

Validity and authority or cognitive rightness and pragmatic efficacy? : on the concepts of pramna, pramnabhta and pramna(bhta)purusa

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen
Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société
Suisse-Asie**

Band (Jahr): **49 (1995)**

Heft 4

PDF erstellt am: **27.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147200>

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VALIDITY AND AUTHORITY
OR COGNITIVE RIGHTNESS AND PRAGMATIC EFFICACY?
ON THE CONCEPTS OF *PRAMĀṆA*, *PRAMĀṆABHŪTA*
AND *PRAMĀṆA(BHŪTA)PURUṢA*¹

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I

In the theory of knowledge of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism based on the writings of Dignāga (early sixth century) and Dharmakīrti (seventh century) – the principal founders of the Buddhist *Pramāṇa* school – two and only two distinct kinds of right – i.e. correct, grounded – knowledge or cognition (Skt. *pramāṇa* = Tib. *tshad ma*) are recognized. The first is direct perception (*pratyakṣa* = *mñon sum*), defined as *avisamvādaka* (literally ‘congruent’) – that is, undefeasible/veridical and reliable (*mi [b]slu ba* ‘non-delusive’) and free of conceptual construction (*kalpanāpoḍha* = *rtog pa dan bral ba*). And the second is inferential knowledge (*anumāna* = *rjes dpag*) which is gained when – by the logical reason or mark (*hetu* = *gtan tshigs*, *liṅga* = *rtags*) as the means of inference (*sādhana* = *sgrub byed*) – it is inferred that a probandum (*sādhya* = *bsgrub bya*) qualifies the subject of the inference (*dharmin* = *chos can*). These two *pramāṇas* are regularly understood in the

- 1 For further and more detailed information of a philological and historical kind on this subject, see D. SEYFORT RUEGG, ‘*Pramāṇabhūta*, **pramāṇa(bhūta)-puruṣa*, *pratyakṣadharman*, and *sāksātkṛtadharman* as epithets of the *ṛṣi*, *ācārya* and *tathāgata* in grammatical, epistemological and Madhyamaka texts’, *BSOAS* 57 (1994), pp. 303-20. And for a discussion of some further semantic problems, see D. SEYFORT RUEGG, ‘La notion du voyant et du «connaisseur suprême» et la question de l’autorité épistémique’, *WZKS* 38 (1994), pp. 403-19. [Since the publication of these two studies which contain a bibliography of the question, and since the preparation of this article, there has appeared E. FRANCO, ‘Yet another look at the framework of the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*’, *IJ* 137 (1994), pp. 233-52; Franco translates (p. 235) *pramāṇabhūta* by ‘is/has become a means of knowledge/authority’. Roger JACKSON’s *Is enlightenment possible?* (1994) has unfortunately not been available.]

school of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as resultant cognitions that is, as *pramāṇaphala* rather than as simply means for cognition. *Pratyakṣa* – direct perceptual knowledge – pertains to the particular (*svalakṣaṇa* = *rañ gi mtshan ñid*), whereas *anumāna* – inferential knowledge – concerns a conceptual general character (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa* = *spyi'i mtshan ñid*). A further requirement that many philosophers of the Buddhist Pramāṇa school have stipulated in order for a cognition to count as a *pramāṇa* is that it must be *fresh* knowledge.

The Pramāṇa school of Buddhism has in addition accepted reliable verbal knowledge, and scripture (*āptāgama* = *yid ches pa 'i lun*), but without recognizing such knowledge as a separate and independent third *pramāṇa*. Rather, in this school this particular kind of knowledge is subsumed under inferential knowledge (*anumāna*). The difference between the inferential knowledge mentioned earlier and such reliable verbal knowledge rests, then, in the fact that regular *anumāna* has in its scope what is cognitively only partly accessible ([*iṣat*] *parokṣa* = [*cuñ zad*] *lkog gyur* ‘[slightly, i.e. partially] hidden’), i.e., what cannot be known directly by the cognizer because of epistemologically extrinsic factors such as invisibility due to distance (an often cited instance is fire on a distant hill). Non-substantiality (*nairātmya* = *bdag med*, *niḥsvabhāvatā* = *ño bo ñid med pa*) – that fundamental principle of Mahāyānist Buddhist thought – also falls within the scope of this form of inferential knowledge. On the other hand, *āgama* ‘scripture’ includes within its scope that kind of cognitive object which is wholly inaccessible (*atyantaparokṣa* = *šin tu lkog gyur*) to ordinary cognizers because of an epistemologically intrinsic reason such as its transempiricalness (an example cited is *svarga*, heavenly existence). Hence, for the Buddhist Pramāṇa school, scripture constitutes a special case included under *anumāna*. As for the Madhyamaka school, while it has in fact recognized *āgama* as a third *pramāṇa*,² it ascribes no real self-existence (*svabhāva* = *rañ bžin*) to this or any other *pramāṇa* and their corresponding cognitive objects (*prameya* = *gžal bya*).

Yet Buddhist traditions have also recognized the Buddha – i.e. the Teacher (*śāstr*, Tib. *ston pa*) – as *prāmāṇika* ‘authoritative’, indeed even as *pramāṇa*. And his teaching (*dharma*), the Buddha-word (*buddhavacana* =

2 See e.g. Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛttiḥ*, i.1 (ed. LA VALLÉE POUSSIN, p.75); xx.3.

saṅs rgyas kyi bka'), may also be recognized as *pramāṇa*.³ Not only this, but the Buddha himself is said by Dignāga to be *pramāṇabhūta* (*tshad mar gyur pa*) in his *Pramāṇasamuccaya* i.1 (quoted below, § II). And Candrakīrti has described a reliable teacher (such as Nāgārjuna) as a person who is *pramāṇabhūta* (*tshad mar gyur pa 'i skyes bu* = **pramāṇabhūta-puruṣa*).⁴ Furthermore, on the basis of anticipatory concepts found in certain Indian sources, the Tibetan tradition has developed the idea of the *tshad ma 'i skyes bu* (= **pramāṇa-puruṣa*) 'person embodying right knowledge'. In fact, besides being defined as cognition (*blo* = *buddhi*, *dhī*) and as speech (*ñag* = *vāc*), *pramāṇa* has also been defined as a person (*skyes bu* = *puruṣa*, *gañ zag* = *pudgala*) in Tibetan manuals belonging to the *Pramāṇa* school.⁵

The question then is how, in the *Pramāṇa* school, this last concept of a person as *pramāṇa* is to be accounted for when, for the same school, *pramāṇa* is by definition exclusively knowledge in the form of either *pratyakṣa* or *anumāna*.

II

In the benedictory stanza of his *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (i.1) Dignāga has written:

*pramāṇabhūtāya jagaddhitaṣiṇe praṇamya śāstre sugatāya tāyine /
pramāṇasiddhyai svamatāt samuccayaḥ kariṣyate viprasṛtād ihâikataḥ //*

(*tshad mar gyur pa 'gro la phan par bzed // ston pa bde gšegs skyob la phyag 'tshal nas //*
tshad ma (b)sgrub phyir ran gi gzuñ kun las // btus te sna tshogs 'thor mams 'dir gcig bya //)

'Having paid respect to [the Bhagavant] who is (like ?) a (means of) correct knowledge – the Seeker for the well-being of people [1], the Teacher [2], the Sugata [3] and the Protector [4] –, with the purpose of establishing (the means of) correct knowledge I shall here bring together a Compendium [i.e. the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*] from my widely spread doctrine.'

For our purpose, the crucial expression here is the epithet *pramāṇabhūta* qualifying the Buddha-Bhagavant as the (unexpressed) subject of the verse. How is this epithet as applied to a person to be understood given the fact

3 For the Madhyamaka school, see e.g. Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛttiḥ* xv.6.

4 See Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatara* vi.2.

5 See *BSOAS* 57 (cited in note 1 above), p. 313 f.

that according to Dignāga himself a *pramāṇa* is by definition knowledge/cognition?

In a number of recent publications, the epithet *pramāṇabhūta* has been rendered either as ‘who is a *pramāṇa*’ or as ‘who has become a *pramāṇa*’.⁶ The second interpretation is supported by what Dharmakīrti has written in his *Pramāṇavārttika* (Pramāṇasiddhi chap., k. 7) concerning the word *bhūta* serving to exclude the false supposition of non-origination (*abhūtavinivṛtti*), that is, the wrong idea that a *buddha* is permanent (*nitya*) in the manner of God according to the theists or of the Veda according to the Brahmanical Mīmāṃsakas:

*tadvat pramāṇam bhagavān abhūtavinivṛttaye /
bhūtoktiḥ sādhanāpekṣā tato yuktā pramāṇatā //*

*(de ldan bcom ldan tshad ma ñid // ma skyes pa ni bzlog don du //
gyur pa ñid gsuñs de yi phyir // sgrub byed la ltos tshad yin rigs //)*

‘So [in view of what is stated in verses 1-6], the Lord [being] (a means of) correct/efficacious⁷ knowledge, the mention of [the compound-final element] *bhūta* [in Dignāga’s term *pramāṇa-bhūta*] serves to avert [the wrong supposition of] non-origination; hence, being dependent on instruments [of realization that the Lord has cultivated, his] quality of being a *pramāṇa* is justified.’

In itself, Dharmakīrti’s gloss is of great interest, but we do not know whether such was the (or a) meaning actually intended by Dignāga when he used the word *pramāṇabhūta*.

III

The earliest use of *pramāṇabhūta* so far noted in Sanskrit literature is found in Patañjali’s commentary on Pāṇini’s grammar (*Mahābhāṣya*, ed. F. KIELHORN, vol. 1, p. 9), where it qualifies the word *ācārya* referring to the master grammarian. There this epithet is usually understood as meaning ‘who is an authority’ (*prāmāṇyam prāptaḥ*, ‘who has attained authoritativeness’ [Kaiyaṭa, et al.]). In addition, a pleonastic use of *-bhūta* at the end of a compound is well known. However, in the Indian grammatical tradition, the element *-bhūta* at the end of a compound has also been regularly explained as having the sense of likeness (*sādrśya*; cf. *pitṛbhūta* ‘father-like’). This

⁶ For references see the two articles cited in note 1.

⁷ The idea of efficacy (*arthakriyā*) in relation to indefeasibility/veridicalness and reliability has been discussed in *BSOAS* 57, p. 305 f.

use is explicitly mentioned as early as Yāska's *Nirukta* (iii.16). And it is attested in the explanation of the expression *sāmānyabhūta* found in the *Mahābhāṣyadīpikā* by Bhartṛhari,⁸ an author who was known to and used by Dignāga.

This last use of *-bhūta* in the sense of likeness was therefore already well established before Dignāga's time. And it can be traced also in commentarial explanations of the epithet *pramāṇabhūta* in later Indian works of the Pramāṇa school and their Tibetan translations.⁹ Now, if Dignāga did in fact employ the word *pramāṇabhūta* in the sense of 'like (a means of) right knowledge', this usage would be in perfect harmony with his concept of *pramāṇa* as knowledge (of either the *pratyakṣa* or the *anumāna* kind). As just noted, examples of this interpretation of *-bhūta* = *gyur pa* as expressing a comparison are to be found in works of the Indian Pramāṇa school even though Dharmakīrti's own explanation in his *Pramāṇavārttika* did not support this understanding of the term. That this was the meaning intended to be conveyed by *pramāṇabhūta* is, however, not clearly established by all commentators.

IV

In order to throw further light on this matter it is necessary to consider some uses of the word *pramāṇabhūta* within the Buddhist tradition prior to Dignāga.

The earliest attestation so far noted of this word to refer to the Buddha-Bhagavant is found in chap. xxi of the *Lalitavistara* (p. 319), alongside the epithet *paramasākṣībhūta* 'being a direct witness/realizer in the highest degree'. The term is then found in *Mahāyānasūtrālamkārabhāṣya* xviii.31 which treats the four recourses (*pratisaraṇa*). There we read *prāmāṇiko 'rtho yaḥ pramāṇabhūtena nīto vibhaktāḥ śāstrā vā tatpramāṇīkṛtena vā* 'the normal (true and reliable) sense "elicited" (*nīta* = *nes pa*), i.e. explicated (*vibhaktā* = *rnam par phye ba*), either by the Teacher who is (like?) a means of right knowledge (*tshad mar gyur pa*) or by one whom this Teacher has made a standard (means of knowledge, *pramāṇīkṛta* = *tshad mar mdzad pa*)'. According to Sthiramati's comment,¹⁰ the Teacher described as *pramāṇa-*

8 *Mahābhāṣyadīpikā* (ed. J. BRONKHORST, Poona, 1987), p. 3 (on *Mahābhāṣya* 1, p. 1).

9 For references see *BSOAS* 57, p. 311 f.

10 In the sDe dge edition, *Sems tsam* Section, f. 95b-96a.

bhūta is the Buddha, the sense (*artha*) of his teaching being either *ābhi-prāyika* 'intentional' – that is, of provisional meaning that is still to be 'elicited' (*neyārtha*) in another, final, sense, in contradistinction to the definitive sense (*nītārtha*) – or *prāmāṇika* 'normal, standard'. As for teachers who are *pramāṇīkṛta* (*tshad mar byas pa*, *tshad mar bžag pa*) by the Buddha, according to Sthiramati they are either a Bodhisattva, or a great Śrāvaka, or a person such as Nāgārjuna whom the Tathāgata has foretold in a prophecy as a future teacher.

V

Attention has been called above to the fact that if the epithet *pramāṇabhūta* were to be understood as meaning '*pramāṇa*-like', following the already cited explanations of *-bhūta* as the final member of a compound, there would no longer be any inconsistency between this description of the Buddha in the benedictory stanza of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and Dignāga's own theory of a *pramāṇa* being necessarily one or the other of two forms of knowledge, rather than a person however exalted.

Now, very interestingly, in a later non-Buddhist grammatical commentary by Śivarāmendra Sarasvatī on the passage of Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* where the word *pramāṇabhūta* has been used to qualify the teacher, the question has in fact been raised as to how it was possible to describe a cognizing person (*pramātr*) as *pramāṇabhūta*. For, by definition, a *pramāṇa* is knowledge (*jñāna*), not a person.¹¹ It thus appears that also within the Brahmanical tradition of grammatical exegesis there arose the same problem already mentioned at the beginning of this paper in connexion with the Buddhist *Pramāṇa* school in India and Tibet. This interesting convergence in problematics underscores once again the continuity between Buddhist and Brahmanical śāstraic and philosophic thought.

Another case of interest in the present context where the Buddhist and Brahmanical concepts of a reliable teacher have converged is that of the Buddha conceived of as *pramāṇabhūta* and *paramasākṣībhūta* – in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and the *Lalitavistara* respectively (cited above) – and that of a teacher conceived of as *āpta* and as *sākṣātkṛtadharman* in the

11 *Mahābhāṣyasiddhāntaratnaprakāśa* (in *Mahābhāṣya Pradīpa Vyākhyānāni*, ed. M. S. NARASIMHACHARYA [Pondicherry, 1973]), vol. i, p. 230.

Nyāya school of philosophy.¹² Thus, in the discussion on the *āpta* ‘reliable person’, and on *āptavacana*, in the *Nyāyabhāṣya* (I.i.7), the concept of trustworthiness embraces not only direct knowledge of reality but also compassion for beings (*bhūta-dayā*) and the wish to make things known exactly as they are (*yathābhūtārthacikhyāpayiṣā*). In the benedictory stanza of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* the action of the Buddha is described in almost the same terms when Dignāga attaches to him the epithets of *jagaddhitaṣin* ‘seeking the well-being of people’ (the *āśayasampad* of the *hetusampad*), *śāstr* ‘teacher’ (the *prayogasampad* of the *hetusampad*) and *tāyin* (*skyopa*) ‘protector’ (the *parārthasampad* of the *phalasampad*).

VI

The evidence assembled above suggests some general observations on the *pramāṇa* concept. In the preceding pages the term has been translated as right/correct knowledge/cognition because, in an epistemological or gnoseological context, this rendering appears to fit the uses of the term best. Very good scholars have however translated this term by ‘valid knowledge/cognition’ or even by ‘authority’.

Let me then state why I think that the latter translations – though of course not wrong in any simple sense given that the lexemes *pramāṇa* and *prāmāṇika* have such meanings in certain contexts – could lead to a misunderstanding of both the concept of *pramāṇa* and that of validity and authority in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thought.

To take the question of validity first, it is to be noticed that a valid administrative act officially permits something to be done, and valid legislation enjoins or forbids a thing by law. Thus a valid passport or visa makes permissible, and validates, travel to some destination(s). And in a legally binding way valid legislation either enjoins or forbids the doing of something, validating an appropriate course of action. But, clearly, a valid travel-document does not actually transport its holder to his destination; nor can a valid law enjoining or forbidding something automatically effect this end (thus no law, however valid, of itself automatically puts an end to all

12 On the epithet *sākṣātkṛtadharman* meaning ‘having directly witnessed/perceived things’ (or, according to some, ‘having direct perception for a property’), and on the epithet *pratyakṣadharman* ‘having direct perception of *dharma*(s)’, see *BSOAS* 57, p. 307 f.

murder). In other words, validity is a property that attaches to an official document or to a legislative act as instruments, but not to the end envisaged in these instruments by the administrative or legislative authority, which will still remain to be realized. In a similar way, the validity of a process of inferential reasoning or argument guarantees its form, but without itself constituting (resultant) reasoned or inferential knowledge. In short, validity has the instrumental function of making something permissible and legal, but without being able by itself to bring into being the effect, or state of affairs, envisaged. With a *pramāṇa* the case is entirely different. For a *pramāṇa* effects its result (which it so to speak embodies in itself), this result being precisely right knowledge, i.e. the *pramāṇaphala* in the Pramāṇa school's theory. In the domain of epistemology and logic, then, validity properly speaking will instead attach only to a *parārthānumāna* – i.e. to a 'syllogism' as the instrument by which one person makes another person know something by means of an inferential *process* which may indeed be properly described as valid –, but neither to direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) nor to that form of *anumāna* which is (resultant) inferential knowledge for oneself (*svārthānumāna*).

Hence the concept of validity – which properly attaches to an official document, a legislative act or an inferential process – would, when applied to *pramāṇa*, tend to detract from the very directness and immediacy that must characterize it as (resultant) knowledge. This is because validity has the above-described instrumental function of enabling something other than itself, thus involving mediacy and indirectness in respect to the result envisaged.

Now, it might be claimed that an argument in favour of connecting validity with *pramāṇa* can, nevertheless, be sought in the fact that the latter has regularly been explained in terms of *avisaṃvādana* 'congruence' – i.e. veridicalness and reliability (*mi bslu ba*) –, a concept which is in its turn defined by the pragmatic notion of causal efficacy (*arthakriyā*).¹³ And it might then be asserted that a *pramāṇa* has validity inasmuch as it functions as the instrument that permits us to engage practically with the object envisaged. In other words, it might perhaps be argued that correct cognition – *pramāṇa* – is *validated* precisely by its efficacy. The fact, however, remains that the notion of pragmatic efficacy attaching to correct knowledge –

13 See above and Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika*, *Pramāṇasiddhi* chap. k. 1; and *BSOAS* 57, p.305 f.

pramāṇa – is quite distinct from that of validity which, in logic and philosophy, applies to *formal* validity in a *process* of reasoning or argument. In fact it is unclear to what the concept of validity in the strict philosophical sense just noted could apply in the Buddhist *Pramāṇa* school's concept of *pramāṇa*. Moreover, were we to lay emphasis only on the pragmatic side of the above-mentioned definition of *pramāṇa*, there would be a risk of overlooking its central epistemic nature as '[fresh] revelation of an unknown object' (*ajñātārthaprakāśa*; see *Pramāṇavārttika*, *Pramāṇasiddhi* chap. k. 5).

In short, two major objections can be raised against the application of the concept of validity to *pramāṇa*: (1) it detracts from the immediacy and self-containedness of *pramāṇa* as epistemic result by introducing a concept frequently associated with instrumentality, mediateness and a process of inferential reasoning or argument; and (2) it runs the risk of obscuring the essentially cognitive nature of *pramāṇa* by stressing onesidedly the pragmatic dimension.

As for the problem posed by the translation of *pramāṇa* by 'authority', the Buddha – or a reliable teacher who follows the Buddha – is without doubt authoritative for the Buddhist. But, in the light of the evidence, it seems correct to say that such persons are authoritative only in a secondary and derivative way, that is, in so far as they are already in the first place *pramāṇa(bhūta)*. To put this in another way, their authoritativeness results, by derivation, from the fact of their being persons who have direct knowledge (*sākṣātkāra*) of reality, which is directly perceptible (*pratyakṣa*) for them. As was indeed stated in the *Lalitavistara*, the Buddha is *pramāṇa-bhūta* and *paramasākṣībhūta*. In the same way, in the Brahmanical tradition, a totally reliable teacher is described as *sākṣātkṛtadharman* and *pratyakṣadharman*, and also as *adhigatayāthātathya* 'having comprehended reality as it really is'. Very interestingly, the last term, found in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (I, p. 11) beside *pratyakṣadharman*, is strongly reminiscent of the word *tathāgata*, which has been regularly interpreted in the Buddhist tradition as meaning one who knows (*gam-*) things as they really are.¹⁴

In sum, he who is *pramāṇabhūta*, and a **pramāṇapuruṣa*, is an authority for another person as a result of already possessing immediate knowledge of reality. Hence, to translate these two terms by 'being/become an authority' and as 'person of authority' respectively tends to obscure the

14 See D. SEYFORTH RUEGG, 'Védique *addhā* et quelques expressions parallèles à *tathāgata*', *JA* 1955, pp. 163-170; and *BSOAS* 57, p. 318 f.

essential quality of immediacy and directness that attaches to *pramāṇa*, substituting for it a concept that usually implies mediacy and indirectness, namely that of one person's depending on another who functions for him as an external means of knowledge, that is, as an authority.

Finally, it is to be observed that, in order to be regarded as *pramāṇa-bhūta* – or as *āpta* – the teacher is not only required to be in possession of direct and immediate knowledge of ultimate reality but, in addition, he is supposed to be compassionate and desirous of teaching. These further requirements have been mentioned both by Dignāga and his followers (for the *pramāṇabhūta*) and by the *Nyāyabhāṣya* (for the *āpta*). Their separate specification demonstrates how the fundamental factors of *sākṣātkāra* and the epistemic *pramāṇa*, as direct and immediate knowledge, are distinguishable from a teacher's authoritativeness, which will then flow from all these qualities taken together. *Pramāṇa*, or *sākṣātkāra*, is accordingly necessary, but not sufficient, to constitute authoritativeness in teachership.

VII

In summary, to describe the Buddha as *pramāṇabhūta* could mean that, as a person rather than knowledge, he is *pramāṇa*-like (without, however, being strictly speaking a *pramāṇa* as such). Or it may mean that the real nature of a Buddha – his buddha-hood – consists precisely in direct and immediate knowledge of reality. Or it could imply that, for his disciples, a Buddha as a both trustworthy and compassionate knower of reality indeed functions in practice as a reliable means of knowledge, and accordingly as an epistemic standard or norm (a further meaning of the word *pramāṇa*).

Some further clarification will no doubt be needed concerning how precisely the second form of *pramāṇa*, viz. inferential knowledge (*anumāna*), fits in with the *Pramāṇa* school's concept of the Buddha and Sage as *pramāṇa(bhūta)* – and also as *sugata* (understood as derivable not only from *gam-* 'to go' but also from *gam-* 'to know': *jñātavant-* [see e.g. Manorathanandin]) – which, apparently, was developed originally on the model of direct cognition (*pratyakṣa*), viz. the first form of *pramāṇa*, and of immediate knowledge of reality (*sākṣātkāra*) alone.¹⁵

15 The exact relation between *śāstrīva* 'teachership' and *tāyitva* 'protectorship' in the *maṅgalaśloka* of Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and in Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter also requires elucidation. [See now E. FRANCO, *loc. cit.*, for a discussion with respect to Dharmakīrti in particular.]

At all events, the evidence that has been assembled above indicates that the term *pramāṇabhūta* is interpretable in more than one way even in terms of the theories of the Buddhist Pramāṇa school. Such multiplicity of meaning – a kind of in-built polysemy and semantic overdetermination – is a characteristic feature of much of Indian philosophical and śāstraic language, whence it passed to Tibetan philosophical writings as well.

The uses in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thought of the words *pramāṇa* = *tshad ma*, *pramāṇabhūta* = *tshad mar gyur pa* and **pramāṇapuruṣa* = *tshad ma 'i skyes bu* confront us accordingly with issues and problems that are both lexical and religio-philosophical in nature. They concern the very nature of the Buddha and teacher (*śāstrī*, *ācārya*) as conceived in this tradition. Very significantly, too, they touch on the important question of what actually constitutes both religious and philosophical authority in Buddhist thought.

