

On the Digressions of the *Prajñāpradīpa*, with a Reevaluation of Its Chinese Translation

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0. Introduction

There exist two translations of the *Prajñāpradīpa* (PP) written by Bhāviveka (ca. 490/500–570 CE), which is one of the most famous commentaries on the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (MMK) of Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250 CE). The first is a Tibetan translation (PP_tib) by Klu'i rgyal mtshan and Jñānagarbha from the early 9th century, and the other is in Chinese (PP_chin) written by Prabhākaramitra between 630 and 632 CE. The original Sanskrit text of PP has been lost; therefore, the study of PP must have been dependent on these two translations. But, in most cases, PP_tib only has been used and not PP_chin, because, it has been said, the latter is too poor a translation for academic study.¹⁾ However, in 2006, Leonard van der Kuijp insisted that “it is often alleged that the Chinese translation is generally of an inferior quality, but I am not altogether convinced of the cogency of privileging for this reason the Tibetan rendition and by and large ignoring the former, as is by no means infrequently done”²⁾ in the context of an examination of the contents of PP chapter 22 (henceforth presented in the format PP 22), using both PP_tib and PP_chin. Subsequently, in 2011, Helmut Krasser referred to the digression,³⁾ found in this chapter in PP_tib (i.e., in PP_tib 22), a point that had been picked up also in Kuijp [2006]. According to Krasser, there is a possibility that the Sanskrit “Ur-PP” did not originally include the digression in the translations; he notes that the *Tarkajvālā* (TJ) was also written by Bhāviveka, and that in it, the same problems are discussed as in the digression in PP_tib 22, but that in TJ, the discussion is partly not correct.⁴⁾ Therefore, Krasser contends that after both PP and TJ were written, at some point when Bhāviveka was preaching from PP to his students, a rectified discussion was inserted into PP, as the digression. While this suggestion of Krasser’s is attractive, this does not necessarily make it correct. Therefore, in the present paper, I will examine his suggestion, and in its context, reevaluate the value of the PP_

chin.

1. The Digressions in PP_tib and Their Counterparts of PP_chin

According to Krasser, there are ten digressions in PP_tib—he focuses on the one in chapter 22, where the problem of the Omniscient (*tathāgata*) is discussed. This digression is also seen in PP_chin 22, though in a slightly different form than in PP_tib.⁵⁾ Table 1 presents all digressions in both translations.

Table 1

Chap.	Digression in PP_tib	Counterpart in PP_chin
5	Start: D91b6/P111b1 End: D92a6/P112a3	Not present (Some text just before the digression is also missing.)
7	Start: D107b4/P131b5 End: D108a1/P132a3	Present (There are small differences from PP_tib, and the digression is not explicitly called out in the text.) Start: 77a29–End: 77b10
8	Start: unclear End: D122b1/P150a5	Present (There are major differences from PP_tib; again, however, the digression is not explicitly called out in the text.) Start and end: unclear
12	Start: D143b4/P177b6 End: D144b1/P178b4	Not present
13	Start: D148a2/P283a7 End: D148b6/P184b1	Not present
18	Start: D184a3/P229a7 End: D184b5/P230a4	Not present
22	Start: D214a3/P268a5 End: D216b1/P271a7	Present See Krasser [2011a]. Start: 118c18–End: 119c28
23	Start: D223b2?/P280b4? End: D224a1/P281a5	Unclear (There exists an expression to show the digression.)
25	Start: D242a1/P322a1 End: D248a7/P360a4	Not present
27	Start: D257a6?/P323a5? End: D258b5/P325a3	Not present (There exist three short sentences that there are not present in PP_tib, but these are not a digression.)

As you can see from Table 1, six digressions present in PP_tib do not exist in PP_chin. The digressions in chapters 12, 13, 18, and 25, which involve different kinds of discussions with non-Mādhyamika, do not exist in PP_chin, though the previous and following sen-

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tences can be found. The digressions in chapters 5 and 27 are also missing, and the text is further altered from PP_tib. The digression in chapter 23 is not present but traces of it are indicated by some expressions used. It seems clear that there are some inconsistencies in the translation here. Besides the digression in chapter 22, which has already been examined in Krasser [2011] and [2011a], we see, digressions in chapters 7 and 8 in both texts, but both with major differences from PP_tib.

At any rate, it is certain that more than half of all digressions in PP_tib are missing from PP_chin. How can we best understand this situation? I can offer two possibilities. One is the possibility that the translator of PP_chin, Prabhākaramitra, intentionally did not translate these parts, because they were “digressions.” The other is the possibility that these digressions did not exist in the original Sanskrit text of PP, but that the digressions were subsequently inserted into PP_tib but not PP_chin. At present, we do not have any conclusive evidence allowing us to decide which possibility is correct. However, if we assume the former, it is difficult to see why some digressions were nevertheless translated into Chinese. Therefore, the latter answer seems to be more plausible at the moment, though, of course, it has also some problems. Of note is that if the digressions were added after the original PP had been produced, as Krasser insists, then they must have been added twice at least. On this basis, I would like to put a hypothesis forward by slightly changing the sequence of events suggested in Krasser [2011].

[1] Ur-PP (no digression) → PP1 (the basis of PP_chin, which has some digressions) → PP2 (the basis of PP_tib, which has all the digressions)

In order to come to plausible agreement on this question, we must compare PP_tib with PP_chin point by point, and both with other texts of Bhāviveka, namely *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* (MHK), TJ, and *Dà chéng zhāng zhēn lùn* 大乘掌珍論.

2. Is PP_chin Invaluable?

The hypothesis above may be regarded as unintuitive or unappealing on the ground that PP_chin is widely considered to be a version of less merit than the other. In this context, it is important to note that PP_chin has been the least studied and last used of the texts mentioned by scholars, including the present author; and in fact, I have examined PP_chin in detail for several months and must agree that PP_chin is not good. However, it retains some merit, and in some places, evidence can be seen, that PP_chin is more skillfully writ-

ten than PP_tib. Below, I give an example.

The first verse of MMK 22 is seen as problematic by scholars,⁶⁾ because of the large differences between it as seen on the one hand in Tibetan translations of MMK and cited in one commentary, *Prasannapadā* (PrasP), both translated into Tibetan by Ñi ma grags, and that cited in four other commentaries, namely *Buddhapālitamūlamadhyamakavṛtti* (BP), *Akutobhayā* (AK), PP_tib, and *Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā* (PPT), all translated into Tibetan by Klu'i rgyal mtshan, on the other. See the table below.

Table 2

The former: translation by Ñi ma grags	The latter: translation by Klu'i rgyal mtshan
phuñ min phuñ po las gžan min //	sku min sku las gžan ma yin //
de la phuñ med der de med //	de la sku med der de med //
de bžin gšegs pa phuñ ldan min //	de bžin gšegs pa sku ldan min //
de bžin gšegs pa gañ žig yin //	de bžin gšegs pa gañ žig yin //

These two translations are the same except that *phuñ po* in the translation by Ñi ma grags is *sku* in the one by Klu'i rgyal mtshan. As far as we can follow the text of MMK 22, it seems that *phuñ po* is a preferable translation to *sku*. Although *sku* (*kāya* in Sanskrit), which means “body,” and *phuñ po* (*skandha* in Sanskrit), which means “the constituent elements,” are evidently quite different in meaning, written in the Sanskrit manuscript, they look very similar and could thus be easily confused.⁷⁾ On the other hand, as Saitō [1987a] insists, there is evidence that this difference is not just a mistake; in fact, he argues, the word *sku* must have been used in the Sanskrit texts of MMK, which Bhāviveka depended on when he was writing PP. Saitō points out the following sentence found in PP_tib as evidence.

[2] **sku** min žes bya ba la sogs pa ste / de la **sku**'i don ni phuñ po'i don to // (“**Not body** (*kāya*) etc.” is seen [in the first verse of MMK 22]. Among these [words of this verse], the meaning of [the word] “*kāya*” is the meaning of *skandha*.)

This is a commentary on the first verse of MMK 22 as found in PP_tib 22, which seems to show that *sku* (*kāya*) was actually used in the verse in MMK, which Bhāviveka depended on, and that he had no other choice to interpret it as *skandha* for the reason that he could not explain the whole of MMK 22 well if *sku* had been the word, as Saitō points out. If this were the case, there would exist two different versions of MMK, namely one in which *kāya* was used and the other in which *skandha* was used.

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PP_chin gives us the clue to solve this question. In PP_chin, this verse is translated as follows:

[3] 非陰不離陰 陰如來互無 非如來有陰 何等是如來 (The Omniscient [*tathāgata*] is not *skandha*, neither it is different from *skandha*. *Tathāgata* does not exist in *skandha*, and vice versa. *Tathāgata* does not have any *skandha*. [If so,] what is *tathāgata*?)

The Chinese character “陰,” used three times in [3], is a translation of *skandha* (*phuñ po*), “the constituent elements,” which matches the translation by Ñi ma grags but not that in PP_tib. Moreover “陰” (*skandha*) is also used in this verse in two other Chinese translations, namely MMK (中論) and the commentary *Dà chéng zhōng guān shì lùn* 大乘中觀積論, written by Sthiramati (ca. 510–570 CE). All these Chinese translations, including PP_chin, show that it is reasonable to think that in the original Sanskrit text of this verse *skandha* is used, but not *kāya*.

If this is the case, how then should we understand [2], which presents strong evidence that *kāya* is used in the verse cited in the original text of PP? The key to solving this problem can also be found in PP_chin. The translation of [2] in PP_chin is as follows:

[4] 積曰。陰者謂積聚義。

This Chinese translation means “*Skandha* is the meaning of ‘piled up.’” Thus, [2], from PP_tib, and [4], from PP_chin, seem to be totally different. Traditionally, in such a case, scholars would have assumed that PP_tib, with its better reputation, was correct and PP_chin wrong. However, if [4] is correct, the original Sanskrit sentence that can be reconstructed for [4] is probably something like the following, because [4] strongly recalls the very famous definition of *skandha* in *Abhidharma* doctrine.

[5] **rāśyarthah skandhārtha** iti siddham / (AKBh: p. 13 l. 7)

(Established is that the meaning of *skandha* is the meaning of ‘piled up (*rāśi*).’)

Taking into account that *rāśi* is often translated as *phuñ po* in Tibetan and that it is easy to misread *skandha* as *kāya* in a Sanskrit manuscript, it is conceivable that [2], *sku’i don ni phuñ po’i don*, is the Tibetan translation of [5], which can in turn be reconstructed from [4]. This would mean that *skandhārtha* and *rāśyārtha* were translated as *sku’i don* and *phuñ po’i don* respectively. In other words, for this verse at least, the reading of PP_tib should be rectified on the basis of PP_chin.

3. Conclusion

We have seen that PP_chin may sometimes give us very useful information about how PP was written. What is now needed is a rigorous comparison of PP_chin and PP_tib step by step, which will likely clarify the question of whether, the Sanskrit text of PP, on which PP_chin is based, contains all the digressions found in PP_tib from the very beginning. To do this, however, and in all scholarly work with PP_chin, we must use the text without prejudice, since we have seen the example that *sku* (*kāya*) in the first verse of chapter 22 of some commentaries on MMK, as translated by Klu'i rgyal mtshan, should likely be corrected to *phuñ po* (*skandha*), based on PP_chin and the Tibetan translations by Ñi ma grags

I have presented only a small amount of evidence, because of space limits. I will pick up more digressions and examine them in detail in a future paper.

Notes: 1) Tsukinowa is the first scholar to have insisted that PP_chin is bad translation. See Tsukinowa [1929], [1929a], [1931]. 2) See van der Kuijp [2006] pp. 171–172. 3) The “digression” consists of the sentence, which end with a final sentence that *iti alam prasaṅgena prakṛtam eva vyākhyāsyāmaḥ* (Skt.); *zar la bśad pas chog gi skabs ñid dpyad par bya'o* (Tib.); 且置是事。今還說我本宗。 (Chin.). There are some variations between these sentences. 4) Krasser's main purpose is to rethink the active period of Dharmakīrti and to prove that the identification of the authors of PP and TJ is correct. 5) Krasser infers that this is the reason why the student or students wrote down this digression on the other papers, which was inserted into another part of PP. 6) See Saitō [1987]. 7) Anne MacDonald, who is a specialist in PrasP and its Sanskrit manuscript, kindly gave me this suggestion.

Abbreviations: AK = *Akutobhayā*; AKBh = *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* by Vasubandhu: Pradhan [1967]; BP = *Buddhapālitamūlamadhyamakavṛtti* by Buddhapālita; D = sDe dge ed.; MMK = *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* by Nāgārjuna: Saigusa [1985]; MHK = *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* by Bhāviveka; P = Peking ed.; PP = *Prajñāpradīpa* by Bhāviveka; PP_chin = PP Chinese translation of PP: T30 [1566] pp. 51–136; PPT = *Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā* by Avalokitavrata; PP_tib = PP Tibetan translation of PP: D (3853) tsha 45b4–259b3, P [95] (5253) tsha 53b3–326a6; PrasP = *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti; T = Taishōzō; TJ = *Tarkajvālā* by Bhavya

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研究費補助金 研究成果報告書).

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(Work on this paper has been generously supported by the Austrian Science Found (FWF) in the framework of the FWF project P23196-G15 “Buddhist Literature and its Context.”)

〈Key words〉 Bhāviveka, *Prajñāpradīpa*, Prabhākaramitra, Klu’i rgyal mtshan, 般若灯論

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