laghu*⁴⁹ in comparison to *mahā*, we can reconstruct that the phrase *rig gnas chung ba lnga* is the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *laghu vidyā*. Going back to the enumeration of the five minor fields of learning, the above verse in PANG-DREL was reproduced similarly by Paṇ chen 'jam dbyangs kha che, (hereafter Jamkha, 14th cent);⁵⁰ but Narthang Lotsāwa (1383-1445),⁵¹ Kālapāda,⁵² and the Fifth Dalai Lama reproduced with a slight variation that swapped *poetics* (*tshig rgyan*) and *poetry* (*snyan ngag*).⁵³ These scholars, wittingly or unwittingly, gave prominence to 'poetry' and since then Tibetan intellectuals began to

⁴⁶ SNAR-DREL, 4 (v).

⁴⁷ Kālapāda was a great Sanskritist and according to Gyen Beri Jigme, Kālapāda declined to be the teacher of the Fifth Dalai Lama (personal conversation, 2018). I have not seen this in any sources yet.

⁴⁸ BLO-GSAL-MGUL-RGYAN, 5 (r).

⁴⁹ This comparative category of major and minor is common in classical Indian tradition. Professor Emeritus Kameshwar Nath Mishra of Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, told me that those Paṇḍitas who mastered these minor fields of learning can also be called as Laghu Paṇḍita. There is also a tradition of using the term *laghu* in Sanskrit texts such as Varadarāja's *Laghu Siddhānta Kaumudī* (personal conversation, 2019).

⁵⁰ 'Jam dbyangs kha che 2016:203.

⁵¹ SNAR-DREL, 4 (v).

⁵² BLO-GSAL-MGUL-RGYAN, 5 (r).

⁵³ See (ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991:6 (v).) TBRC W2CZ5990.

enumerate 'poetry' instead of 'poetics' in the five minor fields of learning.⁵⁴ As poetry and the image of the poet became important factors among the learned circles in this period, it is possible that intellectuals like Narthang, Kālapāda, and the Great Fifth simply elevated poetry to the five minor fields of learning. However, as mentioned earlier, Khamtrul, in the eighteenth century, corrected the saying by writing instead of "if you know poetry you will not be ignorant about poetics (*sgra rgyan/tshig rgyan*)", it should be the other way around: "if you know poetics then you will not be ignorant in poetry."⁵⁵ For Khamtrul, poetry is the end result of the poetic process and Tibetan scholars mixed up 'the cause' (*rgyu* i.e. poetics) and 'the result' (*'bras bu* i.e. poetry).⁵⁶ Although, Khamtrul only mentioned it was based on Indian Paṇḍitas' saying; this quote is actually available in PANG-DREL, as mentioned above.

The restructuring of the categories of knowledge was not just limited to *poetry* alone, as sixteenth-seventeenth century Tibetan scholars began to see problems in including 'the science of language' or grammar (*sgra rig pa*) in both the categories of five major and minor classifications of knowledge. Kālapāda⁵⁷ captured this mood among Tibetan intellectuals regarding the problem of redundancy:

"For some scholars, the science of language (*sgra rig pa*) is part of the five sciences and cannot be placed with minor fields of learning; [G]enerally, the term major and minor are relative to one another; [once] these categories are created, there is contradiction between the major and minor categories; thus, scholars added "knowing astrology one will not be ignorant about numerology."⁵⁸

Tibetan intellectuals solved the problem of redundancy by excluding grammar (*sgra*) and including astrology (*skar rtsis*) to the list. The Fifth Dalai Lama's commentary of *The Mirror* along with the edited version that contains commentary by Desi Sangyé Gyatso give us clearer information about particular figures who initiated this change. Pang, Jamkha, Narthang Lotsāwa, Rinpung Ngawang Jigdak (Ngag dbang

⁵⁴ Also, Taktsang in his KUN-SHES wrote 'poetry' as one of the five minor fields of learning, 10.

⁵⁵ KHAMS-DREL, 13.

⁵⁶ KHAMS-DREL, 13.

⁵⁷ This text *rig gnas lnga'i rnam dbye cung zad bshad pa legs bshad nor bu'i 'phreng ba blo gsäl mgul rgyan zhes bya ba bzhugs so* (BLO-GSAL-MGUL-RGYAN) was put under the collection of *rikné* texts by Pang Lotsāwa. But the text was by seventeenth century scholar Dus 'khor zhabs drung, known widely by his Sanskrit appellation Kālapāda. TBRC: W00KKG09663.

⁵⁸ BLO-GSAL-MGUL-RGYAN, 5 (r).

'jigs grags, 1482-1542), [and also THA-SNYAD]⁵⁹ classified 'grammar' in both the five major and minor categories in their commentaries of *The Mirror*,⁶⁰ and it is my assumption that Jamkha, Narthang Lotsāwa and Rinpung Ngawang Jigdak simply followed what was in PANG-DREL. The Fifth Dalai Lama further mentions that Palkhang Lotsāwa (Dpal sgang [aka. Karma phrin las phyogs las rnam rgyal, Ngag dbang chos kyi rgya mtsho, Dbyangs can snyems pa'i sde,⁶¹ 1456-1539], makes a critical intervention by adding astrology (*skar rtsis*), as per the traditions of Kālacakra Svarodaya tantra (*dbyangs 'char ba'i rgyud*), to the list of five minor fields of learning.⁶² Khamtrul added another figure, Lochen Sonam Dé (Lo chen bsod nams rgya mtsho'i sde, 1424-1482) along with the Palkhang Lotsāwa in their role in introducing 'astrology' (*rtsis*)⁶³ in place of 'grammar'; and according to Khamtrul, this inclusion of 'astrology' was greatly admired by Situ as well.⁶⁴

However, the original formulation of the five minor fields of learning i.e. grammar, lexicon, prosody, poetic, and dramaturgy was treated as a branch of 'the science of language' (*sgra rig pa*) of the five major sciences. Since all five minor subjects deal, in one or another, with Indic languages and rhetorical traditions,⁶⁵ from its very inception, I believe, 'astrology' was never included in the list as it belongs to 'the science of crafts' (*bzo rig pa*). Sapañ, in his autocommentary of NGA-RGYAD, NGA-RGYAD-'DREL also stated that astrology is usually classified under 'the science of crafts' (*bzo rig pa*) but "while writ-

⁵⁹ THA-SNYAD, 2009, 432.

⁶⁰ ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991:7 (r) and Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1996:16.

⁶¹ Zhu chen wrote Dpal khang dbyangs can snyems pa'i sde in CHU-GTER, 44 (r). He also mentioned that it was Tak-tsang, who first introduced *astrology* in the five minor fields of learning; but in KUN-SHES, Taksang wrote as per what was mentioned by PAND-DREL, 10.

⁶² ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991:7(r).

⁶³ Although, I have translated *rtsis* as astrology; the Tibetan term could mean a range of things from astronomy, calendrical systems (Indian and Chinese), calculation of inner body's wind (*nang gi rlung..rtsis*) to Kalacakra. See, MKH, 2 (v); Gold 2007:155.

⁶⁴ KHAMS-DREL, 13. More research is required by going through the works of Lo chen bsod nams rgya mtsho'i sde to see if he mentioned Pang or names of other scholars, who cast doubts on enumerating 'grammar' in both five major and minor forms of knowledge.

⁶⁵ Contemporary Tibetan scholars like Samdhong Rinpoche expressed another interpretation that *sgra rig pa* in the five major science should be understood as 'the science of language' (*śabda vidyā*) and *sgra* in the five minor fields of learning should be taken as 'grammar' (*vyākaraṇa*)—which can just be a part of the larger science of language (*śabda vidyā*). See Rinpoche 2012:121. However, Tibetan intellectuals in the past have treated *sgra rig pa* and *sgra* as one.

ing this text, he has classified it separately considering the subject matter under discussion."⁶⁶

To sum up, the historiography of the five minor fields of learning is far more complicated and convoluted compared to the five major sciences. As we have discussed, the original enumeration of the five minor fields of learning underwent two major reconfigurations: one in the fifteenth century and another in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. Khamtrul, in the eighteenth century, was the first to highlight that instead of *poetry* it should be *poetics*. For this essay, I have primarily consulted Tibetan commentarial literature on *The Mirror* and a handful important works on *rikné*, but there is a sea of other important literary works that lie beyond the scope of this short essay. A more complete and detailed discussion either on individual subject or altogether as the five minor fields of learning using additional textual sources remains to be done.

ABBREVIATIONS

BLO-GSAL-MGUL-RGYAN: Kālapāda or Dus 'khor zhabs drung. *Rig gnas lnga'i rnam dbye cung zad bshad pa legs bshad nor bu'i 'phreng ba blo gsal mgul rgyan zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, in Blo gros brtan pa's *Rig gnas phyogs bsdebs*. Dharamshala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1981. 1-106.

CHU-GTER: *dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnam las dam pa'i chos thos pa'i yi ge don gnyer gdengs can rol pa'i chu gter*. Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2005.

DGYES-GLU: Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho. Snyan ngag me long gi dka' 'grel dbyangs can dgyes pa'i glu dbyangs zhes bya ba bzhugs in *Gsung 'bum/ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*. Dharamshala: Nam gsal sgron ma, 2007. 281-543.

KHAMS-DREL: Khams sprul bstan 'dzin chos kyi nyi ma. *Rgyan gyi bstan bcos me long paN chen bla ma'i gsung bzhin bkral ba dbyangs can ngag gi rol mtsho legs bshad nor bu'i 'byung khungs*. Xining: mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2004.

KUN-SHES: Stag tshang lo tsa wa shes rab rin chen. *Rig gnas kun shes nas bdag med grub pa'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa nyung gsal kun dga'*. *Gsung 'bum shes rab rin chen*. Beijing: Krung go bod rig dpe skrun khang, 2007. 1-92.

LEGS-BSHAD: *Legs par bshad pa rin po che'i gter* in *Sa skya bka' 'bum*. Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006. 113-261.

METOK : *Sa skya paṇ ḍi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan*. *Sdeb sbyor sna tshogs*

⁶⁶ NGA-RGYAD-'DREL, 20 (v).

- me tog gi chun po in Sa skya bka' 'bum*. Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006. 567-610.
- MKH : *Sa skya paṅ ḍi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan. Mkhas pa la 'jug pa'i sgo zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos bzhugs so in Sa skya bka' 'bum*. Kathmandu : Sachen International, 2006. 349-478.
- NGA-BRGYAD-DREL : *Sa skya paṅ ḍi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan. Nga brgyad ma'i 'grel pa in Sa skya bka' 'bum*. Kathmandu : Sachen International, 2006. 640-667.
- PANG-DREL : *Dpang blo gros brtan pa. Snyan ngag me long gyi rgya cher 'grel pa gzhung don gsal ba zhes bya ba bzhugs so in Dpang lo tsA ba blo gros brtan pa'i gsung phyogs bsdus*. BDRC W2PD17532. 1-135.
- SNAR-DREL: *Snar thang dge 'dun dpal. Snar thang snyan 'grel*. TBRC W2CZ7881.
- SITU-DRIS-LEN: *Chos kyi 'byung gnas. Dris len sna tshogs nor bu ke tA ka'i phreng ba in Gsung 'bum Chos kyi 'byung gnas*. TBRC W26630. Sansal, Kangra: Palpung Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1990. 8: 461 – 490.
- THA-SNYAD: *Dgra 'dul dbang po. Tha snyad rig gnas lnga ji ltar byung ba'I tshul gsal bar byed pa blo gsal mgrin rgyan legs bshad nor bu'I phreng ba, in Sa skya'I chos 'byung gces bsdus*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009. 5: 212 – 248.
- TSIG-GTER: *Sa skya paṅ ḍi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan. Gtsig gi gter zhes bya ba'I bstan bcos bzhugs in Sa skya bka' 'bum*. Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006. 539-567.
- ZHU-CHEN-RIG-GNAS: *Zhu chen tshul khirms rin chen. Bod kyi rig gnas lnga'I rnam gzhag*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1981.

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