On a Factor for the Occurrence of Variant Readings in the Tibetan Canon

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Abstract：One can reasonably imagine that Tibetan scribes transcribed manuscripts from the original, first in shorthand（*skung yig*）, then reinstated the original words to complete the final products. This must have been the case with Buddhist scriptures as well. In the process of reverting the working drafts to the original with standard spellings, unexpected words might happen to be reconstructed, leading to the creation of new variant readings. Such variants do not reflect any differences among the original Sanskrit texts, nor are they simple technical mistranscriptions. We should consider them as "transmissional" variants（as opposed to "recentional" ones）caused by the process of reproducing the original text based on stenographic notations. In this essay, I will point out occurances of this possibility in the Tibetan Buddhist canon.

Introduction

In this essay, I would like to discuss the relationship between shorthand notes（=*skung yig* drafts）and the final products, namely, the manuscripts of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. First, I will briefly explain the standard methods of shorthand writing, which will help clarify my argument elaborated in the latter part of this essay. As one may easily guess, in its first stage, each scribe probably prepared his own shorthand notes or working drafts transcribing the original texts. Although their ways of abbreviating words could have differed slightly from each other, this difference can generally be overlooked, as usually the very same person will have reinstated the original words to produce the final product. He will surely have known his own way of rendering words in shorthand and how to reinstate back to their original forms.

1．The basic forms of *skung yig* characters.

Although the method of shorthand may have varied from person to person, there were some standard forms. rNam rgyal tshe ring in the preface of his book, *Bod kyi skung yig phyogs sgrigs*, classified the basic ways of *skung yig*[1]. dPa' ris Sangs rgyas also classified *skung yig* in his book *Bod yig 'bri tshul mthong ba kun smon*[2]. Furthermore, Shes rab also analyzes basic forms of *skung yig* in the preface of his *skung yig* dictionary, *sKung yig gsal byed nor bu'i me long*[3]. Based on these general methods and on my personal findings, here I would like to summarize the basic forms of *skung yig* characters.

1）The most basic way to abbreviate words is to connect the first syllable ending in a vowel with the vowel that comes after the consonants in the next syllable. For example,

rdo（rj）e 𝕊   dge（'d）un nyi（sh）u 𝕊

chu（sh）el 𝕊   dge（bsh）es 𝕊 and so forth.

In some cases, the *rjes 'jug* of the preceding syllable is retained. For example,

theg（dm）an 𝕊 in this case.

2）There is also a way of connecting the vowel or the *rjes 'jug* of the preceding syllable with the consonants after the *ya btags, ra btags* or *la btags*-part of the following syllable, as in the examples below.

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[1] rNam rgyal tshe ring.（1983）2-8.
[2] dPa' ris Sangs rgyas.（1997）Chapter 5. 109-133.
[3] Shes rab.（2003）1-3.
* Recentry, I could examine the article: Dud bla bu chung "Bod kyi yi ge'i skung yig gi rnam gzhag las kung yig gi ngo bo dang byung 'phel, dbye ba'i rnam grangs skor bshad pa"（in Tibetan）, *BOD LJONGS ZHIB 'JUG*（Tibetan Studies：西藏研究（2017.1）），Lhasa 2017 Feb, pp.29−45; which also presented some ideas of classification.

gdul (b)ya 　　dal ('b)yor 　　rjes (d)ran

In the cases where the main consonant (ming gzhi) of the following syllable is ಕ, ಕ, or ಕ, only the *tsa-lag* mark ⌐ is preserved.

bdud (r)tsi 　　spyi (g)tsug

3) When the *rjes 'jug* of the preceding syllable is the same as the first consonant of the following syllable, they can be connected without a *tsheg*. For example, as in the following cases.

dpal (l)dan 　　nam (m)kha'

4) When the *rjes 'jug* -g accompanies the *yang 'jug* -s, ┌ or ┐ (reflected letter of d or t) is substituted, as in the case below.

khyab byed ma dmigs pa'i rtags

5) The *anusvāra* mark ● or ● is substituted for the *rjes 'jug* -m, as in the following cases.

bum pa 　　sem(s) d(p)a'

The *anusvāra* mark ● is also used for the *rjes 'jug* -ng and for the suffix -m, as in the following examples.

dbang (ph)yug ma 　　dbu ma

6) Dual use of a consonant at the end of preceding word and at the head of a particle can be seen, as in the below examples.

mig (g)i 　　tshig (g)is

man (cha)d (d)u 　　smras (s)o

bskyed (d)e

7) The Genitive particle འི (པའི) and the suffix པོ / མོ are indicated only by their vowel marks.

dpa' (b)o   [figure]   bzlum (p)o   [figure]

8）Figures can be substituted for a particular word.

phyogs gnyis [figure]   bzhin (d)u [figure]

9）Reflected letter: ㄱ is substituted for ཡོད་ or ཡོད་པ་ and ㅎ for མེད་ or མེད་པ་.

yod par (th)al [figure]   med par (th)al [figure]

10）The mark [figure] rya is substituted for ◌

rgya gcig mchong gcig [figure]

11）ya-btags ◌ can be substituted for ga-'ogs, also sometimes substituted for the rjes 'jug -g or -gs.

gzhan (d)u (g)zhan med [figure]   dmigs pa [figure]

2．Debate-manual written by Shes rab sbyin pa.

The *skung yig* style has been used in extremely composite forms among experts or scholastics within the same field. These highly abbreviated terms cannot be understood by scholars working in other fields. The following example is quoted from a manuscript of the so-called debate-manual written by Shes rab sbyin pa, who was the abbot of gSang phu Nyi ma thang monastery.[4] For example, 1b2 mid to 1b2 end:

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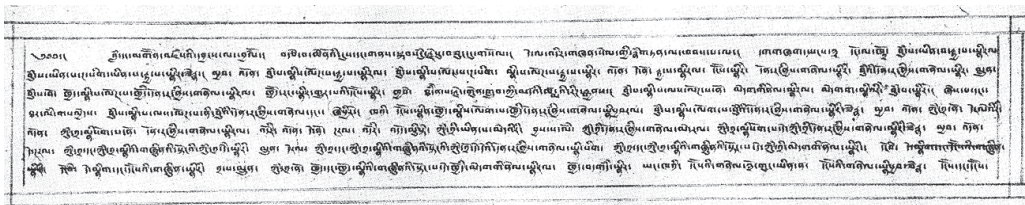
4 Otani University Tibetan Works Series, Vol.III.［No.13954］*gzhan sel gyi mtha' dpyod*: 1b2；See also their web site of Tibetan Works Research Project of the Shin Buddhist Comprehensive Research Institute. Dr.Thupten Gawa released its transcriptions in decompressed form.

ཀྱེ་པ་སྐྲིཔ་ཀ་ཁྱབ་ཀུ་ཡེས།

བུ་པ་སྐྲེ་པ་ལོྟ་པ་ཏ་ཡོག   *bum pa ma yin pa las logs pa yod pa gang zhig/*

སྐྲི་པ་ཁྲ་ཡ་སྲྱ་ཡ་སྱིུ།

སྐྲེ་པ་ལོྟ་པ་རྒྱ་པ་སྱུར།   *ma yin pa las logs pa rtag pa yin pa'i phyir/*

ཀྲཀ། ཀྲཀ།

འདོན། དེ་ནོ།   *'dod na/ de chos can/*

རྒྱ་པ་སྐྲེ་ལ་ཤ   ྐྲཀི་ཤྱྱུ།

རྒྱ་པ་སྐྲེར་ལ། དངོས་ཤྱྱིར་ཏེ།   *rtag pa ma yin par thal/ dngos po yin pa'i phyir te/*

ཀཾ་པ་ཀྲྱ་པ་གཉྲེ་ལ་ཤྱིི།

དོན་རང་གྱིས་གཞན་ཤྱྱིར་ཏེ།   *don rang mtshan gyis gzhan sel yin pa'i phyir te/*

སྐྲི་ཁ་པ་ཀྲྱ་པ་གཉྲེ་ལ་ཤྱིི། སྲྱུས།

བུ་པི་དོན་རང་གྱིས་གཞན་ཤྱྱིར་ སྲྱུན།

   *bum pa'i don rang mtshan gyis gzhan sel yin pa'i phyir/ ma grub na/*

Readers are required to have special knowledge on the daily monastic debate.

3．Sa skya paṇḍita's *Legs bshad*.

In the process of transcribing the working drafts back to the original with standard spellings, unexpected words might happen to be reconstructed.

For example, here we have a Mongolian manuscript of Sa skya paṇḍita's *Legs bshad*.[5]
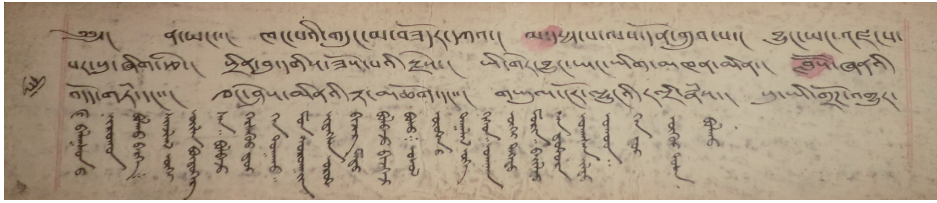
From the end of the second line, verse 86 begins. For the first and second stanzas, all published editions agree with:

བློ་གྲོས་ཞན་པའི་འདོད་གཏམ་དང་། ཅང་ཤེས་མིན་པའི་རྟ་མཆོག་དང་། *blo gros zhan pa'i 'dod gtam dang/ cang shes min pa'i rta mchog dang/*.

For the third stanza of this verse: གཡུལ་ངོར་ལྷུང་བའི་རལ་གྲི་རྣ, some texts are reconstructed as: *g.yul ngor lhung **ba'i** ral gri rnams/* while other texts read: *g.yul ngor lhung **pa'i** ral gri rnams/*[6].

Such differentiation of *ba* and *pa* are usually regarded as technical mistranscriptions by the scribes or regarded as their lack of grammatical knowledge. However, when we take into consideration the above knowledge of *skung yig*, we can see that they occurred during the process of decompressing (unzipping) the abbreviated forms. The character ལྷུང་བའི་ of this *skung yig* can be decompressed as ལྷུང་བའི་ or ལྷུང་པའི་. This should not be considered as "miscopying."

We can find almost the same situation in the cases of པོ and མོ . Both པོ and མོ are usually compressed by stating only the naro mark ◌ོ without the ming gzhi པ or མ. This problem can also occur in the case of པར / བར . Scribes only state -ར without པ or བ. Unexpected variants can occur during the process of decompressing such forms of abbreviation.

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6   Bosson (1969): 56; Eimer (2014): 95; Ligeti (1948): 26.

4．*Vinayavastu*

4.1

Let us examine some questionable variant readings, for example, from the very opening part of the first volume of the bKa' 'gyur[7]. We can find many variants that may have occurred during the process of decompressing.

The following *skung yig* forms on the right are based on my speculations, with no evidences at this stage, as attempts to find possible mediators between the original texts and the final products.

p 6-l. （D）ཁོང་དུ་ཆུད་ཅིང་ /（Q N）ཁོངས་སུ་ཆུད་ཅིང་ ← ཁོཆུད་ཅིང་ ?

p11-20.（D N）སྦྱི་བོར་ /（Y）སྤྱོ་བར་ /（Q）སྦྱི་བར་ ← སྤྱོིར་ ?

p14-2. （D）ལོག་ཤིག་ /（Zhol）ལོག་ཅིག་ ← ལོིག་ ?

p14-3. （D）རྒྱུ་སྦྱིན་པར་ /（N）རྒྱུ་སྦྱིན་པར་ ← སྦྱིན་པར་ ?

p14-20.（D）ཆུག་ཤིག་ /（Zhol）ཆུག་ཅིག་ ← ཆིུག་ ?

p17-1. （D）མཐའ་འཁོབ་ /（Y, Q）མཐའ་ཁོབ་ ← མཐའཁོབ་ ?

p18-3. （D）པར་བྱའི་ /（Y, Q）པར་བྱ་བའི་ ← པར་བྱེ་ ?

p19-1. （D）དགའ་གིས་བསུ་བར་ /（N）དགའ་གིས་གསུ་བར་ ← དགའ་གིསུ་བར་ ?

p19-4. （D）ཕྱིན་ཏོ། /（Y, Q）ཕྱིན་ནོ། ← ཕྱིནོ། ?

p26-6. （D）དབྱུ་གུ་དག་ /（N, Zhol）དབྱུག་གུ་དག་ ← དབྱུག་དག་ ?

p28-4. （D）འདི་ནི་མི་འཐད་ /（N）འདི་མི་མཐད་ /（Y, Q）འདི་ནི་འདི་མི་མཐད་

← འདིམེཐད་ ?

p29-7. （D）ཡུལ་ན་གནས་བླ་ཡི། /（N, Zhol）ཡུལ་ལ་གནས་པ་བླའི། ← ཡུལཅུས་བླི། ?

P50-8. （D）དགའ་ལ་ཡང་ཡོངས་སུ་ /（N, Zhol）དགའ་ལ་ཡོངས་སུ་ ← དགའ་ལ་ཡཆོས་ ?

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[7]　中華大蔵経『甘珠爾（対勘本）』蔵文 vol.1.; D（=Derge）/ Q（=Qianlong）/ N（=Narthang）/ Y（=Yongle）.

4.2　Another case in *Vinaya-vastu*

The fifteenth chapter of *Vinaya-vastu* narrates the Buddha's instruction on the suitable structure of a *Vihāra*. In this section, its Tibetan translation has a passage གཡས་གཡོན་དུ་གནས་ཁང་གཉིས་སོ། (There are two flats [each] on [both the] right and left sides) (TTP 'dul ba Nge 184b7). This passage has a variant reading in the London manuscript Kangyur which reads གཡས་ཕྱོགས་སུ་གནས་ཁང་གཉིས་སོ།[8] (There are two flats on the right side). One might think there were two different Sanskrit originals.

Fortunately, we can check this passage against the Sanskrit text: *Śayanāsanavastu* (Gnoli: 1978). It has been passed down as *dvayoḥ pārśvayor dve layane* (on both sides there are two flats each)[9], which supports གཡས་གཡོན་དུ་གནས་ཁང་གཉིས་སོ། of the Beijing edition. It is likely that this was the original passage when it was translated in to Tibetan. We may boldly suppose that the scribe took notes in the *skung yig* style as ཕྱོ�su་གནས་ཁང་གཉིས་སོ། which can also be transcribed back to its decompressed form as གཡས་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ག ནས་ཁང་གཉིས་སོ།.

5．The *Sukhāvatīvyūha* Sūtra

5.1

In the Smaller *Sukhāvatīvyūha* Sūtra, texts of blockprint editions (Q/D/N) preserve a passage that reads ཁྲུང་ཁྲུང་དང་། ｜ རྨ་བྱ་དག་ཡོད་པ་དེ་དག་ཀུན་ཉིན་ལན་གསུམ་ ⋯ (TTP 221a6). This does not correspond exactly to the *Them spang ma* group Kangyur editions (also in *Phug brag* edition) which reads ཁྲུང་ཁྲུང་དང་། ｜ རྨ་བྱ་དག་ཡོད་དེ། དེ་དག་ཀུན་ཉིན་ལན་གསུམ་ ⋯ (Skt:⋯*santi ... krauñcā mayūrāś ca / te triṣkṛitvā...*). According to Niisaku's comparative list, in the text of the Tawang manuscript bKa' 'gyur, this very passage appears as ཁྲུང་ཁྲུང་དང་། ｜ རྨ་བྱ་ཡོད་པ་དེ་དག་ཀུན་ཉིན་ལན་གསུམ་ ⋯.[10] As we have seen above in

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[8]　*The Microfiche Edition of the śel dkar Manuscript bKa' 'gyur*, The British Library (1997). 519.1-2.
[9]　Gnoli (1978): Ms.317a.
[10]　Niisaku (2010): 19-20.

the first section of this paper, reflected d: Ⰵ is used for ཡོང་ as well as for ཡོང་པ་. Thus we can assume the existence of some "mediators" in the process of editing, for example, like: ⰅⰅⰅⰺⰅ.

5.2

In the Larger *Sukhāvatīvyūha* Sūtra, all texts of blockprint editions preserve the same passage བྱེ་བ་ཁྲག་ཁྲིག་བརྒྱ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་མང་པོ་ (TTP 304b2). However in the Qianglong edition, six letters among them བརྒྱ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་ are small. Probably a later editor who restored this edition cut the original བརྒྱ་ཕྲག་ (four letter's space) and replaced them with the six smaller letters བརྒྱ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་. Probably བརྒྱ་ཕྲག་ was there originally, because we can find the passage as བྱེ་བ་ཁྲག་ཁྲིག་བརྒྱ་ཕྲག་མང་པོ་ in *Phug brag* edition. In this case, I would like to boldly propose that the scribe took notes in the *skung yig* style as བཙྒོང་, which can be transcribed back to its decompressed form either as བརྒྱ་སྟོང་ཕྲག་ or as བརྒྱ་ཕྲག་མང་པོ་.

I hope the progress of research on the so called "Region Kangyur" or "Proto-Kanjur" might be able to present some more tangible evidences.[11]

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[11] We have very limited knowledge on *skung yig* usage in the so called proto-Kangyur texts and in the manuscripts of ancient Tibetan translations.
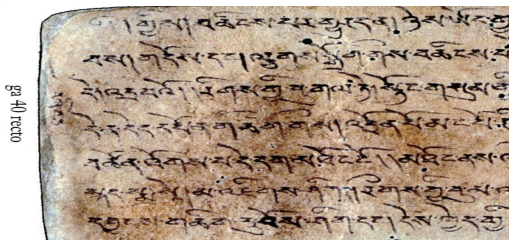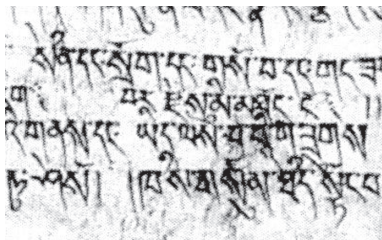
Left: *sKung yig* in the Bathang Kanjur (last line: ···ཏུ་ཤེས||སོ||གསུམ་ཐེད་སྟོང་པ་in skung yig=···tu shes so// khams gsum thams cad stong pa···) Eimer (2012): XXXV. Fig.2.

Right: *sKung yig* in the Kotanese *Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra* (end of 40b5 to beginning of 40b6: འདི་སྐད་སྲྫི in skung yig='di skad ces smras te/) Karashima (2008: Plate2).

6．Conclusion

It is possible that new variant readings might occurred during the process of decompressing（unzipping）words that had once been compressed in *skung yig*. I conclude that such variants do not reflect differences among the original texts, nor are they simply technical mistranscriptions by the scribes.

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