

The Meaning of the Case-affix *la* in Classical Tibetan Grammar*

Paṅ chen don grub

1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to consider characteristics of classical Tibetan grammar and clarify the influence of Sanskrit grammar on it. Classical Tibetan grammar was first established by Thon mi samḥboṭa (7th cent.) who was, according to the traditional understanding, the inventor of Tibetan alphabet and the author of the first grammatical treatises, *Sum cu pa* and *Rtags 'jug*. Then, it was later developed by the commentators on Thon mi's texts, especially after the 17th century, such as Pra ti rin chen don grub (17–18th cent.), Si tu chos kyi 'byung gnas (1700–1774), and so on. The topic to be discussed here is the meaning of the particle *la* (*la sgra*) that occurs twice as a case-affix in the eulogistic verse of the *Sum cu pa*. The verse in question runs as follows:

gang la ⁽¹⁾ *yon tan mchog mnga' ba'i* ||
dkon cog de la ⁽²⁾ *phyag 'tshal lo* ||

“I salute the [three] jewels which possess the highest quality.”

The meaning of the case-affix *la* is a debatable topic among the Tibetan grammarians. Pra ti understands the particle *la* ⁽¹⁾ of *gang la* as the seventh case-affix denoting the locus in which the action *mnga'* (“to possess”) takes place and understands *la* ⁽²⁾ of *de la* as the fourth case-affix that means the purpose of the action *phyag 'tshal* (“to salute”). In contrast, Si tu understands both *la* ⁽¹⁾ of *gang la* and *la* ⁽²⁾ of *de la* as the second case-affix that means the object of action. Si tu points out that there is no functional difference between the particle *la* of *gang la* and that of *de la* and demonstrates his theory by utilizing the knowledge of Sanskrit grammar. This presentation therefore aims to clarify Si tu's position on this issue by comparing it with Pra ti's.

2 The Meaning of *la* in the Eulogistic Verse

2.1 Refutation of Others' Position

Let us look at Si tu's discussion of the meaning of the case-affix *la* in the eulogistic verse. At the beginning of the discussion, Si tu mentions a certain scholar's view and criticizes it.

SG 21.9ff.: *kha cig gis* | *skabs 'dir gang la zhes pa'i la yig logs su bkar nas ngos gzung ba'i don dang de la zhes pa'i la yig ched du bya ba'i don du bshad mod* | *snga ma ni gzhung 'di'i la don 'chad pa'i skabs su de 'dra la 'jug par ma bshad par ma zad don gyis kyang de 'drar 'jug mi srid pas mi 'thad cing* | *gang zhig la yon tan mchog mnga' ba'am ldan pa zhes sbrel dgos pas rnam dbye bdun pa gnas gzhi'i don nyid do* ||

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Someone, at this point, isolates the particle *la* of *gang la* and explains it as denoting specification (*ngos gzung ba*); and he [isolates] the particle *la* of *de la* and explains it as meaning the purpose of action (*ched du bya ba*). However, the former part [of his explanation] is not valid because this treatise [i.e., the *Sum cu pa*] does not mention such usage when it explains the meaning of *la don*, and because it is impossible that [the particle *la*] is applied in such a way in the actual usage. It is necessary to interpret [the phrase as meaning] “those which possess the highest quality” or “those which are associated with the highest quality.” So it has precisely the meaning of locus (*gnas gzhi*), namely, that of the seventh case.

As Si tu explains here, a certain opponent holds that the particle *la* of *gang la* and that of *de la* function differently: the former is for specification (*ngos gzung ba*) and the latter denotes the purpose of action (*ched du bya ba*). To begin with, Si tu examines the first part of his assertion and refutes it by saying that it is inconsistent not only with the system of *Sum cu pa* but also with the actual usage. He asserts therefore that the particle *la* of *gang la* should be understood as the seventh-case affix denoting the locus (*gnas gzhi*) in which action takes place.

The idea refuted here is also found in Pra ti’s commentary on the same verse. Pra ti ascribes it to Rnam gling paṅ chen dkon mchog chos grags (1646–1718) and denies it for the same reason. Pra ti says the followings:

KZGG 6.8ff.: *dir rnam gling paṅ chen gyis* |

gang la zhes pa’i la yig nges bzung gi don te | *’chad ’gyur de ma thag pa’i yon tan rnams dang*
ldan pa de nyid ngos bzung ba dang |

zhes bshad pa mi ’thad de | *’dir mnga’ ba zhes pa yod pa’am brten pa’i don yin la* | *yon tan mchog*
yod pa’am brten pa’i gzhi | *spyi’i tshul gyis gang zhes smos te* | *de la brten par brjod pa’i sgra* | *la*
zhes smras pa yin zhing |

On this point, Rnam gling paṅ chen says:

The particle *la* of *gang la* denotes specification (*nges bzung*) because it specifies that which possess the qualities that will be explained subsequently.

But this is unreasonable. For, in this [verse], the word *mnga’ ba* means “to exist” or “to rely”; the locus (*gzhi*) in which the highest qualities exist or rely on is expressed by *gang* in the manner of the generality (*spyi’i tshul gyis*); and the particle *la* is [applied] as that which indicates the reliance on that.

As can be seen from this statement, Pra ti shares the same view on this point with Si tu. We then go back to Si tu’s argument. Si tu goes on to examine the second part of the opponent’s assertion.

SG 21.15ff.: *phyi ma ni legs sbyar shes rlom gyis zhwa dpe lham la bkab par zad de* | *ci’iphyir* | *ka*
lā par |

na mas | *swa sti* | *swā hā* | *swa dhā* | *a lam* | *ba ṣaṭ* | *sbyor ba bzhi ba’o* <| |>

zhes ’byung bar na mas kyi yul la spyir btang don ’thob kyi sgo nas gnyis pa ’jug kyang grags pa
dmigs bsal gyi sgo nas bzhi ba sbyor bar mkhas ba rnams kyis bzhed mod kyi | *de ’dra’i bye brag*
ma phyed par | *na mas kyi yul la bzhi ba ’jug par bshad do snyam nas phyag ’tshal ba’i don can gyi*
sgra’i yul thams cad la bzhi ba ’jug par bsam zhing smra ba’i phyir ro | |

As for the latter [part of his assertion], he merely [makes irrelevant remarks] in a way like [a man who] covers his shoes with his hat, as he has a conceit that he knows Sanskrit. [Q:] Why is that? [A:] The reason is as follows. The *Kalāpasūtra* says:

“The fourth case-affix occurs when [there is an item] combined with *namas*, *svasti*, *svāhā*, *svadhā*, *alam*, *vaṣaṭ*.”¹

As stated here, scholars admit that, although in general (*spyir btang*) the second case-affix occurs in the domain of an object of *namas* in accordance with the [common] understanding of its meaning (*don 'thob kyi sgo nas*), the fourth case-affix also occurs in accordance with the special rule that accords with the common usage (*grags pa dmigs bsal gyi sgo nas*). But, by thinking that the fourth case-affix [always] occurs in the domain of an object of *namas* without making such distinction, he holds and asserts that the fourth case-affix occurs in all objects of the word having a meaning of salutation.

Si tu points out that the opponent is making irrelevant remarks due to his inaccurate knowledge of Sanskrit grammar. It is true that, in Sanskrit, the fourth case-affix is introduced after that which co-occurs with *namas* (e.g., *namas devāya*, *haraye namaḥ*) in accordance with a special rule that accords with the common usage. But, Si tu argues, it is not the case that the fourth case-affix is always introduced after that which denotes the object of salutation because there are cases where the second case-affix occurs after such items. In the next paragraph, Si tu gives some examples to show this point. He says:

SG 22.5ff.: *des na spyir btang gi sgrub pa'i dbang gis | pra ṇa myaṃ sogs kṛt rkyen gzhan gyis bsgrubs pa dang | na mā mi sogs ting mtha' rnam dang | byings gzhan las byung ba'i bande | banda nam lta bu rnam kyang 'dud cing phyag 'tshal ba'i don can du mtshungs kyang de dag gi yul la nam du'ang gnyis pa las gzhan pa'i rnam dbye 'jug pa ma yin pa 'di kun gyis shes par bya'o | |*

Therefore, everyone should know this. In accordance with the general [rule of] a word-formation (*spyir btang gi sgrub pa'i dbang gis*), there are those which share the meaning of “bowing” and “saluting,” for example: [1] *praṇamya* (< *pra ṇa myaṃ*), which is formed by [introducing] other *kṛt* affix [*LyaP* to the verb *pra-ṇam*], [2] the finite verb *namāmi*, which ends with *tiñ* affix, and [3] *vandi* (< *bande*), *vandana* (< *banda nam*), etc., which are derived from other verb root [namely, *vand*]; however, nothing other than the second case-affix occurs after [the noun denoting] their objects.

Here are the cases where the second case-affix is introduced after the noun denoting the object of salutation.

1. *devaṃ praṇamya* |
“after having saluted the god”
2. *devaṃ namāmi* |
“I bow down to the god.”
3. *devaṃ vandate* |
“He worships the god.”

Si tu emphasizes that, according to the general rule, the noun ending in the second case-affix occurs with what denotes salutation, but that, according to the special rule for exceptions, the noun ending in

¹KS 2.4.26: *namaḥsvastisvāhāsvadhālamvaṣaḍyoge caturthī* |; Cf. A 2.3.16: *namaḥsvastisvāhāsvadhālamvaṣaḍyogāc ca* |

the fourth case-affix occurs with that, as one can say: *devāya praṇamya*, *devāya namāmi*, and so forth. Si tu criticizes the opponent for not making distinction between these two cases.

At this point it is interesting to consider Pra ti's position on this issue. His view on the usage of the particle *la* of *de la* is totally different from Si tu's. Pra ti says as follows:

KZGG 5.16ff.: *la zhes bya ba ni | bzhi ba dgos ched kyi sgra'o | |*

The particle *la* [of *de la*] is a linguistic item denoting the fourth case, that is, the purpose of action (*dgos ched*).

Pra ti holds that the particle *la* of *de la* denotes the purpose of action (*ched du bya ba*). He therefore interprets the eulogistic verse as follows:

KZGG 6.3ff.: *yon tan gyi khyad par mchog tu gyur pa gang la mnga' ba'i dkon mchog de'i ched du phyag 'tshal lo | |*

I salute *for the sake of* (*ched du*) the [three] jewels which possess the highest special quality.

But here a problem occurs. If Pra ti's interpretation is correct, the verse implies that the author Thon mi makes a salutation *for the sake of* the three jewels of Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha, which contradicts our intuition and common sense.² This became a topic of debate in Si tu's commentary, which will be examined in the next section.

2.2 Si tu's Own View

We go back to Si tu's discussion of the case-affix *la* in the eulogistic verse. As said above, Si tu admits that, in Sanskrit, the noun denoting the object of salutation requires either the second case-affix by applying a general rule or the fourth case-affix by applying a special rule. Having made these points, Si tu questions whether this distinction is applicable to Tibetan grammar.

SG 22.11ff.: *rgyu mtshan des na bod du de lta'i grags pa dmigs bsal med pa'i phyir don thob gtso bas | bzhi pa'i spyir btang gi don sbyin pa'i snod la sogs pa bya ba gang yin yang bya yul de'am de dang 'brel ba'i don du song ba zhig dgos pa las | yul khyad par can la phyag byed pa ni phyag byed po nyid dam de dang 'brel ba'i don las phyag yul de'i ched du min pa ni gnag rdzis kyang rtogs par sla ba'i phyir phyag gi yul la rnam dbye gnyis pa 'jug pa las 'os med do | |*

For that reason, in Tibet [that is, in Tibetan grammar], there is no such special rule that accords with the common usage; and hence, the understanding of its meaning is significant. Therefore [the following distinction must be made]. As in the case of the recipient of giving (*sbyin pa'i snod*) and so forth, an ordinary object (*spyir btang gi don*) of the fourth case-affix must necessarily be that object of action (*bya yul de*), regardless of what action it may be, or alternatively, the object that is related to it (*de dang 'brel ba'i don*). But the action of saluting a special object [such as three jewels] (*yul khyad par can la phyag byed pa*) is [to be done] for the purpose of the agent of salutation himself or something related to him, and not the object of salutation [namely, the three jewels etc.], as even a cowherd easily understands this. So there are no other possibilities than the second case-affix occurring after [the noun denoting] the object of salutation.

²It is interesting to note that Dmu dge bsam gtan (1914–1993) interprets the sentence like: “I salute *for the sake of* the three jewels” as meaning: “I make a salutation *for the sake of attaining* the three jewels.” See LSJNg 309.3ff.

Si tu denies the applicability of the distinction of the general rule and special rule to the usage of the Tibetan particle *la*. He asserts instead that the function of the particle *la* should be understood in terms of its meaning in a particular context. In accordance with Si tu's analysis, let us consider the following two sentences:

- (1) *sprang po la sbyin pa btang* |
 "He gave a donation to a begger."
 (2) *dkon cog la phyag 'tshal* |
 "He salutes the [three] jewels."

In the case of sentence (1), *sprang po* ("a begger") is a person who gets advantage from the donation and therefore indicated by adding the fourth case-affix *la*. But in the case of sentence (2), *dkon cog* is a special object (*yul khyad par can*) of salutation and is not a beneficiary of that action so that it is indicated by adding the second case-affix, and not the fourth case-affix denoting the purpose of action; otherwise, the sentence would imply: "He salutes *for the sake of* the [three] jewels," which however is not the case. Accordingly, it is inappropriate to regard the particle *la* in the eulogistic verse as the fourth case-affix. The particle *la* in the verse functions exclusively as the second case-affix denoting the object of salutation.

Finally, let us look at the following passage in which Si tu's alternative interpretation of the verse is expressed.

SG 24.1ff.: *gang la dang de la zhes pa'i la don gnyis mtha' gcig tu mi mtshungs par 'chad dgos pa'ang ma yin te* | *legs sbyar gyi rnam dbye sbyor tshul dang bstun na* | *gang zhes pa spyi'i sgra* | *de zhes pa bye brag nges gzung gi sgra yin pas* | *spyi'i bya ba bye brag la nges gzung gis sbyor ba 'di 'dra'i rigs la gnyis kar rnam dbye mtshungs par sbyor ba yin pa'i phyir de gnyis ka rnam dbye gnyis pa'i don du byas na'ang rung ste* | *phyag 'tshal lo* | | *gang la na yon tan mchog mnga' ba'i dkon cog de la'o* | | *zhes 'chad pa'i lugs so* | |

It is not the case that the two *la don* particles in the expressions *gang la* and *de la* must necessarily be explained as different. In conformity with the method of applying Sanskrit case-affixes, *gang* is a word for the generality (*spyi sgra*) and *de* is a word that specifies a particular (*bye brag nges gzung gi sgra*); and therefore, in such an expression that combines the action of the generality to a particular by specification, [it is possible that] the same case-affix is equally applied to both [namely, *gang* and *de*]. Accordingly, it is permissible to think that both of these two have the meaning of the second case. Thus, the following is the way of construing [the sentence]: "I make a salutation. *To* what (*gang la*)? *To* the [three] jewels which possess the highest quality (*dkon cog de la'o*)."

Si tu considers that the particle *la* of *gang la* and that of *de la* in the eulogistic verse equally function as the second case-affix denoting the object of action. As he points out here, this kind of construction is used in Sanskrit (e.g., *yam...tam*, *yām...tām*, *yāni...tāni*, etc.), but his analysis of the sentence is difficult to justify from the perspective of Sanskrit grammar. According to Si tu, both *gang la* and *de la* indicate the object of the same action, '*phyag tshal*' ("to salute"), making an expression that combines the action of the generality to a particular by specification (*spyi'i bya ba bye brag la nges gzung gis sbyor ba*); thus, the sentence is paraphrased as: "I make a salutation. *To* what (*gang la*)? *To* the [three] jewels which possess the highest quality (*dkon cog de la'o*)."

This is the how Si tu interprets the relative construction of Tibetan by using, but not wholly relying on, the knowledge of Sanskrit grammar.

3 Conclusion

So far, we have examined the case-affix *la* in the eulogistic verse of the *Sum cu pa* by comparing Si tu's interpretation with Pra ti's. There are differences in interpretation between these two commentators.

Pra ti understands the particle *la* of *gang la* as the seventh case-affix denoting locus of action and that of *de la* as the fourth case-affix denoting the purpose of action. Si tu offers two different interpretations of the sentence. In the first place, Si tu understands the particle *la* of *gang la* as the seventh case-affix like Pra ti, but understands that of *de la* as the second case-affix denoting the object of action. In the second place, he states that both can be explained as the second case-affix denoting the object of action.

Si tu is fully aware of the idea of distinguishing the general rule and special rule regarding the application of the fourth case-affix in Sanskrit. Furthermore, he has the full knowledge of the method of applying case-affixes in Sanskrit grammar. It is, however, important to notice that Si tu is trying to explain the usage of the Tibetan case-affix *la* within the context of Tibetan grammar even if he uses the full knowledge of Sanskrit to reinforce his theory.

Bibliography

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LSJNg *Blo gsal 'jug ngogs* (Dmu dge bsam gtan). Xining: Mtshon sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang. 1997.

(Paṅ chen don grub, Hiroshima University [Indian Philosophy])

チベット古典文法学における *la* 助詞の意味

班青東周

本研究の目的は、チベット古典文法の特徴を考察し、それに対するサンスクリット文法の影響を明らかにすることである。チベット古典文法学はトウンミ・サンボータ (Thon mi saṃbhoṭa: 7世紀) が著したと伝承される『三十頌』と『性入法』に始まり、タティ・リンチェン・トンドブゥブ (Pra ti rin chen don grub: 16世紀末–17世紀初) やシトゥ・パンチェン・チューキ・チュンネー (Si tu paṅ chen chos kyi 'byung gnas: 1700–1774) などの註釈者達の活躍によって発展を遂げる。本研究では『三十頌』の敬礼文の中に二回現れる格助詞 *la* (*la sgra*) の意味を分析する。その敬礼文とは次のものである。

gang *la* ⁽¹⁾ yon tan mchog mnga' ba'i || dkon cog de *la* ⁽²⁾ phyag 'tshal lo ||

「最高の美質を有する〔三〕宝に〔私は〕敬礼する」

ここでの二つの格助詞 *la* の機能が、チベット文法学者達の間で議論的となっている。タティは、第一の *la* 助詞を *mnga'* (「有する」) という行為が行われる場を表示する第七格として理解し、第二の *la* 助詞を *phyag 'tshal* (「敬礼する」) という行為の目的 (～のために) を意味する第四格として理解する。しかし、シトゥは、まず *gang la* の *la* ⁽¹⁾ を第七格として理解し、*de la* の *la* ⁽²⁾ を第二格として理解する。そして、*gang la* の *la* ⁽¹⁾ と *de la* の *la* ⁽²⁾ の両方を、行為対象を表示する第二格として理解する。シトゥは *gang la* の助詞 *la* ⁽¹⁾ と *de la* の助詞 *la* ⁽¹⁾ の間には機能的な違いはないと指摘し、サンスクリット文法の知識を活用して自身の説を立証しようとしている。本論文では以上の二者の見解を比較した上で、主にシトゥの立場を明確にしている。