

Project Title: Critical Edition and Translation of a 12th century Tibetan commentary on the *Illumination of the Middle Way*

Jongbok Yi, Associate Professor of Asian Philosophy

Introduction

I am applying for a sabbatical for the Spring of 2022 to complete my project: a critical edition of and translate the 12th century Tibetan manuscript, the *Commentary on the Illumination of the Middle Way*. My goal is to publish its critical edition and prepare to publish its English translation in collaboration with Dr. Pascale Hugon at the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) in the Austrian Academy of Sciences.¹ Dr. Hugon is a leading scholar of her research area, the 12th century to 13th century Tibetan Buddhist epistemology and Middle Way philosophy. I have been collaborating with Dr. Hugon since July 2019.

Statement of the Aims and Objectives of the Project

During the sabbatical, I will entirely focus on finalizing the critical edition of Chapa Chökyi Senggé's² *Commentary on Kamalaśīla's Illumination of the Middle*. The text of this project is a commentary on the root text, *Illumination of the Middle Way*. The root text is composed of an 8th-century Indian scholastic Buddhist monk, Kamalaśīla. He contributed to establishing the roadmap of Tibetan Buddhism by inheriting the tradition of Indian Buddhism, not Chinese Buddhist Tradition. Among his treatises, the *Illumination of the Middle Way* is a pivotal treatise representing the Autonomy Middle Way School in expounding a view on emptiness, the key to attaining enlightenment through Buddhist epistemology, logic, and Middle Way philosophy. Chapa Chökyi Senggé (**Chapa**, henceforth) is a prominent Buddhist scholar who greatly influenced the formation of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. The text of the project, *Commentary on the Illumination of the Middle (the Commentary*, henceforth), was a monastic textbook at the center of indigenous Tibetan scholastic tradition, Sangphu Ne'utok. Chapa's philosophical views that we will find in this commentary became the doctrinal foundation of the Geluk Tradition, where the 14th Dalai Lama is a member. Therefore, this text's critical edition and translation will become essential works for this field and provide an extensive understanding of the initial development of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy in the 12th century CE onward.

Background on Work Already Accomplished

Background: A critical edition requires different editions of the same text. While many scholars had known that Chapa's *Commentary* could illuminate the 12th-century Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, nobody could locate the actual manuscript until I found it in Tibet in 2005 (**Manuscript B**, henceforth). I took high-resolution pictures of the manuscript and typed the entire *Commentary*. Also, I made 90% of cross-references with the root text by Kamalaśīla in over two years for my dissertation. However, after reading the *Commentary*, my thesis advisor told me not to pursue it as it would take another ten years to finish the dissertation. Following his advice, I decided to wait until I became tenured.

¹ For detailed CV and projects of Dr. Hugon, see <https://www.oecaw.ac.at/en/ikga/team/research/hugon-pascale/>.

² phywa chos kyi seng ge, 1109-1169.

Meanwhile, another edition of the *Commentary* was published in Tibet in 2006 (**Manuscript A**, henceforth). However, since the *Commentary* contains highly complex philosophical debates, it was difficult for scholars to access the text. I briefly mentioned a different manuscript that I found in Tibet to Dr. Hugon in later 2006 in a conference and contacted her again in 2018 to resume the critical edition project.

Realizing the possibility of a critical edition, Dr. Hugon invited me to the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia in the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, Austria, in July 2019. In the institute, we intensively worked on creating the critical edition and translating the text based on the critical edition, as posted on the institution's website.³

The list of works already accomplished: I finished typing in the *Commentary* in Unicode based on Manuscript B (176 folios) found in Tibet and interwove it with the root text, *Illumination of the Middle Way*, by making cross-references between two texts. In addition, Manuscript A (164 folios) published in 2006 will enable us to create a critical edition and translate the entire text. Also, I have been using two digitized editions of the root text.

Work progress: In July 2019, Dr. Pascale and I met worked on both the critical edition and translation over four hours every weekday for a month. We are meeting over Zoom every other week and work three hours. We have finished 16 folios of the critical edition and translation out of 164 folios of Manuscript A.

Statement of Procedures/Methodology:

Creating a critical edition is a painstaking and strenuous work while its methodology is relatively simple—that is, critically comparing different editions, applying emendations to the new edition, and translating the target text based on the critical edition. Therefore, I am afraid that my methodology section is relatively short. The critical edition follows Karl Lachmann's method that "aims at providing a standardized, rational procedure for editing texts based on multiple manuscripts" to efficiently and timely create a critical edition.⁴ Dr. Hugon and I have been comparing and recording discrepancies between two manuscripts and apply emendations to the new critical edition while translating the *Commentary*. While Lachmann method is purely philological, we agreed that translating the *Commentary* is necessary to make a better edition by understanding the context systematically and logically. Therefore, the critical edition will be made by philological comparison of these two editions and philosophical examination of its context.

Currently, both of us do not have much time to focus on the project entirely. Notably, Dr. Hugon runs several other projects simultaneously. Besides, critically deciding better words and translating a complicated Tibetan sentence often takes two specialists to discuss over an hour. Therefore, even devoting three hours every other week is not enough to create the critical edition within a few years. To accelerate its publication, I want to devote my entire time to make a draft version of the critical edition during the sabbatical so that our decision of emendations and translation can be much efficient.

Timeline: I expect that more than half of the critical edition could be done by the fall of 2021, and therefore, during the sabbatical in the spring semester of 2022, I will devote my entire time to finish the draft version of the critical edition by May 2022 and complete the final version by July 2022.

³ <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/ikga/research/tibetan-studies/research-areas/early-tibetan-madhyamaka/>.

⁴ Glenn W. Most, "What Is a Critical Edition?," in *Ars Edendi Lecture Series, Vol. IV* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2016), 176–78.

Travel: While Zoom meeting is okay, it is not as effective as in-person collaboration. Also, working for three hours on screen makes both of us very tired. With my presence at the institute, Dr. Hugon will devote her time solely to this project as we did in July 2019. Therefore, at the last stage of its publication, I want to work intensively with her in-person to finalize the project.

Importance or Value

As Helmut Tauscher stated in his article in 2009, "the studies of his Madhyamaka (Middle Way) treatises have not yet advanced to a degree that would allow for a comprehensive survey of his Madhyamaka position."⁵ One of reasons why the research of this field could not be comprehensive was because of lack of materials. In this sense, this project will be a valuable foundation for research in Buddhist epistemology, logic, Middle Way doctrine, and the 12th century Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, and it will be counted as the first critical edition among scholars.

In addition to lack of resource and the difficulty of reading manuscripts, Chapa's texts have not been fully translated due to extreme complexity. The philosophical concepts and grammar that he uses are somewhat different from the later period. While Dr. Hugon has focused on 12th to 13th century, my research is mostly on 14th to 18th century Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Therefore, our collaboration can provide a very extensive understanding of the target text. The translation will be the first translation among Chapa's works and will serve as a foundation for further research. I am confident that the critical edition and translation will contribute to the comprehensive understanding of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy of this period and provide a clearer picture of the historical development of Tibetan philosophical traditions from the 12th century CE to the later period.

Further Research or Study

Dr. Hugon told me that the Austrian Academy of Sciences had expressed interest in publishing both as a peer-reviewed series, Vienna Series for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies. This project will serve as the first volume of a trilogy written by Chapa. Therefore, when this project is completed, I will work to publish translations of two other treatises. Also, Dr. Hugon and I will publish a few articles based on the critical edition. It is also very possible that we will present a paper based on this project in the International Association of Tibetan Studies in August 2022.

Outcome

The key outcome is the production of two peer-reviewed publications of the Commentary's critical edition and its English translation. In my field of study, a critical edition plays a crucial role as a primary text of numerous academic works for scholars worldwide. While other scholarly works from Tibet around the 12th century CE are only available as poorly scanned manuscripts, due to another edition of the *Commentary*, Dr. Hugon and I can create an accessible, searchable, and reliable edition of the text. In this sense, publishing a critical edition of Chapa will be regarded as a monumental achievement in the field of Tibetan scholasticism. Also, the translation of the *Commentary* will be the first complete translation among treatises in the 12th to 13th century Tibetan scholasticism. On a personal level, completing these two works will be a meaningful way of concluding a chapter and opening a new chapter of my research on the development of Tibetan scholasticism from Chapa's tradition to the Geluk Tradition.

⁵ Helmut Tauscher, "Remarks on Phya Pa Chos Kyi Seng Ge and His Madhyamaka Treatises," *The Tibet Journal* 34/35, no. 3/2 (2010): 7.