

# A Sketch of the Translation History of Tibetan Gnostic Verses (1269-2021)

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## Abstract

The Communist Party of China and our country have attached great importance to Tibet and have held many symposiums to discuss and study Tibetan issues in all aspects, especially the development and prosperity of culture. Therefore, this article turns the focus to the translation and dissemination of Tibetan indigenous culture. It sorts out and studies the fragmentary translations of Tibetan gnostic verses, and finally organizes them into a systematic translation history of Tibetan gnostic verses. Taking the translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* as an example, it sorts out the translation history from the initial stage of translating into Mongolian in the 13th Century and the 14th Century to the heyday of multilingual translation in the early 21st century so as to explore the translation, study and dissemination of Tibetan ethnic literary works, especially Tibetan gnostic verses.

## Keywords

Tibetan gnostic verses, translation history, *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

## 1. Introduction

The Communist Party of China and our country attach great importance to Tibet. Seven symposiums on work in Tibet (1980, 1984, 1994, 2001, 2010, 2015) have been held to study the development of Tibet. These seven symposiums played a significant role in the Tibetan development and promoted all aspects of work in Tibet. Thus we can see that our country places great emphasis on social stability and economic development in Tibet.

There are several core words in symposiums on work in Tibet held by the Central Committee of the CPC: unity, affluence, civilization, booming of culture and art, strengthening internal exchanges, promoting Tibetan traditional culture and new culture, building cultural preservation areas with Chinese characteristics and so on.

Sorting out the translation history of Tibetan gnostic verses is of great significance to both history and reality. As one kind of unique ethnic literary work, there is certain complexity in the translation motivation and the background of the times of Tibetan gnostic verses.

Wang Yao and others suggested dividing the history of Tibetology into eight periods, from 1840 to 1995 and later (Yao Wang, 2013, p. 25). The division of Yao Wang and others has enlightening and referential significance for us.

The translation of Tibetan gnostic verses has its own complexity. Tibetan gnostic verses have been continuously translated into Mongolian and later into several western languages since its birth. Only the history of Tibetan gnostic verses Chinese translation (also refers to as ethnic translation) is also complicated. Zhengshuan Li and Chunlong Zhao once wrote another paper in which they divided of Tibetan gnostic verses Chinese translation into five stages, namely (1) the germination period (1938-1949); (2) the beginning period (1950-1965); (3) the silent period (1966-1976) ; (4) the overall period (1977-1995); (5) the deepening period (since 1995). If the translation phenomenon of Tibetan gnostic verses separation is considered together, the situation will be more complicated, because Tibetan gnostic verses have

been translated into nearly ten languages. Therefore, this article intends to consider the study of the translation history of Tibetan gnomic verses in a larger scope in order to avoid one-sided conclusions under the isolated case studies. The current situation in translation and collation of Tibetan gnomic verses does not match the emphasis of Party Central Committee on Tibetan cultural construction. Therefore, this paper sorts out the multilingual translation activities of Tibetan gnomic verses separation and divides the translation history of Tibetan gnomic verses to explore the characteristics and rules of Tibetan gnomic verses translation. (The research object of this article is based on official publications, except Mongolian.)

## 2. About *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

*Sakya Gnostic Verses* is the representative work of Saban Gongga Gyaltsen, the fourth-generation patriarch in Sakya royal family, and the beginning and model of Tibetan gnomic verses.

Gongga Gyaltsen was born in Sakya royal family in the southwest of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. He was studious since childhood and learnt Buddhist sutras and scriptures under eminent teachers. So he gradually became a famous scholar and the first pandita in Tibet. Ban Zhida is a literal translation of the word “Pandita” which means “a learned scholar”. Therefore, later translators directly call him “Pandita” without “Saban”, like replacing a person’s name with his degree or title. Although there are many others who are also pandita, all readers know “Pandita” in books specifically refers to Saban Gongga Gyaltsen.

Gongga Gyaltsen made great contributions not only to Tibetan culture but also consolidating the Tibetan regime, safeguarding our country’s territorial integrity and improving national relations. It was he who led his nephew to participate in the Liangzhou Talks (1247) and peacefully resolved the issue of Mongolian-Tibetan relationship. It had a profound impact on Chinese history afterwards with great significance. It proved and further established the control of Central Government over Tibet and brought Tibetan culture to Mongolia, which greatly enriched and influenced Mongolian literature, culture and thought, and also spread Buddhism. Since then, his nephew Gro mgon (1235-1280) was also ordered to create the Phags pa Mongolian.

*Sakya Gnostic Verses* puts forward a series of propositions in gnomic verses on how to pursue studies, how to know people, how to conduct oneself in society and how to get along with people and things. It emphasizes the importance of knowledge and wisdom of life, advocates integrity and sincerity, teaches people to the sincere, encourages exerting benevolence, inculcates the thought of loving the people and being patient in case of trouble, calls for keeping charity, altruism and never forget diligence and other ideas. Each verse consists of four lines, with seven characters per line, which does not rhyme completely, so it belongs to free form. The original book has nine chapters with 457 verses. The main ideas of these nine chapters are: how to observe scholars, how to observe sages, how to observe fools, how to observe people between sages and fools, how to recognize evil deeds, how to observe correct methods of life, how to observe incorrect methods of life, how to observe things and how to observe the teaching method. For the translation of the titles of these nine chapters, different translators use different words.

In terms of form and content, *Sakya Gnostic Verses* by Gongga Gyaltsen inherited and developed those of Nagarjuna, an Indian Buddhist philosopher (ca. 150-250). Gongga Gyaltsen personally observed and thought deeply of combining with Tibetan culture and social phenomena, and then wrote this book of gnomic verses that can regulate people’s daily behaviors, benefit the ruler’s governance of society and fill readers with philosophy. Among the 457 gnomic verses, over 100 verses (as many as one-fifth) directly imitated and used the content of Nagarjuna’s gnomic verses. Due to space limitations, no example is given here.

*Sakya Gnostic Verses* was translated into many languages spreading to Chinese mainland and the rest of the world.

## 3. The Initial Stage of Translating *Sakya Gnostic Verses* into Mongolian in the 13th Century and the 14th Century

*Sakya Gnostic Verses* was translated into Mongolian when Gongga Gyaltsen was still alive. In about the second half of the 13th century, the translator of the earliest version was Sonam Gala (Tibetan name as Bsod nams), a mantra master. The birth and death of Sonam Gala is unknown, but according to the literature, it is speculated that he lived in the period of Kublai Khan (1215-1294). He used Phags pa character, namely, new Mongolian characters. The title of the book translated by Sonam Gala is *Subasidi*, an engraved form with 457 verses.

The title of the book *Sakya Gnostic Verses* was changed into many expressions when it was translated into Mongolian which named the book as *A Treasury of Good Sayings*. The Mongolian people call it *Subaxidy* (Sanskrit transliteration). *Subasidi* has become the etymology of treasure and elegant sayings commonly used by American translators. As an important document since the 13th century, *Sakya Gnostic Verses* circulated in Tibetan and Mongolian regions and

had a profound impact on the Mongolian ideology and culture.

Phags pa character is a kind of Mongolian created by Phags pa (Phags pa means sage)

Phags pa is Gongga Gyaltsen's nephew Gro mgon, the fifth-generation patriarch of the Sakya Sect. In 1244, to prevent Tibet from being conquered by the Mongolian cruel forces, he accompanied his elder uncle Gongga Gyantsen to Liangzhou (now Wuwei City, Gansu Province). In August 1246, they arrived in Liangzhou and met with Ogedei Khan (grandson of Genghis Khan) (1186-1241) and the second son of Kuorui (?-1251) to discuss the issue of Mongolian-Tibetan relationship. This is the famous Liangzhou Talks. It not only peacefully resolved the issues between Mongolia and Tibet, but also established the dominance of the Sakya family in Tibet.

In 1264, Gro mgon was ordered to create Mongolian character. In 1269, the whole Mongolia began to use "New Mongolian Characters", that is, "Phags pa" character. Therefore, in 1270, Gro mgon was named "Royal Teacher" and "the Karmapa". As the official character of Mongolia, Phags pa character promoted the civilization of Mongolia. It once unified the Mongolian character, but it was deactivated with the fall of the Yuan Dynasty (1368).

The time when *Sakya Gnostic Verses* was translated into Phags pa character could only take place in the 13th and 14th centuries, specifically between 1269 and 1368. After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, the Mongolian nobles retreated to the grassland and reactivated ancient Uighur Mongolian character.

The literature shows that there is also a Mongolian translation in the Republic of Buryatia, but the date of publication is unknown.

#### 4. The Follow-up Period of Mongolian Translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* in the 17th Century and the 18th Century

In the 17th and 18th centuries, there were still activities of translating *Sakya Gnostic Verses* into Mongolian. There are three main versions. It can be seen that Tibetan gnostic verses had a profound influence on Mongolian culture, literature and ideology. These Mongolian translations are an important carrier for the inheritance of Tibetan gnostic verses and an important resource for westerners to translate Tibetan gnostic verses.

From 1630 to 1661, a Todo Mongolian version of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* appeared. The translator was Zaya Pandita.

In the middle of the 18th century, an engraved form of the *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated by Lobsandanbizalsan appeared in Beijing.

In the second half of the 18th century, *Sakya Gnostic Verses* of Qagan Obo Temple translated by Chahar Chagan Aobao appeared. He was the compere and translator of Chahar Chagan Obo Temple and the head of printing Mongolian and Tibetan scriptures. He was not only a scholar and translator, but also an interpreter, writer and researcher, and he also wrote gnostic verses.

Compared with Sonam Gara's translation, the Chahar Chagan Obo Temple translation is more intact.

#### 5. The Initial Stage of Translating *Sakya Gnostic Verses* into Foreign Languages in the 19th Century

The 19th century was an important beginning for Tibetan gnostic verses to go global and the formation of world Tibetology. Although several versions in the 19th century were all selected translations, their significance should not be underestimated. The spread of these versions in the West enabled westerners to understand Chinese cultural thoughts and Tibetan literature and religion. Since then, the western translation of Tibetan gnostic verses has been influenced by them. Therefore, these western translators have made great contributions to the dissemination of Chinese literature and culture.

##### 5.1 Csoma's selective English translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

In 1819, a Hungarian called Alexander Csoma DE Körösi (1784-1842) set off to come to the East. His name was translated into two Chinese versions. One is Qiaoma (transliterated from Csoma, the other is Keluxi (transliterated from Körösi). Now we call him Csoma. He spent two years hiking from Hungary to India and the Himalayan mountain area in China. He lived with many Tibetan scholars in Zangla Village and studied Tibetan language and Tibetan culture. He spent the rest of his life there where he died. It is generally believed that he came to the East to seek root or to find his origin. According to this purpose, he attempted to translate Tibetan gnostic verses into English to find the thinking patterns, methods and the structure of language expression between two nations in the process of translating it into English. As for what he found, we need to write another article to conduct archaeological research. In fact, according to the introduction of Tivadar Duka (1825-1908), the author of Csoma's biographer, Csoma was interested in a popular state-

ment at the time and tried proving it. The prevailing saying at the time was that the Magyar language of Hungary originated from a kind of language in Central Asia, perhaps a branch of Uyghurs. This is the reason why he came to the East. As a result, he translated *Sakya Gnostic Verses*, a Tibetan gnostic verses, and became the first person who translated *Sakya Gnostic Verses* into foreign language and the founder of Tibetology, although he did not find the language and place he was looking for.

In 1833, Csoma translated 234 verses of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* into English, but it was not published until 1855 in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Vol. 24 (Page 141-165, section 85) in 1855 and Vol. 25 of 1856 (Page 258-294, section 149) in 1856, which set a precedent for Tibetan gnostic verses English translation. The English name of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* that Csoma chose to translate is *A Brief Notice of the Subhāshita Ratna Nidhi of Sakya Pandita* (Körösi, 1855: Vol. XXIV). This gnostic verses edition used prose rather than verse. He chose to translate 234 verses and divided them into 9 chapters in Tibetan and English. In other words, he selected some verses from 9 chapters of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* to translate. He was the first western scholar to translate and study Tibetan literature and released his first fruits. (Lijuan Geng & Zhengshuan Li, 2015, pp. 103-106). As for the reason why he used prose instead of verse, it is worthy of discussing in another article. When his translation was published in 1855, Csoma was already dead.

In the process of the foreign translation of Tibetan literature and the development of Tibetology, Csoma made the greatest contribution: he was the first to translate *Sakya Gnostic Verses*; he also sent many of his accumulated documents to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Later, these materials became important materials for studying Tibet, the foundation of Tibetology studies and the treasure that made Hungarian Oriental literature studies invincible. Davenport also praised Csoma and believed that *Sakya Gnostic Verses* chosen to translate by Csoma was one of the first books where part of Tibetan literature was translated into English. (Davenport, 2000, p. 17)

## 5.2 Schiefner's selective German translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

Between 1863 and 1865, Anton Schiefner (1817-1879) published an excerpt from *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated into German (33 verses, 1863-65).

Schiefner was born in a German-speaking family in the Estonian city of Reval (now called Tallinn, the capital of Estonia). Estonia belonged to the Russian Empire at that time. His father was a businessman who immigrated from Bohemia. From 1840 to 1842, he devoted himself to studying eastern languages in Berlin. After returning to St. Petersburg in 1843, he obtained a position in the Imperial College soon. In 1852, he was instructed to teach Tibetan language and literature. He died in St. Petersburg at the age of 62.

## 5.3 Philipp Édouard Foucaux's selective French translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

In 1858, Philipp Édouard Foucaux (1811-1894, also translated as Fu Ke, but it is easy to be confused with another Foucault, so Philipp Édouard Foucaux is used in this article) published a French translation of an excerpt (134 verses) of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* in Benjamin-DuPont Publishing House, Paris with only 46 pages. The poems were taken from Csoma's translation. The structure of the book is as follows: there is a preface with two-and-a-half pages introducing his translation influenced by Csoma, the author and his family of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*. The text proper is the translation of 134 verses in prose, and the serial number is Roman numerals. There are words of two pages after the text, and the title is PLAINTES DE NORZANG—A LA RECHERCHE DE YIDPHROM, and the last is annotations of two pages. What should be noted is that the verses selected in the text were selected by the translator among 457 verses, 9 chapters of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* according to his own preference and understanding. The order is from front to back, and the serial number is added by the translator Philipp Édouard Foucaux. For example:

### I

Si vous avez du talent, tous les hommes, sans être appelés, s'assemblent d'eux-mêmes (autour de vous);----Queleque éloignée que soit la fleur odorante, elle est entourée d'une nuée d'abeilles.

(P. E. Foucaux, 1858: 9)

This verse is the 8th verse of the first chapter in *Sakya Gnostic Verses*. The verse translated from Tibetan into Chinese by Tsedan Dorji (Cidan Duoqi) and others is like this:

只要是知识渊博大学者，  
自然会有人汇集在你的周围；  
只要是香气四溢的鲜花，  
自然会有成群的蜜蜂飞来。

(Tsedan Dorji, 1985: 2)

If a man is a learned scholar,  
People will cluster around him naturally.  
If it is a fragrant flower,  
A swarm of bees will fly to it naturally.

(tr. Zhengshuan Li)

In September 2010, the American KESSINGER PUBLISHING published Philipp Édouard Foucaux's French translation again. The publisher said that the purpose of republishing this book is to protect and promote world literature. That this work could be listed into world literature, is enough to illustrate its value and influence.

## 6. The complete German translation and comparative study period of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* in the first half of the 20th century

In the first half of the 20th century, the most important activity in translation of Tibetan gnostic verses was that the whole *Sakya Gnostic Verses* was translated into German. Its importance not only reflected the completeness of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*, but also provided a blueprint for the study of the overall thought and art form in *Sakya Gnostic Verses*. William Lachlan Campbell (1880-1937), a Scot, made outstanding contributions.

In 1925, Campbell published his German translation of the entire *Sakya Gnostic Verses* with a total of 457 verses. The German title of the book is *die spruche von sakya*, and it is translated into Chinese as *Gnostic Verses of Sakya*. But as a third-party translator whose mother tongue was neither Tibetan nor German, the quality of his translation is also controversial.

From 1916 to 1917, Campbell worked in Gyangze Town, south central Tibet. He bought some books of gnostic verses there, including some engraved forms whose accuracy was of suspicion.

In addition, it is necessary to mention another work done by Campbell. This work seems unrelated with his German translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*, but the inner connection is extremely close. He translated *The Tree of Wisdom* written by Nagarjuna, an Indian Buddhist philosopher with "Translated by W. L. Campbell" on its cover. In fact, the translation is very important for the study of Tibetan gnostic verses, because in fact he had already explored the relationship between Tibetan gnostic verses and Indian gnostic verses.

The book *The Tree of Wisdom* was translated by Campbell from Tibetan to English and was published in Calcutta University in 1919.

According to Campbell's preface in the Gangtok translation in October 1918, *The Tree of Wisdom* was translated into Tibetan around the 11th century. It was quoted by many Tibetan writers and sometimes used in whole sentences. He called this type of behavior literary piracies or plagiarism. (Campbell, 1919: Preface) It can be seen that Campbell studied the inner connection between *Sakya Gnostic Verses* and *The Tree of Wisdom*. In fact, this is the discovery of questions through comparative literature research methods. The comparison between Gongga Gyaltzen's gnostic verses and Nagarjuna's was meaningful because he found the inheritance relationship between Tibetan gnostic verses and Nagarjuna's. The important finding confirmed the speculation of some people that the Tibetan gnostic verses inherited the Nagarjuna's gnostic verses both in form and content, and made this literary form more excellent.

## 7. The Initial Stage of Chinese Translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* in the 1950s

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tibetan gnostic verses were gradually translated. In the initial period, *Sakya Gnostic Verses* was first selected for translation. It was an exploratory translation, which is similar to the westerners'.

### 7.1 The historical background of Chinese translation of gnostic verses in the 1950s

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Central Committee decided to liberate Tibet peacefully and protect Tibetan religion and culture. In nearly two years, the Central Government repeatedly urged the Tibetan local government to smash the stubborn resistance of conservative forces, win over progressives and spur middle forces to protect people's livelihood in Tibet to the fullest extent. Finally the agreement for the peaceful liberation of Tibet was signed. In October 1951, Tibet was peacefully liberated. In June 1959, Tibet implemented democratic reforms so that serfs turned over and became masters; great changes occurred in productive relations and the productive forces were fully liberated. In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region was established; ethnic policies were fully implemented; legal

religions were protected; patriotic enthusiasm was high, and security in the southwestern frontier of the motherland became stable.

## 7.2 Wang Yao and his translation of gnomic verses into Chinese

In the middle of the 20th century (1956-1957), Wang Yao (1928-2015) selected more than 200 verses from *Sakya Gnostic Verses* and translated them into Chinese, which were serialized in the supplement of *People's Daily*. After being processed and revised, the *Selected Tibetan Sakya Gnostic Verses* was published by Qinghai People's Publishing House in 1958.

Wang Yao's Chinese translation of gnomic verses was the first in this field and was of great significance. Although his Chinese translation was a century later than Csoma's English translation, Wang Yao was the pioneer in translating Tibetan gnomic verses into Chinese in China.

## 8. The Prosperous Period of Translating *Sakya Gnostic Verses* into Many Languages in the Second Half of the 20th Century (1960-1990)

From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, it was the prosperous period when Tibetan gnomic verses were translated into many languages so that multiple translations appeared. It promoted the spread of gnomic verses and laid a foundation and created a good atmosphere for the prosperous period of gnomic verse to be translated into many languages in the 21st century.

### 8.1 American scholar James Evert Bosson's English translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

In 1969, James Evert Bosson (1933-2016) published his English translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* remaining it as *A Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels*. It was his doctoral dissertation completed in 1965. Bosson's translations were Mongolian-English rendering and Tibetan-English rendering using prose literal translation. Bosson's translation and research were accompanied by more detailed textual research materials with the main aim of academic research. His master copy was the original Tibetan text and the Mongolian *Sakya Gnostic Verses* which was photocopied by Ligeti Lajos (1902-1987) in Hungary in 1948.

*A Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels* was the 92nd volume of the Ural and Altaic Languages series publications in Indiana University. This book was dedicated to Phyllis, which was written on the title page. Its preface is valuable in that it not only introduced the materials he had collected but also compared languages and grammar between Tibetan and Mongolian. The text proper is marked with Arabic numerals for serial number. The text proper is the translation from Tibetan into English. In the square brackets below is the text translated from Mongolian into English. Take Section 1 of Chapter 1 as an example:

1. The wise are the keepers of the treasury of excellence; they gather together aphoristic jewels. Because the ocean is the treasury of water, all rivers flow (into it).

[The wise are the keepers of the treasury of excellence. They gather together aphoristic jewels. Because the ocean has become the treasury of water, all rivers flow thither. ]

Bosson did research and translated in Mongolian, Tibetan and Manchu. Several of his publications were groundbreaking, including *Buryatian Readings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962) and *A Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels: Sakya Gnostic Verses of Sakya Pandita in Tibetan and Mongolian* (Indiana University Press, 1969, the full name is: *A Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels: The Subhasitaratnanidhi of Sa Skya Pandita in Tibetan and Mongolian*).

### 8.2 U.S. citizen Tarthang Tulku's English translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

Tarthang Talku (1934-2018?) was born in eastern Tibet, China. Later he went to India. In 1969, he settled down in the United States.

Tarthang Tulku's English translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* was entitled *Elegant Sayings* (1977).

Talku's translation had much in common with that of Csoma: the number of stanzas selected was the same, and the verses were also the same. The difference is that Talku adopted stanza form with some changes in use of words. However, his translation was not rhymed, but was in free style.

For example, Csoma's translation of the first stanza (the 7th stanza of the original *Sakya Gnostic Verses*):

Were you to die the next year, acquire science: though in this life you cannot become wise, in your future

birth, it will be a recommendatory precious thing, if taken with you.

(Alexander Csoma, 1855: 44)

Acquire knowledge though you may die next year.  
Although in this life you may not become wise,  
In your future birth, if taken with you,  
It will become a precious thing.

(Tulku, 1977: 63)

Talku translated poetry into poetry and restored the beauty of poetry, which was a great contribution. He replaced some words. For this behavior, we do not know whether he wanted to avoid being accused of plagiarism or he corrected Csoma based on the original Tibetan text.

### 8.3 Hungarian scholar Louis Ligeti's Hungarian translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

In 1948, Louis Ligeti published a photocopy of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* in Budapest. The master copy was the book that he bought from a royal mansion and presented it to the Hungarian Academy during his investigation in Inner Mongolia from 1928 to 1931. He wrote a preface in the photocopy explaining the source and value of the manuscript in detail and told readers that the character in this book included Tibetan and Uighur Mongolian.

In 1973, the Academy of Sciences Press in Budapest published Ligeti's work entitled *The Treasure of Famous Sentences: Sakya Gnostic Verses Translated by Sonam Gala*. Sonam Gala, a figure in the Kublai (1215-1294) period who translated *Sakya Gnostic Verses* from Tibetan to Uighur Mongolian.

The content of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* attached to Ligeti's book is that of the 1948 edition.

The preface and introduction in this translation were written in French. That is to say, the preface and introduction are the research part of this book. The text is the content from a photocopy in 1948, that is, Uighur Mongolian or a transliteration of it. There are 457 verses in the text, catalogue and references after it and a list at the end, which illustrates that this book is the fourth of Ligeti Mongolian Study Collection.

Here is the first section of the translation:

1  
merged erdem-ün sang bariycid:  
sayin üge-tü erdeniš-I quriyayu:  
yeke dalai usun-u sang inu boluysan-u tula:  
qamuy müred tende cidquyu:  
(LOUIS LIGETI, 1973: 25)

Ligeti was the first person to introduce the Tibetan materials in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences sent by Csoma in 1933. In 1942, he edited the data index and started Tibetan studies. He listed Csoma as an important Tibetologist, guided the direction of research, inspired József Térjek to carry out a careful classification study of Csoma and pushed Tibetan studies to a climax.

### 8.4 Dalikova's selective Russian translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

In 1973, Dailikova, a former Soviet Union Tibetologist, published an article entitled *Proverbs in Sakya Pandita*. She translated 37 verses from *Sakya Gnostic Verses* into Russian and put them in the article. This article was included in *Studies on Chinese Literature in the Soviet Union (Collected Works in Memory of the 60th Anniversary of N. T. Fedorenko, an Academician of the Soviet Academy of Sciences)* published in Moscow.

### 8.5 Georg Kara's selective German translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

In 1977, Georg Kara translated 9 verses from *Sakya Gnostic Verses*. Although the number was very small, it seems that these verses are his favorite. For example:

1. Wenn du einen Feind, der dir geschadet hat, überwinden möchtest, dann überwinde zuerst deinen Zorn. (The general meaning is: if you want to defeat your enemy, you must subdue your anger at first.)
2. Kleine Bäche machen viel Geräusch, der Ozean brüllt selten. (The general meaning is: the streams in the mountains are always noisy, but the vast oceans are rarely noisy.)

It is easy to see that Kara paid more attention to the ethical value of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* and its role in improving

humanistic cultivation.

## 8.6 Tandori Dezső's Hungarian translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

In 1984, Tandori Dezső (1938.12-2019.2), a Hungarian poet and translator, translated Ligeti's Mongolian-Tibetan bilingual translation into Hungarian. This book was published by the European Publishing House in Budapest. It contains 152 pages.

In 2011, the Hungarian fapadoskonyv.hu Publishing House printed and published this book again with 132 pages.

## 9. Prosperous Period of Tibetan Gnostic Verses Chinese Translation in the 1980s and 1990s

In 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee decided to implement the policy of invigorating domestic economy and opening to the outside world. At the beginning of China's reform and opening up in the 1980s, the translation of Tibetan Gnostic Verses presented a flourishing situation, including the retranslation of certain Gnostic Verses.

### 9.1 Chinese translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses*

*Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated by Tsedan Dorji (Cidan Duoji) and others was published by Tibet People's Publishing House in 1980. The translation team was composed of two Tibetan scholars and four scholars of Han nationality. Nearly 20,000 copies were printed in two prints. The editor's preface briefly introduces *Sakya Gnostic Verses*. The contents follow. There are no serial numbers in the text.

Wang Yao's complete Chinese translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses (Tibetan and Chinese Edition)* was published by Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House in 1981.

### 9.2 Chinese translation of *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree, Dgeldan Gnostic Verses*

#### 9.2.1 Chinese translation of *Dgeldan Gnostic Verses*

"Dgeldan", a transliteration of the Tibetan pronunciation, means "goodness". *Dgeldan Gnostic Verses* are cautionary words to teach people to behave correctly, not to be a fool, to be a sage.

*Dgeldan Gnostic Verses* was written by Sonam Drakpa (1478-1554), an eminent Tibetan monk. It contains 125 verses. Each verse consists of four lines and each line has seven characters. The first two lines express the author's idea, while the latter two are examples to draw an analogy. Generally fables and allusions are used to enable readers to further understand the author's idea and increase the expressiveness. The language is vivid, approachable and impressive.

The only complete Chinese translation of *Dgeldan Gnostic Verses* was translated by Yufang Geng (1929-?). It was published together with *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* by the Tibet People's Publishing House in 1986. The title of this book is *Dgeldan Gnostic Verses; Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*. It was published after the second national symposium on work in Tibet (1984).

Yufang Geng translated and published the Chinese translation of *Dgeldan Gnostic Verses* in the mid-1980s, which was closely related to the social background and national policy at that time. Before the publication of Yufang Geng's Chinese translation (1986), the Central Government had held two symposiums on work in Tibet. The symposiums played an important role in promoting construction of Tibet. Our country had given great support to Tibetan economy, culture, education and other fields. The publication of Geng Yufang's Chinese translation conformed to Tibet's needs of development.

#### 9.2.2 Chinese translation of *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*

*Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* together with *Dgeldan Gnostic Verses* was published in 1986. The title of this book is *Dgeldan Gnostic Verses; Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*.

*Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* was written by Konchok Tenpai Dronme (1762-1823). It contains gnostic verses of "Water" (139 verses) and gnostic verses of "Tree" (100 verses). The book uses images of water and trees as a metaphor to tell the truth of life.

Tenpai Dronme was the third generation of living Buddha of Gongtangcang. He was learned and talented. In *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*, he guides people's daily behavior, expresses insights and exhortations about world affairs, exposes corruption and darkness, expresses sympathy for the people, analyzes the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, discusses social and life issues, teaches people to have quality, education and cultivation and cultivates people with virtue through Buddhist philosophy. The "water" and "tree" in *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* symbolize

various forms of life, which has profound meaning and thought with distinctive features.

### 9.3 Chinese translation of *Moral Cultivation of Kings*

*Moral Cultivation of King* was written by Mipham Gyatso (1846-1912). Its Tibetan version was published by Tibet People's Publishing House in 1983.

*Moral Cultivation of Kings* was translated into Chinese by Geng Yufang and was published by Tibet People's Publishing House in 1987. So far this has been the only Chinese version. This book was also published after the second national symposium on work in Tibet (1984).

According to Davenport's research, Jampal Rinchen ('jam dpal rin chen), the prince of the Dege Kingdom in eastern Tibet, asked the great scholar Mipham Gyatso how to become a qualified king in the process of fighting for the throne with his elder brother. So Mipham Gyatso wrote this book (John Thomas Davenport, 2000, p. 12).

*Moral Cultivation of Kings* has immortal literary, historical and sociological research value. There are 21 chapters in the book, including 1,102 gnomic verses and over 5000 lines, which is the longest poem among all Tibetan gnomic verses. The content is broad and profound, and the language is plain and vigorous, involving ethics, policy, ways of dealing with people, principles of dealing with things, the method of employing people, the standards of right and wrong and the approach of self-cultivation and so on of the ruling class. As a literary classic and sociological work, it not only displays the profound philosophy and wisdom of the Tibetan people, but also reflects the unique cultural characteristics, living conditions and historical features of Tibetan society.

### 9.4 Chinese translation of *Gnomic Verses about Fire, Gnomic Verses about Iron and Gnomic Verses about Treasure*

According to Zhengshuan Li and Chunlong Zhao's search on Chinese translation of other gnomic verses, they found that in the 1980s, there was one selected Chinese translation of *Gnomic Verses about Fire, Gnomic Verses about Iron and Gnomic Verses about Treasure* respectively.

### 9.5 Selected Tibetan *Gnomic Verses about Materials* (Tibetan-Chinese)

*Selected Tibetan Gnomic Verses about Materials* is a Tibetan-Chinese edition translated by Wuyang Li, Shizhen Wang and Zhaozhong Zheng. It was published by Gansu Nationalities Publishing House in 1984. In this book, there are 58 verses from *Gnomic Verses about Trees*, 66 verses from *Gnomic Verses about Water*, 10 verses of *Gnomic Verses about Fire*, 12 verses from *Gnomic Verses about Iron* and 16 verses of *Gnomic Verses about Treasury*.

## 10. The Heyday of Multilingual Translation of Many Tibetan Gnomic Verses in the Early 21st Century

With the quick development of globalization and the closer and more frequent exchanges between people of all countries and ethnic groups, the translation of Tibetan gnomic verses has entered its heyday. Languages used continued to increase. The target of translation ranged from the single *Sakya Gnomic Verses* to other books of gnomic verses. The Chinese versions have been reprinted continuously, and the old versions in other languages have also been reprinted frequently.

### 10.1 John T. Davenport's English translation of *Sakya Gnomic Verses*

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the American translator John T. Davenport (1945-) translated *Sakya Gnomic Verses* into English. He entitled his book *Ordinary Wisdom: Sakya Pandita's Treasury of Good Advice*. He highlighted "Good Advice". Persuading people to be good is the author's purpose and the essence and gist of it. For the general public, he inserted an explanatory commentary on gnomic verses to help them increase wisdom. This deep commentary translation is more popular in the West. It was published by WISDOM PUBLICATIONS in 2000.

The book is authored by John Thomas Davenport with Sallie D. Davenport and Losang Thonden. It is accompanied by a comment, and its English name is *with a commentary entitled A Hive Where Gather Bees of Clear Understanding by Sakya Khenpo Sangyay Tenzin*. It should be said that this is a cooperative translation, each with his or her own merit. Losang Thonden was a Tibetan with a high level of Tibetan and a good command of English. The poet and translator Bei Ta speculated that the Davenport translation may be the English interpretation of *Sakya Gnomic Verses* by Losang

Thonden, and Davenport and Sallie D. Davenport reworded it in English (Bei Ta, 2014, p. 64).

The target readers of Davenport are ordinary readers in the English world. The translation has detailed annotations on myths and allusions, which is a research-based and deep translation.

Davenport believed that Bosson's works were unpopular because of the lack of annotations, so he always annotated the allusions that appear in gnomic verses. Sometimes the comments are very long. Its annotations have explanatory and strong educational functions by preaching to readers with story annotations.

Davenport's translation has obvious features: complete style, comprehensive content, translating poetry into poetry, dense poetic flavor, strong moral preaching, many imperative sentences, detailed annotations, retaining the culture of gnomic verses, providing a certain reference (Li Zhengshuan & Zhao Chunlong, 2015, pp. 85-86).

## **10.2 Chinese translation of *Tibetan Gnomic Verses about Water, Wood, Fire and Wind***

In 2000, Jinsong Xiao, a Taiwan scholar, published the *Tibetan Gnomic Verses on Water, Wood, Fire and Wind*, a series of books on Mongolian and Tibet with special studies. It contains 139 verses of *Gnomic Verses on Water*, 106 verses of *Gnomic Verses on Wood*, 70 verses of *Gnomic Verses on Fire* and 65 verses of *Gnomic Verses on Wind*. These gnomic verses are all in seven-character line. But Jinsong Xiao's Chinese version is four-character line. It adopts Tibetan, Chinese translation, Roman antiphony, word explanation, vernacular translation and annotations. The specific form is: Tibetan and Chinese are listed in the left column. Antiphony and word explanation are in the right column. The following is word-to-word literal translation with single column typesetting, and the side notes are also arranged in a single column.

## **10.3 TYMAHOBA O.T's selective Russian translation of *Sakya Gnomic Verses***

In 2001, the Russian scholar TYMAHOBA O.T's monograph *Tibetan Religion and Its Educational Significance* was published by Moscow Fair Press and Publishing Company. In the fourth chapter of his monograph *Renaissance and the Wise Man*, TYMAHOBA O.T translated part of *Sakya Gnomic Verses* into Russian.

## **10.4 Yoshiro Imacda's Japanese translation of *Sakya Gnomic Verses***

In August 2002, the Japanese version of *Sakya Gnomic Verses* translated by Yoshiro Imacda (1947-) was published by Iwanami Shoten of Tokyo Co. Ltd.. Iwanami was founded in 1913 by Iwanami Shigeo. Iwanami was reorganized into Co. Ltd in 1949.

Yoshiro Imacda, a Japanese-French Tibetologist, has made great contributions to the study of world Tibetology. The master copy of his Japanese translation of *Sakya Gnomic Verses* is Bosson's *A Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels* (1969) and *Sakya Gnomic Verses from Tibetan Buddhist Cultural Association Wenqiutang* (1994).

## **10.5 A. K. Васильева's selective Russian translation of *Sakya Gnomic Verses***

In 2004, A.K. Васильева, a Russian writer and translator, translated the ninth chapter *Buddhist Speculation in Sakya Gnomic Verses* into Russian in the fourth chapter of *Treasure House of Proverbs' Dharma* and published it in the collection of essays in *India and Tibet: Text and Translation (Translate)*.

## **10.6 Trilingual version of *Sakya Gnomic Verses (in Tibetan, Chinese and English)***

In 2009, China Tibetology Publishing House published another Chinese translation of *Sakya Gnomic Verses*. This version added an English version and became a trilingual reader. The Chinese translator is Renzeng Cairang and Cai Gongtai, and the English translator is Davenport. The addition of English in *Sakya Gnomic Verses* published in China illustrates the international awareness of translators and publishers and the idea of pushing *Sakya Gnomic Verses* from China to the English-speaking world.

## **10.7 Bilingual version of *Sakya Gnomic Verses (Tibetan and Chinese)***

In 2010, the Tibet People's Publishing House published the bilingual version of *Sakya Gnomic Verses* (Tibetan and Chinese), translated into Chinese by Bandian Dunyu and Shuguang Yang.

In September 2012, the second edition of this book was published. In June 2013, it was printed for the second time, and the print volume increased to 12,000 copies. It is accompanied by some meaningful illustrations to make the content more intuitional.

### 10.8 Bilingual version of *Sakya Gnostic Verses: The Treasure and Wisdom Recited by Tibetan Nobles for Generations (Chinese and Tibetan)*

In 2012, Yao Wang's Chinese translation of *Sakya Gnostic Verses: The Treasure and Wisdom Recited by Tibetan Nobles for Generations* was published by Contemporary China Publishing House. The former part is in Chinese and the latter part is in Tibetan.

In this version, a subtitle was added on the cover. The editor's and translator's preface did not say who added the subtitle and did not explain why the subtitle was added. It may imply that if you want to become a noble or a person of status, you must read or recite *Sakya Gnostic Verses*. In fact, this subtitle emphasizes the importance of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* for people's growth in one way.

### 10.9 English translation of *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*

On November 16, 2012, Karuna Publications in United States published an English version entitled *The Water and Wood Shastras* translated by Yeshe Khedrup and Wilson Hurley. Through comparison and research, it was found that *The Water and Wood Shastras* was *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*. The author was Tenpai Dronme. In addition, the usage of "tree" and "wood" can be exemplified from the words used in the interpretation of *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* by Suodaji Khenpo who called *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* as *Gnostic Verses about Water and Wood* and divided it into "Gnostic Verses about Water" and "Gnostic Verses about Wood", which proved that "wood" was "tree". The book is a joint translation of a Tibetan scholar and an American. What does publisher Karuna mean? The word means "compassion" or "kindness". It can be seen that this publishing house is closely related to Buddhism.

### 10.10 Bilingual version of *English Translation of Tibetan Gnostic Verses*

In 2013, Changchun Publishing House (a national first-class publishing house) published *English Translation of Tibetan Gnostic Verses*, including *Sakya Gnostic Verses*, *Dgaldan Gnostic Verses* and *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*.

Its cover is in Chinese, English and Tibetan. Enclosed are the publication introductory remarks, the first foreword by Professor Hongyin Wang, the second foreword by Aleri Harvey in New Mexico State University, the preface by Zhengshuan Li, Chinese and English double-column typesetting in the text and brief comments on the back cover by three experts such as Rongpei Wang, Hongyin Wang and Guowen Huang.

Among them, *Dgaldan Gnostic Verses* is the first English version at home and abroad.

*Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* is the second English version in the world. It is only a few months later than the English translation of Yesh Kodrap and Wilson Hurley published by Karuna Publications in the United States. It is the first English translation in China.

### 10.11 Trilingual version of *Moral Cultivation of Kings (English, Chinese and Tibetan)*

In July 2017, Nepal Tianli Publishing Culture Company published *Moral Cultivation of Kings* translated into English by Zhengshuan Li and Jiao Liu.

The English translation of *Moral Cultivation of Kings* is based on Yufang Geng's Chinese version. The trilingual form (English, Chinese and Tibetan) has expanded infinitely the readership of *Moral Cultivation of Kings*, enabling it to be distributed in Tibetan-speaking area, Chinese-speaking area and worldwide.

### 10.12 Trilingual version of *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree (English, Chinese and Tibetan)*

In November 2017, Zhengshuan Li and Shengxuan Li's English translation of *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* (English, Chinese and Tibetan) was published in Nepal by Tianli Publishing Culture Company.

Zhengshuan Li and Shengxuan Li published their book based on Yufang Geng's Chinese translation of *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* in *Dgaldan Gnostic Verses* and *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree*. The translation was completed in 2011 and was included in *English Translation of Tibetan Gnostic Verses* published by Changchun Publishing House in 2013.

Based on the translation principle of faithful equivalence, the translation aims to be faithful to the Chinese translation to the greatest extent and to retain the form of gnomic verses of the original Tibetan language as much as possible so as to better convey the philosophical thoughts in *Gnostic Verses about Water and Tree* to readers. Therefore, readers can

feel the artistic charm of Tibetan gnostic verses.

### 10.13 Trilingual Version of *Illustrated Sakya Gnostic Verses* (English, Chinese and Tibetan)

The trilingual version of *Illustrated Sakya Gnostic Verses* (English, Chinese and Tibetan) (*Sakya Gnostic Verses* with illustrations) whose English was translated by Zhengshuan Li and others was published by Tianli Publishing Culture Company in Nepal in October 2018. The format is 710x1000 with 288 pages. The typesetting order is: English, Chinese and Tibetan. In order to save space, the original four lines in Chinese became two lines. There are many illustrations in it.

In the same year, the trilingual version of *Illustrated Sakya Gnostic Verses* (English, Chinese and Tibetan) was also published in China by Ancient Tibetan Books Publishing House in Tibet.

### 10.14 Trilingual Version of *Dgaldan Gnostic Verses* (English, Chinese and Tibetan)

Trilingual Version of *Dgaldan Gnostic Verses* (English, Chinese and Tibetan) whose English was translated by Zhengshuan Li and Hua Shao was published by Everest Publishing House in Nepal in July 2019.

### 10.15 Zhengshuan Li's Regurgitation-feeding translation of some gnostic verses into Chinese

In order to strengthen the research on Tibetan gnostic verses translated from Tibetan into English by foreign translators and to make a comparative study with the Tibetan-Chinese translations published in China, Zhengshuan Li and others translated several Tibetan-English translations of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* back into Chinese. The translation principle is: translation with faithful equivalence, without beautifying and uglifying the original texts in order to explore the syntactic structure and words used by foreign translators. Actually, these foreign translators expect Csoma and Bosson did not work independently; Talku, Davenport and Hurley cooperated with Tibetan scholars. The domestic translators except Yao Wang, either those of Han nationality or Tibetans, basically cooperated with one another. It should be said that there will be no difficulty in understanding. If not, it is an interesting phenomenon. Zhengshuan Li and others have only provided translations from other languages, but they have not yet made comparative studies. At present, the meaning expressed in Davenport's translation is still different from that expressed in Tsedan Dorji's translation.

These Regurgitation-feeding English-Chinese translations serve as a reward to the Tibetan culture. While they have research value, they also expand the readership and promote the ethnic exchanges between Tibet and Han.

Zhengshuan Li and Lijuan Geng translated *Elegant Sayings* from Talku into Chinese. The title of the book is *The Treasure of Elegant Sayings (Sakya Gnostic Verses)*. The translator added a bracket (*Sakya Gnostic Verses*) after "The Treasure of *Elegant Sayings*" to indicate that it was *Sakya Gnostic Verses*. This book was published by Toronto Education Press, Canada in 2014.

Zhengshuan Li and Chunlong Zhao translated *Ordinary Wisdom: Sakya Pandita's Treasury of Good Advice* from Davenport into Chinese, and the book was entitled *Ordinary Wisdom: The Treasury of Sakya Pandita Good Advice (the original title: Sakya Gnostic Verses)* (Huashan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2016). After literally translating the title of the book, they added a bracket and "original title: *Sakya Gnostic Verses*" to guide readers to guess the original text of this book.

### 10.16 Several reprinted versions

After entering the 21st century, Chinese translation and several translations of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* published in the West have been reprinted again and again, showing that the charm of Tibetan gnostic verses remains undiminished. The specific information has been described above so only the publishers and the publishing time are listed here.

In 2010, Kesinger Press in the United States reprinted *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated into French by Philipp Édouard Foucaux. In 2011, the Hungarian fapadoskonyv.hu publishing house re-published *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated into Hungarian by Tandori Dezső. In 2012, *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated into Chinese by Bandian Dunyu (Tibetan and Chinese) was reprinted. In 2012, Wang Yao's former translation was renamed and republished. In 2013, appeared the electronic version of *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated into French by Philipp Édouard Foucaux. In 2014, Hachette Book Publishing House of France reprinted *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated into French by Philipp Édouard Foucau. Routledge Publishing House reprinted *Sakya Gnostic Verses* translated into English by Bosson in 1997 and 2017.

It is easy to see that both Chinese and western publishing houses still have a special passion for *Sakya Gnostic Verses* and pay insufficient attention to other gnostic verses.

## 11. Conclusion

At present, no one at home or abroad has systematically written a translation history of Tibetan gnomic verses, but we try to link up the translation phenomena of Tibetan gnomic verses for the first time. As for literary works with profound national characteristics, like Tibetan gnomic verses, dozens of translations have their own profound historical reasons. Clarifying the translation background will not only provide more perspectives for related research, but also can be used as a guide so that the study of literary works in Tibetan and other ethnic both in horizontal comparative and vertical in-depth way can be conducted. The investigation of the translation history of each gnomic verse is helpful to systematically grasp the translation characteristics and outlook of each gnomic verse and provide a systematic guidance and suggestion for further translation and research. After entering the 21st century, the translation, publication or re-printing of Tibetan gnomic verses is in a heyday. Chinese translators also need to seize the opportunity to translate and cooperate with foreign scholars to ensure that Tibetan gnomic verses is transmitted correctly and enters the hearts of world readers, and then becomes an important reading of world literature. The “Belt and Road” initiative and construction needs more cultural exchanges to promote people-to-people bonds and comprehensive construction.

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