A NOTE ON *BDAG DON PHAL BA* IN TIBETAN GRAMMAR

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In this extended note we once again present some supplementary remarks to a study on the traditional Tibetan grammarians' notions of *bdag* ("self"), *gzhan* ("other") and *bya byed las gsum* ("the triad, actions, agents and objects") which Derek D. Herforth and the present author published in 1989 under the title *Agents and Actions in Classical Tibetan* (henceforth abbreviated as "AACT").[1] These notions originally stemmed from verse twelve (see "Note added in proofs" at the end of this article) in the *rTags kyi 'jug pa*, which Tibetan tradition has considered as being one of the two surviving grammatical works of the 7th C.(?) writer Thon mi Sambhoṭa. Subsequently, grammatical thought on these matters had a tortuous development up until Si tu Paṇ chen (1699-1774), after which a more or less standard position emerged. This latter view (with nonetheless a few differences) is what one finds in the works of grammarians such as A lag sha Ngag dbang bstan dar (1759-1840) and A kya Yongs 'dzin dByangs can dga' ba'i blo gros (18th-19th C.), and was the subject matter of our AACT. In what follows some familiarity with these basic Tibetan ideas will have to be presupposed.

Now, the principal elements of Tibetan grammar's analysis of verbs – *bdag* and *gzhan*, or agents and objects as well as their corresponding actions – were, from the time of Si tu Paṇ chen on, generally considered to be applicable only to actions which were directly related with a distinct agent (*byed pa po gzhan dang dngos su 'brel ba'i las*), i.e. transitive verbs. (As we tried to show in AACT the division between verbs which do or do not have distinct agents, i.e. *byed 'brel las tshig* and *byed med las tshig*, is the Tibetan analogue of the transitive/intransitive distinction.) Si tu himself lamented that his predecessors regularly erred in applying *bdag/gzhan* to intransitive and transitive verbs alike. Si tu p. 205 (Dharamsala ed.; See AACT pp. 8-9):

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1 Other such supplementary remarks are to be found in our article entitled "gSer tog Blo bzang tshul khrims rgya mtsho on Tibetan verbs", in the Felicitation Volume for Prof. Géza Uray, Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Vienna 1991. On *bdag* and *gzhan*, see also Tillemans (1988).

yang 'grel byed snga ma thams cad kyis 'di skabs las kyi tshig la byed pa po gzhan
dang dngos su 'brel ma 'brel gyi rnam dbye ma mdzad pa ni shin tu mi legs te / de ma
shes na byed po dang bya ba tha dad pa dang tha mi dad pa'i las kyi tshig so sor ngos
mi zin cing / de ma zin pas 'dir bstan bdag gzhan gyi tha snyad gang la 'jug pa tshul
bzhin ma rtogs par long ba'i 'khar ba bzhin gar 'dzugs med pa'i cal col mang po byung
bar snang ngo // "Moreover, all the previous commentators in this context failed to
make the distinction between verbs (*las kyi tshig*) which were related with distinct
agents and those which were not related. This was extremely pernicious, for when
they did not know that, then they did not recognize verbs as being [of]
heterogeneous [types] when the agent (*byed po*) and [focus of] the action (*bya ba*)
were different and when they were not different. And because that went
unrecognized, they did not know how to apply properly the terms "self" and "other"
which were being taught there [in Thon mi's verse], and like those who depend upon
blind men, [so too] much completely unfounded nonsense seems to have ensued."

It thus became a cardinal tenet of Si tu's interpretation that *bdag* and
gzhan cannot apply to intransitive verbs such as "to go" (*'gro ba*)[2] or "to
become/change into" (*'gyur ba*). In these cases a distinct agent does not
directly appear (*byed pa po gzhan dngos su mi snang ba*; see AACT p. 69
§ 8), the point being that when one says "I go", there is no distinction
between the doer and the object of the action, "going". As Si tu's com-
mentator dNgul chu Dharmabhadra (1772-1851) put it in his *Si tu'i zhal
lung* pp. 50-51 (Japanese translation in Inaba [1986] p. 369; text p. 444):

de yang byed pa po gzhan mi snang zhes pas / dper na / bdag 'gro'o lta bu'i tshe /
'gro ba de bya tshig yin kyang / 'gro bya 'gro byed gnyis ka bdag yin pas / 'gro bya
las gzhan pa'i 'gro byed med pas na 'di la bdag gzhan gyi dbye ba'ang mi byed pa yin
no / "Now, when [Si tu] says 'A distinct agent does not appear', [he means that] in
cases such as 'I am going', although 'to go' is a word for an action, that which
undergoes [the action of] going (*'gro bya*) and the goer (*'gro byed*) are both I, and
thus there is no goer distinct from that which undergoes [the action of] going.
Therefore, in such a case, the division in terms of self and other (*bdag gzhan gyi
dbye ba*) is not made either."

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2   Tibetan-Tibetan dictionaries classify *'gro ba* as *byed med las tshig* or *tha mi dad pa*
("[agent and object] not being different"). See e.g. *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs* and *Bod rgya tshig
mdzod chen mo* s.v. *'gro (ba)*. Note, however, that *this* classification in terms of *byed med
las tshig / byed 'brel las tshig* is not to be confused with another important distinction
between Tibetan verbs, i.e. those showing voluntary or involuntary actions. See our dis-
cussion in AACT pp. 27-28 on *bya tshig rang dbang can* ("autonomous verbs", i.e. those
showing voluntary actions) and *bya tshig gzhan dbang can* ("other-dependent verbs", i.e.
those showing involuntary actions). *'gro ba* is a *bya tshig rang dbang can* in that "going"
involves a certain act of will.

The inapplicability of the categories of *bdag* and *gzhan* to intransitives is also crucial to Si tu's explanation of *rTags kyi 'jug pa*'s horribly enigmatic verse twelve, where Thon mi had spoken about the use of the Tibetan prefixes *b-*, *g-*, *d-*, *'a-* and *m-* to express *bdag, gzhan* and the three verb tenses, viz. past, present and future. For Si tu and post-Si tu grammarians, the temporal specifications in this verse were, at least in part, destined to include uses of the prefixes in cases of verbs which were neither classifiable as *bdag* nor as *gzhan* – such as intransitive verbs.[3] Nonetheless, a problem did arise: there are quite a number of Tibetan forms, such as *'gro ba po* ("goer"), *'gro byed* ("goer"; "means of going"), *'gro bar bya (ba)* ("it undergoes the [action of] going"), *'gro'o* ("...goes") based on the intransitive verb *'gro ba* ("to go"). This occurs particularly often – but not exclusively – in cases of the prefix *'a-*. Now, Thon mi had said the following about *'a-*:

mo ni bdag dang ma 'ongs phyir // "The feminine [prefix *'a-*] is for self and the future"[4]

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3 See Si tu (AACT p. 63, 4): *des na ci phyir 'jug gi gzhung 'di 'chad pa'i skabs su dus gsum gyi dbye bas bshad pa rnams ni / bdag gzhan gyi dbye bas ma khyab pa'i lhag ma rnams bsdu ba'i don du blta bar bya'o //* "Therefore, when explaining [the passage] in this work [i.e. in verse 12 of Thom mi's *rTags kyi 'jug pa*], 'Why are [the prefixes] applied?', we should understand that his specifications in terms of the three-fold temporal division are meant to include the remaining things not pervaded by the self/other division." gSer tog (p. 142) has a slightly different explanation: *gzhung 'dir byed pa po dang bya ba'i yul gyi sgra rnams bsdu ba'i ched du bdag gzhan gyi dbye ba mdzad cing / de la byed bzhin da lta ba dang / bya 'gyur dang byed 'gyur ma 'ongs pa dang / bya ba byas zin 'das pa yod pa dang / bdag gzhan gyi dbye bas ma khyab pa rnams kyang bsdu ba'i ched du dus gsum gyi dbye ba mdzad pa yin no //* "In this treatise [i.e. in verse twelve of the *rTags kyi 'jug pa*], [Thon mi] put forth a division into self and other in order to include words for agents (*byed pa po*) and focuses of action (*bya ba'i yul*). To include present doing (*byed bzhin da lta ba*), future thing-done (*bya 'gyur ma 'ongs pa*) and future doing (*byed 'gyur ma 'ongs pa*), and past accomplished action which pertains to that [self and other] as well as all which is not pervaded (*khyab pa*) by the divisions of self and other, he put forth the three temporal divisions [in verse twelve of the *rTags kyi 'jug pa*]." For the differences between Si tu and gSer tog on these points, see Tillemans (1988) n. 37.

4 Si tu read this verse as *mo ni bdag da ma 'ongs phyir* ("The feminine [prefix] is for self, the present [*da*], the future") and commented on *da* ("present") instead of *dang*. On Si tu p. 248 we get the following discussion of *da* vs. *dang*: *'dir gzhung gi yig cha rnams su mo ni bdag dang ma 'ongs phyir / zhes pa yod cing 'grel byed snga ma rnams la'ang dogs pa ma shar mod / de ni 'dir bstan gyi bdag gzhan dang dus gsum gyi dbye ba gzhung gi dgongs pa bzhin ma phyed pas nongs te / bdag gi tha snyad ma bstan pa'i da lta ba'i tshig 'a phul can mang du yod pa skabs 'dir bstan dgos pa ma shes par 'dug pa'i phyir ro / des na gzhung de ltar bklags pa gzhung gi bstan bya ma rdzogs pa'i skyon du 'gyur bas yig nor brgyud par shes par byos la dkyus su bkod pa bzhin gzung bar bya'o //.* "Here, there is [the reading] *mo ni bdag dang ma 'ongs phyir* in various texts, and doubt did not occur to the earlier commentators either. But this [reading] does not classify the divisions of

The following problem must have arisen to various grammarians: (a) Tibetan literature (especially Tibetan translations of Indian Madhyamaka Buddhist texts) analyzes the process of going in terms of schema such as *'gro ba po* (Skt. *gantṛ*), *'gro ba* (Skt. *gati; gamana*, etc.), *'gro bar bya ba* (Skt. *gamyate*).[5] (b) These terms are very similar to the usual examples of *bdag* and *gzhan*, as in the case of the transitive verb "cut" (*gcod pa*): *gcod pa po, gcad par bya ba / gcad bya*, etc. (See the examples given in A kya Yongs 'dzin dByangs can dga' ba'i blo gros, *rTags 'jug dka' gnas*.) (c) Thus, analogously, the relevant forms of *'gro ba* should also be classifiable as *bdag* and *gzhan* in keeping with Thon mi's verse.

This is a reconstruction of the grammarians' reasoning processes, but it can't be very far off the mark. At any rate, it was dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje (1809-1887), in his *rTags 'jug gi snying po don gsal*, who seems to have been the best known grammarian to have explicitly addressed himself to this type of problem. It prompted him to introduce the notion of a "secondary sense of 'self'" (*bdag don phal ba*) in connection with the prefix *'a-*.[6] Still, dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje did have to remain consistent with Si tu's position and especially, one imagines, with the interpretation of Si tu by dNgul chu Dharmabhadra, who was after all dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje's uncle and mentor! The result was that he distinguished between "*bdag* properly speaking" (*bdag dngos*) and the "secondary sense of *bdag*"

self, other and the three times taught in this [verse] in keeping with the thought of the text, and thus it is mistaken. For, it was not understood that in this context it should be shown that there are many present [tense] words having the prefix *'a-* which were not indicated by the designation "self" [in Thon mi's verse]. Consequently, when the text is read in that manner there will be the fault that what the text teaches is incomplete. So be aware that a mistaken reading has been transmitted! In the real text (*dkyus*)* [the reading] should accepted as we have presented it." *Cf. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* s.v. *dkyus: dpe cha'i gzhung dngos*.
A lag sha Ngag dbang bstan dar p. 187.3-6 echoes Si tu's line of thought and gives a number of examples of *'a-* being used for the present: *sngon 'jug 'a yig da ltar ba la 'jug pa ni / skud pa 'khal bzhin pa / gdan la 'khod bzhin pa sogs dang / de bzhin du / 'jug / 'don / 'thor / 'gog / 'bul / 'tshol sogs 'a yig da ltar ba la 'jug pa mang du yod pa'i phyir / yig cha rnams su / mo ni bdag dang ma 'ongs phyir // zhes byung ba yig nor du shes par byos la gong du bkod pa bzhin gzung bar bya'o //*. On gSer tog's version see AACT p. 9.

5 See May (1959) Chapter II, for Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's critique of motion (i.e. "going"), in which these terms, *inter alia*, play key roles. See K. Bhattacharya (1980) on the Indian grammatical basis of the critique.

6 Note that the term *phal ba* ("common"; "usual") is often used in grammatical contexts in the sense of "secondary" or "subsidiary", contrasted with *gtso bo* ("principal"; "main"). Cf. e.g. *byed pa po gtso bo* "the principal agent" and *byed pa po phal ba* "the secondary agent". These latter notions are discussed in AACT p. 6; *byed pa po gtso bo / phal ba* seem to be the equivalents of the Skt. *pradhānakartṛ* and *guṇakartṛ*.

(*bdag don phal ba*). The former was what Si tu had intended when he said that the temporal specifications in Thon mi's verse were meant "to include the remaining things not pervaded by the self/other distinction."[7] The latter would nonetheless allow us to classify *'gro ba po*, *'gro byed* and *'gro bar byed* ("... goes") under the rubric *bdag* mentioned in the line of Thon mi's verse which treats of *'a-* prefixed forms. In effect, Si tu was supposedly only speaking about the real and strict sense of *bdag* in his exegesis of Thon mi, whereas according to dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje, Thon mi had also made some allowance for secondary, looser senses of *bdag*.

The key passages from the *rTags 'jug gi snying po don gsal* are as follows (pp. 133-134):

> *des na dus gsum du dbye ba // bdag gzhan dbye bas ma khyab pa // bsdu ba'i don du shes dgos par // gsungs kyang sngon 'jug 'a yig skabs // byed las tsam dang 'brel ba yi // dngos po bdag la'ang 'jug pa mthong // ... // mo yig 'a ni 'chad pa po // 'chad par byed dang 'chad par 'gyur // zhes sogs dngos po bdag dngos dang // 'gro ba po dang 'gro bar byed // ces sogs bdag don phal ba dang // 'khyil lo zhes sogs da lta dang // 'khyil bar 'gyur sogs ma 'ongs 'jug //* "So, although [Si tu] said that one should understand the divisions into the three times as meant for including what is not pervaded by self and other, in the context of the prefix *'a-* we see that there are also applications for the entity self which is related with a simple act-qua-doing (*byed las tsam*). ... The feminine letter *'a-* is applied for the entity self properly speaking (*dngos po bdag dngos*), as in *'chad pa po* ('explainer'), *'chad par byed* ('... explains'), *'chad par 'gyur* ('...will explain'), and the secondary sense of self (*bdag don phal ba*) as in *'gro ba po* and *'gro bar byed*, as well as for the present, as in *'khyil lo* ('...coils up')[8], and for the future, as in *'khyil bar 'gyur* ('...will coil up')."

Two questions arise immediately: What about the other prefixes – wouldn't they also admit of *bdag don phal ba*? And what about *gzhan* – is there also a secondary sense of *gzhan*, a *gzhan don phal ba*? dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje himself only spoke about *bdag don phal ba*, and this in connection with the prefix *'a-*. Even in this restricted context of the prefix *'a-*, we have no explanation of forms such as *'gro bya / 'gro bar bya ba*, which are crucially important in philosophical contexts, and which would seem to be candidates for a *gzhan don phal ba*. Nonetheless, it seems clear that there were other grammarians who, while they did not use the exact terminology *bdag don phal ba* or *gzhan don phal ba*, did at least cite certain forms as being a type of *bdag* or *gzhan* which was *not* related to a distinct agent. This is so for gSer tog Blo bzang tshul khrims rgya mtsho

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7   See n. 3 above.
8   Intransitive.

(1845-1915), who maintained that the prefix *'a-* could be "applied for the entity other (*dngos po gzhan*), whether it is or is not related with a distinct agent",[9] and who also argued that there were cases where *m-* was used to show "self, other and so forth not related to a distinct agent."[10] He does not give any examples for the first case, but we can conjecture that *'gro bya / 'gro bar bya ba* might well fit the bill. As for the prefix *m-*, he cites *mkhas pa po* ("one who becomes learned") for *bdag*, and *mkhas bya'i gnas* ("an area in which one is to become learned") for *gzhan*.

In short, there seems to have been, amongst at least a few grammarians, a tendency to loosen Si tu's stricture that *bdag* and *gzhan* apply only to forms of transitive verbs. This modification was probably felt to be necessary because there were simply too many forms, like *'gro ba po, 'gro bar bya ba, mkhas bya, 'gro'o, mkhas pa'o* etc. which seemed to show agents and objects, or actions connected with agents and objects, and yet would have had to remain, strictly speaking, unclassifiable as *bdag* or *gzhan*. However, while there were some grammarians, like gSer tog, who leaned towards dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje's position on this point, many were, and indeed still are, sceptical of the utility of introducing the notion of *bdag don phal ba*. mKhyen rab 'od gsal pp. 25-26 cites the first part of the passage from dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje (up until *'jug pa mthong*) and then argues:

> de la tshig skyon dang don skyon gnyis ka yod de / dang po tshig skyon ni / de lta na
> bzhugs pa po dang / bzhengs pa po sogs sngon 'jug ba yig gi skabs su'ang de ltar
> 'byung bas / gsungs kyang sngon 'jug 'a yig skabs / zhes 'a yig rkyang pa logs su dgar
> mi rigs pa dang / gnyis pa don skyon yang yod de / 'di skabs bya byed tha dad pa'i
> dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis kyi don ni de lta min par bdag gzhan nam / byed po dang
> las gnyis phan tshun ltos grub kyi tshul du gcig yod na cig shos kyang nges par yod
> dgos kyang / khyed kyi bdag don phal pa zhes pa ni de lta min par / 'gro ba po

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9   gSer tog p. 151: ... *byed po gzhan 'brel yin min gyi dngos po gzhan dang / byed po gzhan 'brel gyi byed pa'i las dang bya ba'i las la 'jug cing.*

10 Ibid pp. 154-155: *sngon 'jug gi <u>shin tu mo</u> ma yig <u>ni</u> / byed pa po gzhan dang 'brel ba'i dngos po bdag gzhan gnyis ka dang / byed pa dang bya ba'i las dang / dus gsum kar 'jug pa tshig la zin pas / byed po gzhan 'brel min pa'i bdag gzhan sogs la 'jug pa don gyis thob pa yin pas / de thams cad [154] la <u>mnyam</u> pa ste khyad par med par ston pa'i <u>phyir</u> du ming gzhi la 'jug par 'gyur ro //* "Turning now to the extremely feminine prefix, the letter *m-*, its applications for both the entities self and other related with a distinct agent, for act-qua-doing and act-qua-thing-done and all three times were spoken of in [Thon mi's] verse. So the applications for self, other and so forth *not* related to a distinct agent are obtained through the sense (*don gyis thob pa*), with the result that [*m-*] will be applied to the radical to show all [these things] alike, i.e. without any differences." The underlined Tibetan words make up the last line of Thon mi's verse twelve.

dang / 'gro bya gnyis ka de nyid las tha dad du 'jog tu med pas dgos pa cher mi 'dug snyam / "Here there are both faults concerning the wording [of dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje's statement] and faults concerning the sense. First of all, the faults concerning the wording are as follows: In that case, in the context of the *b-* prefix too, *bzhugs pa po, bzhengs pa po* and so forth, would be like that [i.e. they would *also* be *bdag phal ba*], and thus when [dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje] says, *'Although [Si tu] said..., in the context of the prefix 'a-'*, it is incorrect to single out just the letter *'a-*. Secondly, there are also faults concerning the sense: In the context of [Thon mi's verse], the meaning of 'the entities self and other', where the object and agent are different, is not like [what dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje speaks of]. Self/other, or [in other words] agent and object, are interdependently established so that if one exists, the other must also definitely exist, but your *bdag don phal ba* is not like that. Rather, the goer (*'gro ba po*) and that which undergoes the going (*'gro bya*) are not established as anything other than an identity. So I think that there is no great need [for introducing *bdag don phal ba*]."

Another contemporary grammarian, sKal bzang 'gyur med, on pp. 360-361 of his *Bod kyi brda sprod rig pa'i khrid rgyun*, alludes to the secondary use of the terminology, "self/other", but stresses its important differences from self/other properly speaking:

bdag shar phyogs 'gro gnam nas char pa 'bab / lta bur cha mtshon na / 'gro ba po bdag yin zer chog kyang de la ltos pa'i 'gro bya gzhan med pa dang / 'bab rgyu char pa yin yang de la ltos pa'i 'bab pa po gzhan gtan nas yod mi srid pa de'i thog nas bya tshig 'gro dang 'bab gnyis bya byed tha mi dad pa yin par gsal por 'phrod pa red / rgyu mtshan de'i dbang gis bya byed tha mi dad pa'i bya tshig de rigs la gong dang mi 'dra bar dngos po bdag gzhan.gyi dbye ba med la / de bzhin 'gro ba po bdag dang 'bab rgyu char pa gnyis ka la'ang rnam dbye'i rkyen gang yang sbyar du mi rung / "If one considers [examples] such as 'I am going to the East' or 'Rain is falling from the sky', then although one can say that the goer is 'self' (*bdag*), there is no other object relative to that [goer] which undergoes the going. And although the rain is what is to fall, there can never be an other faller relative to that [rain]. Thus, it is clearly ascertained that verbs [such as] 'to go' or 'to fall' are ones where the object and agent are not different. For this reason, contrary to the previous [type of verb, viz. transitives], the class of verbs where the object and agent are not different does not have any divisions in terms of the entities self and other. Similarly, one cannot join any case-endings [such as the agentive, *kyis, gis* and *gyis*] to the goer, i.e. oneself, and that which is to fall, i.e. the rain."

In fact, sKal bzang 'gyur med has touched upon a key point: we cannot apply the agentive endings (*byed sgra*) to the "agents" of actions like going or falling. Even if we do grant the exegetical point that Thon mi's verse needs a secondary sense of *bdag* (and perhaps even *gzhan*) to adequately account for the forms of *'gro ba*, etc., nonetheless there is an extremely important difference between *bdag* properly speaking and *bdag don phal*

ba, one which turns on *ergativity*.[11] As we argued in AACT, Tibetan is through and through an ergative language in that it has a separate morphological marker for the agents of its actions, but has the same marking for subjects of intransitive verbs and direct objects of transitives. The result is that the (pseudo-) agents which dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje wishes to introduce for intransitives are in a very clear sense *not* agents at all. The difference is one of morphological marking: the so-called "agents" of *'gro ba*, or *'khyil lo*, will not have any ergative marking (as do real agents in Tibetan), but will instead be in the *absolutive* (i.e. no overt marking), just like direct objects. In short, by treating genuine (marked) agents and pseudo-agents of intransitives *alike* in both being *bdag* (in some loose sense), dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje is probably in danger of collapsing an all-important difference between ergative languages, like Tibetan, and non-ergative languages, like Sanskrit. As we have maintained in AACT, Si tu, dNgul chu Dharmabhadra *et al.*, arguably, had some awareness of the ergative features of Tibetan when they formulated their ideas of *bdag* and *gzhan* and thus were quite right to insist that *bdag* and *gzhan* only applied in the case of transitive verbs. If that's so, then the modern critiques of *bdag don phal ba* have a real point.

But let us return to the specific example, *'gro ba*, and the Tibetans' own understanding of the Indian Madhyamaka critique of motion (i.e. "going"), a critique which we find in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās* and which is explained in detail in the commentaries, such as Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* and Bhāvaviveka's *Prajñāpradīpa*. The Indian analysis, as K. Bhattacharya has convincingly shown, *is* inextricably linked with Indian grammatical conceptions concerning agents (*kartṛ*), actions (*kriyā*) and objects (*karman*) – and indeed the goer (*gantṛ*) at stake is taken as a full-fledged agent. Why then were the Tibetan grammarians forced to minimize the type of agent here, i.e. the *'gro ba po* (= *gantṛ*), as being *at most* a *bdag don phal ba*? After all, it is obvious that, at least in terms of the origin of the concepts and terminology, the Tibetan grammarians' triad, *bya byed las gsum*, is Indian-based.[12] So in more general terms, why were the *Tibetan* grammarians' own theories of *bdag/gzhan*, distinct agents, objects, etc. more or less inapplicable *here* in the specific case of

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11 Cf. Comrie (1978) p. 329: *"Ergativity* is a term used in traditional descriptive typological linguistics to refer to a system of nominal case-marking where the subject of an intransitive verb has the same morphological marker as a direct object, and a different morphological marker from the subject of a transitive verb."

12 Cf. AACT pp. vii-viii.

philosophical arguments about motion? The core of the problem is probably that '*gro ba* and its corresponding Sanskrit equivalent, i.e. the root *GAM*, behave completely differently in terms of the syntax of their respective languages. The Tibetan verb '*gro ba* is intransitive (i.e. *byed med las tshig*), lacks an agent with ergative marking, and has no object in the *absolutive*. (The "place one goes to" is indicated by the oblique case-marker, *la*, or one of its variants, i.e. the so-called *la don*). All this is in marked contrast to the Sanskrit root *GAM* ("to go"), which functions as a fairly banal transitive verb (*sakarmaka*), has an agent (*kartṛ*), in the nominative, an object (*karman*), and even has a passive form, *gamyate*. Certainly, Indian and Tibetan grammatical analyses in terms of (distinct) agents, objects, etc. will both apply unproblematically in examples like "cutting wood", where the verbs *CHID* and *gcod* are considered as transitive by Indians and Tibetans alike. But this apparent transferability of Indian and Tibetan schemata in the cases of "cutting", "killing", etc. should not seduce us: '*gro ba/GAM* is precisely one of those examples where transitivity *à la tibétaine* and transitivity *à l'indienne* diverge. And scholastic attempts to patch up the real differences between '*gro ba* and *GAM* by introducing a *bdag don phal ba* are probably at most instructive failures: they remind us of the fundamental difficulties that Tibetans repeatedly had in understanding and using borrowed grammatical categories when the structure of their own language was so significantly different from that of Sanskrit.[13]

A final remark. While *bdag don phal ba* does present potential dangers in blurring some key features of the Tibetan language, it is difficult to say categorically that dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje was *wrong* in his interpretation of Thon mi. We simply do not know what Thon mi *himself* was up to – we only have the commentators' views on a verse which is too brief and enigmatic to be understood independently. However, it is worthwhile to stress that this *bdag don phal ba* explanation would provide no *new* or *further* justification for the frequently heard view that *bdag* must be a version of the Sanskrit middle voice (*ātmanepada*), the latter being very often used for Sanskrit intransitives. The main point against a

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13 Another example of traditional grammar trying to make Tibetan fit the Procrustean bed of Sanskrit is the attempt to explain Tibetan particles in terms of the eight Sanskrit cases. See N. Tournadre (1990), who proposes, instead of the ill-fitting traditional eight, a set of five markers: (1) the ergative-instrumental (*gis* + variants); (2) the genitive-relative (*gi* + variants), (3) the oblique (*la* + variants); (4) the ablative (*nas* + *las*); (5) the absolutive (the marker ϕ). For corrections of a few historical inaccuracies, see also our forthcoming review in this journal.

rapprochement between *bdag* and *ātmanepada* is the fact that *bdag* and *ātmanepada* behave very differently: numerous fully *bona fide* examples of the Sanskrit *ātmanepada* being used for intransitives have Tibetan equivalents which are neither *bdag* nor *gzhan*. By contrast, the main evidence invoked in support of the thesis that *bdag is ātmanepada* – an argument which began with B. Laufer (1898) – is usually that the Tibetan word *bdag* translates the Sanskrit *ātman*, and thus that there *must* have been some relation: coincidence seems too improbable. While we have argued that this appeal to *bdag* = *ātman* probably is not very convincing in itself (see AACT pp. 11-12), it has to be granted that the term *ātmanepada* could have found its way into Tibetan grammar by a route so sinuous that its Indian origins are now almost unrecognizable. That said, dByangs can grub pa'i rdo rje's view on *bdag* would not provide additional ammunition in favour of such a thesis. This Tibetan grammarian's version of *bdag*, in effect, differs very little from that of Si tu et al. on the key point: he too recognized that the only really *bona fide* use of *bdag* in grammatical contexts was in cases where the verb was transitive.

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Note added in proofs

P.C. Verhagen in a recent review of AACT (Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. LVI, I, 1991, pp. 208-210) noticed that our numbering of the key verse in Thon mi differed from that of Bacot. R.A. Miller, on p. 372 of his article in *Tibetan History and Language* (Ed. E. Steinkellner, Vienna 1991), went further and maintained that we consistently miscited the verse in question as being "verse twelve". It is indeed understandable that Miller and Verhagen were puzzled. What we designated as "verse twelve" in AACT (with, alas, no explanation) is usually designated as *śloka*s 12-15 in modern editions of the *rTags kyi 'jug pa*:

> *pho ni 'das dang gzhan bsgrub phyir //*
> *ma ning gnyis ka da ltar ched //*
> *mo ni bdag dang ma 'ongs phyir //*
> *shin tu mo ni mnyam phyir ro //*

Compounding the unclarity was the fact that initially in AACT we also cited the introductory *śloka*, viz. *śloka* 11 (*ci phyir 'jug par byed ce na*) along with this verse twelve. Our choice of the label "verse twelve" was, however, not without reason – far from it. It was motivated by the fact that important Tibetan commentators, notably dNgul chu Dharmabhadra, seem to comment upon *pho ni'das ... mnyam phyir ro* as one *śloka*, rather than four. In dNgul chu, it is commented upon as a four line verse, just like *śloka* 10. Indeed, there is a complete parallel between *śloka* 9-10 and what we are taking as *śloka*s 11-12: both involve a question (*śloka* 9, 11) and then an answer in the form of a four line verse (*śloka* 10,12). See the edition of the *Si tu'i zhal lung* in INABA (1986) pp. 442-443. Si tu himself introduced his discussion on *bdag* and *gzhan* by *pho ni 'das dang gzhan bsgrub phyir zhes sogs gi go don dpyis phyin par byed pa la* (AACT §1), which suggests that by means of the word *sogs* ("etc."; "and the rest") he wished to include the rest of the verse. Finally, we should note that in an edition of the *rTags kyi 'jug pa* by two knowledgeable contemporary Tibetan grammarians, *pho ni 'das ... mnyam*

phyir ro is explicitly taken to be *one śloka*. See bSod nams rgya mtsho and rDo rje rgyal po, *Sum rtags rtsa ba dang de'i 'grel pa si tu'i zhal lung* (Beijing 1982), p. 6. Arguably then, the usual numbering of the *śloka*s in question *should* be revised. Such a renumbering will, unfortunately, necessitate an extensive (and potentially confusing) renumbering of the rest of *rTags kyi 'jug pa's śloka*s. But one thing seems clear: the usual numbering of the *śloka*s does need some serious re-examination.

Another matter which needs to be cleared up at this time. On pp. 56-57 of his *Les Ślokas grammaticaux de Thon mi Sambhoṭa* (Paris, 1928), J. Bacot correctly asserted that when one says *nga 'gro* ("I go"), the intransitive verb "*'gro ba* ("to go") does not take an agent in the ergative-instrumental case, but he then argued that in a sentence like "I am going to Lhasa", which he gave as *ngas lha sa la 'gro gi yod*, the verb "to go" actually becomes transitive and takes an agent in the ergative case. In fact, these remarks of Bacot are erroneous and have no impact on our argumentation. The sentence *ngas lha sa la 'gro gi yod* is bad Tibetan, possibly invented by Bacot himself. A perusal of the example sentences with *'gro ba* and its past form *phyin pa / song ba* which we find in modern manuals and dictionaries reveals inevitably that the ergative is not used in this type of sentence. See the following: (a) Losang Thonden, *Modern Tibetan Language* (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1984) Vol. I, p. 108: *nga khrom la 'gro gi yin* "I'll go to the market", *nga tsho rgya gar la phyin pa yin* "We went to India". (b) M.C. Goldstein and N. Nornang, *Tibétain, manuel de langue parlée* (Paris, 1979) p. 96: *nga kha sang slob grwar phyin pa yin* "I went to school yesterday". (c) Geshe Lhundup Sopa, *Lectures on Tibetan Religious Culture* (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1983) Vol. I, p. 3: *de 'dras kyis rkyen byas nga se rwar phyin pa yin* "On account of that I went to Se ra." (d) *Dag yig gsar bsgrigs* p. 152: *nga bzo grwa la 'gro dgos / byis pa slob grwar song* "I have to go to the factory. The children have gone to school."