

UDC 24

TIBETAN “SUBHASHITA”, ITS MONGOL VERSIONS AND TRANSLATIONS AS A MULTI-CODE LINGUOCULTURAL PHENOMENON: THE CASE OF THE ZAYA PANDITA’S OIRAT TRANSLATION

Ellara U. Omakaeva

Ph.D, Associate Professor,

Leading Researcher of the Laboratory of Complex Buddhist Studies,

Kalmyk State University named after B. B. Gorodovikov, Elista, Russian Federation

E-mail: elomakaeva@mail.ru

Annotation

Didactic literature of the past occupies a special place in the history of the development of the written culture of the peoples of Central Asia, in particular, such a peculiar genre as subhashitas. Compiled on the model of ancient Indian didactic writings (nitishastra), moral sayings of an edifying nature are instructions of the “two rules” concerning the norms of ethical behavior in secular and spiritual life in the context of Buddhist Dharma, useful for both laymen and monks. This article is a continuation of many years of work devoted to the study of the “Subhashita” in the original and in translation into Russian. It provides an overview of the research on the “Subhashita” as an important object in the academic field of Oriental Studies. This monument of Tibetan literature has been the subject of scholarly research both in our country and abroad (Mongolia, China, Hungary, and elsewhere). The scientific novelty of this article lies in its systematic analysis of the Oirat version and its comprehensive characterization. The title “Sayitur nomloxui erdeniyin sang” (or Sayin üge-tü erdeni-yin sang) refers to the “Treasure of Elegant Sayings”, which is the prominent Oirat literary translation on *todo bichig* (“Clear Script”) of the famous Tibetan didactic text (Legs par bshad pa rin po che'i gter), widely known as the Subhashita, functioning both as a literary masterpiece and a practical ethical guide, composed by the Tibetan scholar Sakya Pandita (1182–1251).

Key words

Sakya Pandita, Subhashita, Mongol versions, Oirat translation, the contributions of scholars.



INTRODUCTION

In recent years interest in written monuments has grown markedly. In the context of globalization, the problem of preserving works as the cultural heritage of a particular people, introducing new texts into scientific circulation, and publishing a scientifically adequate translation of a text is extremely relevant.

In the history of the development of Buddhist written culture among the peoples of Central Asia in general, and the Oirats in particular, a special place is occupied by the didactic literature of the past, specifically the unique genre known as the *subhashitas*.

India has a long-standing tradition of folk wisdom expressed in short, easily memorised verses. Sakya Pandita's wise sayings or good advice as a popular guide to the art of living are a striking example of this genre. Moreover, it has co-formed Tibetan culture. The verses contain advice that shows facets of a Buddhist way of life.

Modeled on ancient Indian didactic works (Nitishastras), these moralizing sayings of an instructive nature present instructions on the "two rules" concerning the norms of ethical conduct in secular and spiritual life in the context of the Buddhist Dharma, useful for both laypeople and monastics.

The publication, description and analysis of Buddhist literary monuments are an important task in the study of the Mongolian written tradition. Many of them are preserved in the form of translations into Mongolian languages made mainly from Tibetan. One of them is the earliest medieval (of the thirteenth century) Mongol version of the Tibetan "Treasury of Aphoristic Jewels" (Sa skya Legs bshad), known as *Subhashita*, that was compiled as a moral guide by the famous high monk and scholar Sakya Pandita: Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyeltsen (Tib. ས་སྐ་པཎྌིཏ་ཀུང་གཡེལ་ཙེན་པཎྌིཏ་མཆོན་, sa skya pan di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan), commonly known as Sapaṇ (2).

The word paṇḍita (Sanskrit: पण्डित, Pali: paṇḍita) translates as "scholar" or "sage" (Frisch, 2015: 160). This refers to a title that was awarded to outstanding scholars, well-versed in the five fundamental sciences (Sanskrit. pañcavidyāsthāna, Tib. rig gnas chen po lnga). Moreover, in the Buddhist tradition, this term refers to a deeply educated person possessing not only encyclopedic knowledge but also the highest spiritual experience, wisdom, and an academic degree.

So, the title of pandita in Tibetan Buddhism is not just a title, but a recognition of profound erudition, the ability to deeply understand and convey complex Buddhist teachings.

Sakya Pandita composed many treatises. Among all his works the *Treasury of Good Sayings* is the most popular. The text features quatrains of moral and ethical teachings.

The Elegant Sayings of Sakya Pandita in verse form, usually with four-line stanzas with seven syllables per line, are about secular affairs in daily life. The main idea of Subhashita is how to live correctly according to Buddhist Dharma. The advice often comes with metaphors and comparisons from everyday life. Sakya Pandita's work inspired many similar texts (Bommarito, 2010).

It is interesting to note that there are several Mongolian versions of the Tibetan text. At the end of the 13th century, the Subhashita came into Mongolian circulation. It was translated from Tibetan by the monk Sonomgara, and even printed in square script, but only isolated fragments are known to have survived (Bosson, 1961).

So, the first Mongolian translation was crafted by the monk Sonom Gara in the early Middle Mongol period. Our work focuses on the contributions of scholars to the collection, publication, translation and study of Mongolian versions of the Subhashita. The study aims to identify the specifics of work in this area by Russian and foreign scholars in general, and by the renowned Hungarian Orientalist professor D. Kára in particular.

The object of this study is the Oirat version of a work by a renowned 13th-century Tibetan scholar Sakya pandita Gunga Zhaltan's (1182–1251) "Precious Treasury of Elegant Sayings" (457 quatrains). The Oirat version of Subhashita remains virtually unstudied in comparison with the Tibetan original and Mongolian versions. The study's material consists of a Tibetan text (printed on woodblock from Gumbum Monastery) and an Oirat translation. Originating from the depths of Central Asia, the Oirats, the ancestors of today's Kalmyks, found their new homeland in the Russian steppe between the Don, Volga, and North Caucasus in the early 17th century.

Three main methods represent the research methodology: descriptive (observation, generalization, interpretation and classification), comparative and systemic. We used such techniques as analysis and synthesis.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The discussion focuses on translation strategy. The study of the text as a bilingual phenomenon in the translational aspect is of great interest from the methods of its transmission in the translation language. The following tasks were set in the work: description of the theoretical basis of the study based on the analysis of scientific literature on the stated topic; analysis of the historiography of the issue.

The work known as "Subhashita" exists not only in the original (*Legs par bshad pa'i rin po che'i gter*) but also in numerous translations, primarily into Mongolian languages: Old Mongolian (several times: Sonom-Gara, Mergen-gegen Lubsandambijaltsan, Chakhar gebshi Lubsan-Tsultem and others), Oirat (Zaya Pandita Namkhai Jamtso), and Buryat (R. Nomtoev).

"Subhashita", translated by Zaya-pandita, represents an Oirat version independent of the earlier Mongolian translation by Sonom Gara (Bolsokhoeva, 1975: 188).

The Oirat version consists of 457 quatrains that guide readers through Buddhist principles of wisdom, virtuous behavior, and the difference between noble and foolish actions. It is a vast collection of moral, ethical, and philosophical aphorisms. The text is celebrated by linguists for its rich vocabulary and complex Buddhist terminology. The relevance of the stated topic is related to the problem of the integral study of language, religion and culture.

The text consists of quatrains, comprising nine chapters:

The first chapter (1–30) contains reflections on wise people: the signs of wisdom, how people are drawn to the wise, the value of knowledge, and the importance of prudence. The first chapter of the Oirat text (focusing on the characteristics of wise people) was translated into the modern Kalmyk language and published in 1994 in *Shambhala* magazine.

The second (31–58) contains reflections on noble people: moral qualities, dignity, and behavior befitting a person of high status and pure thoughts.

The third (59–101) contains reflections on foolish and ignorant people (criticism of stupidity, arrogance, and rash actions; often through contrasting imagery).

The fourth (102–144) contains mixed reflections — multifaceted maxims that cannot be reduced to a single narrow theme: observations on life, human weaknesses, and strengths.

The fifth (145–192) reflects on bad behavior, vices, the harm of bad habits and company, and the consequences of evil and foolish actions.

The sixth (193–256) reflects on the natural course of action — how to act in accordance with circumstances and the nature of things, on reasonable moderation and following common sense.

The seventh (257–303) reflects on inappropriate behavior — actions that run counter to circumstances, common sense, or ethics; on the consequences of inappropriate behavior.

The eighth (304–398) reflects on actions — a wide range of questions about deeds and their fruits: good and bad deeds, responsibility, consequences for oneself and others, the importance of reflecting on actions.

The Ninth (399–457) contains reflections on the Dharma: the path of practice, spiritual values, karmic consequences, right aspiration and overcoming mental obscurations.

“Subhashita” has also been translated into European and Asian languages (English, French, German, Chinese). These works opened timeless Tibetan wisdom to Western and Eastern readers (Li, et al., 2022).

It should be emphasized that the Hungarian Orientalists Csoma de Körösi (1855.1856; 1912) and Lajos Ligeti (1948; 1973; 1984) made a great contribution to the study of Subhashita. European readers first learned about Subhashita from the famous Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Körösi (1784-1842), a Hungarian traveler and scientist, the founder of modern scientific Tibetology. The Hungarian scholar’s edition contains a selection of the Tibetan text (234 quatrains) with an English translation. The translation was compiled in 1833 and published in 1855–1856, only after the scholar’s death (1855. 1856).

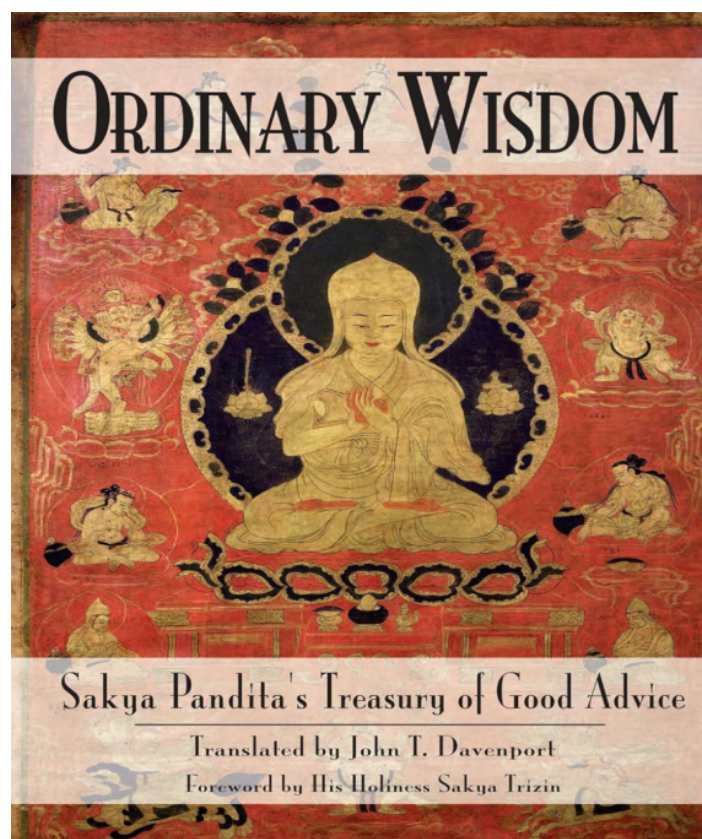
In 1858, the researcher Philipp Édouard Foucaux (1811-1894) published the selective Tibetan text of Sakya Gnostic Verses (134 quatrains) with a French translation (1858). The text 46 pages was published in Paris (Benjamin-Dupont). Foucaux selected the quatrains himself. The publication was based on the translation by Alexander Csoma de Körösi. In the author’s preface (2.5 pages), Foucault discusses his approach to the translation. The prose translation of the selected poems is numbered with Roman numerals. A small glossary (2 pages) and notes (2 pages) are included. In 2010, the American KESSINGER PUBLISHING published Philipp Édouard Foucaux’s French translation again.

A complete translation of the Tibetan text into English was made by the American researcher J. Bosson (1969). (Mongolia, 2018).

It was his doctoral dissertation: “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” (Li, et al., 2022: 78).

Another translation of Sakya Pandita’s text is in John Davenport’s *Ordinary Wisdom* (2000) with a foreword by His Holiness Sakya Trizin (Li, Zhao, 2021). The undoubted advantage of this edition is that in addition to the translation of the text, a modern

commentary, named “A Hive Where Gather Bees of Clear Understanding”, by Sakya Khenpo Sangyay Tenzin (1904–1990) is included, thereby adding considerable understanding to the primary text. commentary aims to explain the obscure and enigmatic verses and the other verses too. Further, it forms in part a tall guide to living our lives through well founded and proper shame and developing ‘yon tan’ knowledge, too.



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” (Li, et al., 2022: 78).

Li Zhengshuan is a Chinese researcher who produced one of the five existing English translations of Sakya Pandita’s text (2013; 2021). A comparative study of all English translations is presented in (Huang, Yan, 2018).

In 1925, the Scotsman William Lachlan Campbell (1880-1937) translated the entire Tibetan text into German (Wang, Li, 2021). W. L. Campbell was the English trading agent in Gyantse, a small trading town between Lhasa and Shigatse, in 1916-1917. There he was able to acquire two Tibetan editions of this widely read work. This is how the publication of German translation and transcribed edition of the famous Tibetan text of Sa-skya Pandita’s *Subhâsitaratnanidhi* came into being.

Chinese translation of more than 200 gnostic verses was published by Qinghai People’s Publishing House in 1958. Wang Yao (1928-2015) was the pioneer in translating

Tibetan into Chinese in China (1958). Wang Yao's complete Chinese translation of Sakya Gnostic Verses (Tibetan and Chinese Edition) was published by Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House in 1981.

Sakya Gnostic Verses "translated by Tsedan Dorji (Cidan Duoqi) and others was published by Tibet People's Publishing House in 1985. The translation team was composed of two Tibetan scholars and four scholars of Han nationality. Nearly 20,000 copies were printed in two prints" (Li, et al., 2022: 78).

Of interest are the works of Chinese scholars devoted to the study of Mongolian versions of Subhashita (Zhao, Li, 2021).

The works of Russian, Mongolian, Kalmyk and Buryat scholars devoted to the study of this monument are noteworthy (Subashid, 1958; Dylykova, 1973; Bolsokhoeva, 1977; Luvsanbaldan, 1986; Subhashida, 1988; Erdeniyin san subashid, 1990; Otgonbaatar, 2008; Demchigmaa, 2012; 2013ab and others).

In 1973, Tibetologist Dylykova published in Moscow Russian translation of 37 verses from Sakya Gnostic Verses (1973). In 2021, a bilingual edition of the Russian translation of the Tibetan text, based on the Aga xylograph, was published in Buryatia (Sakya Pandita..., 2021).

The Mongol-Manchu Collection of the library of the Hungarian academy of sciences contains 320 Mongolian and 30 Manchu manuscripts and block-prints (The Mongol and Manchu...). A large part of the Mongolian collection is devoted to Buddhism. Its oldest and most valuable piece is a 17th-century manuscript, a variant of Sa-Skya Pandita's "Treasury of Good Sayings" in pre-classical Mongolian and Tibetan (Mong. 54). Academician L. Ligeti studied this manuscript in detail and introduced it into scientific circulation, publishing its facsimile 78 years ago (1948).

The Mongolian text of "Subhashita" was later translated into Hungarian by him. It was published as part of the Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica series (volume 29) and was timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of Alexander Csoma de Körös's birth. Ligeti himself not only translated the text but also wrote annotations and an introductory article (1984).

Prof. Kara is the author of the English translation of 9 verses from Sakya Gnostic Verses (1977) and of the first complete Mongol-English-Tibetan dictionary of the earliest Mongolian version of the Tibetan Subhashita, dating from the end of the thirteenth century (2009). The significance of this dictionary is that it is an indispensable tool for the study of Tibetan-Mongol translation techniques. The rich Mongolian lexicon of the monument is presented together with the Tibetan equivalent and the English equivalent. Moreover, Prof. Kara identified discrepancies between the Tibetan and Middle Mongolian texts, loan words and other features of the language of the Sonom Gara's version. The original Tibetan text has nine chapters with 457 verses (1828 lines). The Sonom Gara's translation also consists of 457 quatrains. Each verse consists of four lines.

Prof. G. Kara's work has two main parts. The part I consists of a large introduction (2009: 7-37), which sets out in detail the key concepts used in the text, determines the degree of significance of the work under study, and characterizes the structure of the work, as well as abbreviations and symbols. The author introduces the reader to the scientific topic under consideration and the problem being solved in it, specifies the goals and objectives, and outlines the results of the work done. The part II represents the dictionary itself, followed by a bibliography.

Its nine chapters deal with the following major topics:

- I. the wise people (merged, 1-30: 30 quatrains),
- II. the good (or morally noble) people (sayin aran, 31-58: 28 quatrains),
- III. the dull or foolish (mungqaã-ud, 59-101: 43 quatrains),
- IV. the good and the dull juxtaposed (lit. combined; qoyar-i qolban onoqui, 102-144: 43 quatrains),
- V. the bad behaviour (maãui yabudal, 145-192: 47 quatrains),
- VI. the essential way (èinar yosun, 193-256: 64 quatrains, the second longest chapter),
- VII. the improper rule (yosu ügei törö, 257-303: 47 quatrains),
- VIII. the deed (or action; üile, 304-398: 95 quatrains, the longest chapter) and
- IX. the Dharma or the universal teaching (nom, 399-457: 58 quatrains, about almsgiving vs avarice; about filial piety, learning, fate, death, next life, and enlightenment).

Prof. G. Kara notes that “one of the most frequently used words of the Mongol text is *küimün* ‘man, human, person, someone’, which occurs more than one hundred times” (2009: 22). It corresponds to Tib. *mi* (མི). Another noun of high frequency (65 occurrences) and of similar meaning, *aran* ‘man, person; people’ corresponds to Tib. *skye bo* (སྐེ་བོ). A third, originally plural noun is *amitan* ‘living being’, which translates here Tib. *srog chags*, *srog ldan* (སྐྱེ་ལྔ་ན་), *sems can*.

Kara examines some religious theses through the prism of which one could understand the Buddhism’s attitude to various problems. A number of terms are of considerable interest from the point of view of the civilizational code, in which we see the relationship between three components — identity, Buddhist values and culture.

We are especially interested in Buddhist vocabulary. The Buddhist terminology presented in the written monument under consideration is thematically diverse. Prof. G. Kara gives comparison passages from other Mongol versions of translation of the same work. For us, researchers, this is especially important.

Our next task is to compare the Mongolian version of Subhashita with the Oirat version (Omakaeva, Korneev, 2020; Omakaewa, Korneew, 2024). The Oirat Subhashita has also nine chapters, which are linked by a common idea and are logically structured. «Subhashita»’s Tibetan original and Mongolian versions were an object of research for many years. But the Oirat version is not studied yet and so far, wasn’t exposed to the translation into the modern languages (Kalmyk and Russian), except two chapters published by E. Omakaeva in 1994 in “Shambhala” magazine (Omakaeva, Kuyukinov, 1994; 1995).

In 1994, the Oirat text of Subhashita (the first chapter “Characteristics of wise people”) was first transposed into the modern Kalmyk language and published in the journal Shambala (No. 2, 3–4). Poetic translation of the first two chapters into Russian was also carried out with the necessary explanations of certain terms.

Let’s cite the famous first stanza of the text in question in the original and in the Oirat and Mongolian translations. It speaks of the benefits of constant learning and the accumulation of knowledge. Even the most enlightened minds must continue to learn and expand their knowledge, just as all rivers flow into the ocean, making it even deeper and more expansive.

Тиб.

1. mkhas pa yon tan mdzod ‘dzin pa ||

2. de dag legs bshad rin chen sdud ||

- Ойр.
 erdemyiyn sang bariqči mergen:
 tede sayitur nomloxui erdeni xurāxu:
 yeke dalai usuni sang:
 mūni tula xamuq müren cudxuxu::

Ухаантан мэргэд хэдий эрдэмтэй боловч,
Улам улам мэргэжихийн тул ном судар цуглуулъяу.
Урсах мөрөн бүгд уламжлан дамжсаар
Усны сан болсон их далайд цутгах адил.

- 1) the names of the most important concepts of the moral ethics of Buddhism (for example, Oirat buyan, Kalm. buyin “virtue”, Sanskrit पुण्य “punya”);
- 2) terms denoting objects of Buddhist worship and cult objects;
- 3) nominations of Buddhist clergy;
- 4) designations of paramita (Sanskrit pāramitā; for example, Oir. ögligö, Kalm. ӨГЛИГ, Tib. གླིང་གཤམ་ ‘giving’);
- 5) theonyms (names of deities).

Let's cite the theonym Vishnu as an example. Unlike the Mongolian translation, which records the reproduction of the Sanskrit name (Vishnu), in the Oirat version we see a tracing: the Tibetan term *gos-ser-can* is translated literally — Shar devlt 'In yellow clothes'. Such a translation is quite justified: *Pitambara* (wearing yellow clothes) is one of the names of Vishnu. Vishnu is dressed in yellow silk clothes. His *vahana* ('mount') is the *Garuda* bird. The main layer of Buddhist terminology is formed by borrowings from Sanskrit and Tibetan.

To sum up, time has no power over the «Subhashita». So, interest in it is growing today. And this is no coincidence. The quatrains of the Subhashita speak in an accessible manner about patterns of behavior (worthy and unworthy), reasonable and unreasonable courses of action, honest and dishonest actions and their consequences, and justice and wisdom.

From today's perspective, we can speak of fundamentally new directions and methodological approaches in the study of this text. Employing adaptations in many translation cases are quite necessary in order to achieve functional equivalence. Research on Buddhist text is untenable without a deep study of Buddhism as a whole as a multidimensional phenomenon and the Buddhist worldview as the point of intersection of two

important sign systems — religion and the language that serves it. A comparative analysis of individual fragments of the Oirat and Mongolian translations of the original text of the monument provides clear confirmation of this.

It is necessary to conduct a comparative typological textual analysis using the Mongolian translation of Subhashita by Lubsantsultem, published in 1958 and edited by Academician Ts. Damdinsuren, and other versions. The next aim is to identify discrepancies between the Tibetan original and the Oirat version against the background of Mongolian texts, identify borrowings and frequently used words, characterize the translation's features, and much more.

The results of the study should be taken into account in further study of the phenomenon of linguocultural codes, in particular the spiritual and religious, as well as the natural landscape code and their representation in different versions of the “Subhashita”.

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