Part 1.
Introduction

1. Objectives and approach

The present book is a revised version of my Ph.D. dissertation. It consists of five parts, three appendices[1] and a glossary. The introductory chapter consists of a general overview of classical Tibetan grammar which has its basis in two known root texts, *Sum cu pa* and *Rtags kyi 'jug pa*: a brief history, its authorship, its development and its place in the modern Tibetan language. In explanatory remarks I have tried to present a number of points which have not been widely examined by modern Tibetan and Western scholars, raising for discussion certain problems the Tibetans themselves face in their grammar. This discussion is not only a discusssion of the problem of the commentaries examined but is, in a wider seense, an examination of the general problems of classical Tibetan grammar.

I have tried my best to offer to readers some ideas and a new approach on the points which I have discussed. One should, however, keep in mind that the discussions carried out here are presented from the point of view of traditional Tibetan grammar, and not from the point of view of European linguistics.

---

[1] My papers on *Mkhas pa'i kha rgyan*, which is found in the appendix, and on the function of particles *la*, *na* and the insertion of the instrumental case in Part 2 (explanatory remarks), were presented at the 10th Seminar of Tibetan Studies in Oxford and that Tuebingen University (B114 research project), respectively.

According to my knowledge it is rare for foreign Tibetologists to work on classical Tibetan grammar as a whole. From the end of the nineteenth century to the present most of the presentations and contributions made by foreign scholars in the field of Tibetan grammar have consisted of excerpts of one grammar commentary or another[2]. It seems that Inaba Shoju worked on both parts of the Tibetan grammar tradition *Sum cu pa* (SCP) and *Rtags kyi 'jug pa* (TKJ) in 1954 and later in 1986[3]. Since his work is in Japanese, it was not accessible to me, except for his edition of *Si tu Zhal lung*.

Thus, my primary approach in this work is to present a complete translation of the classical Tibetan grammar treatises, SCP and TKJ with its commentary *Si tu Zhal lung* written by Dharmabhadra, into English to provide an overview of Tibetan grammar for people who want to learn this grammar not in part but as a whole. While in translation I have tried to stay as close as possible to the original, this method can create incomprehensibilities. Therefore, when a word by word translation does not make any sense of the text, I focused on translating the meaning (*don bsgyur*). I have found this more reasonable than keeping a nonsensical literal translation. This method of translation was also suggested in *sGra sbyor bam bo gnyis pa*[4] by the reviser (*zhus chen*) of the Tibetan language at the beginning of the ninth century.

---

[2] Miller 1991:366: "Too often studies of specific questions in the Tibetan grammarians have been conducted by citing and translating bits-and-pieces of one commentary or another, rather than finding out what is available in the corpus as a whole."

[3] Miller 1991:365: "Especially notable in this respect has heen the contribution of Inaba Shoju, particularly his remarkable 1954 monograph on the Tibetan grammatical tradition as a whole (now to be used and cited in the revised and expanded edition of 1986)."

[4] Ishikawa 1990:2: *dharmma bsgyur ba la rgya gar gyi skad kyi go rims las mi bsnor bar bod kyi skad du bsgyur na don dang tshig tu 'brel zhing bde na ma bsnor bar sgyur cig / bsnor na bde zhing go ba bskyed pa zhig yod na / tshigs bcad la ni rtsa ba bzhi pa'am / drug pa pa'ang rung ste / tshigs su bcad pa gcig gi nang na gang bde ba bsnor zhing sgyur cig /*; "When one translates *Dharma* from the Indian language into Tibetan, if the meaning and combination of the word order suit [in Tibetan] as it is in the Indian language order, translate them according to that order. If it gives a better understanding by mixing the word order, whether shloka consists of four or six verses, translate it in more convenient way."

Dharmabhadra's commentary on the classical Tibetan grammar, *Si tu Zhal lung* (henceforth ZHAL), is used as the basis of my work because of its popularity among Tibetan and Western scholars. One can find a complete translation and transliteration of the commentary on *Sum cu pa* and *Rtags kyi 'jug pa* from ZHAL in my work. I have used four different versions of ZHAL. They are:

a. *Zhal lung* published by the Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, Dharamsala, 1986;

b. *Zhal lung* from the collected works of Dngul chu Dharmabhadra, reproduced from a manuscript[5] by Champa Oser, Delhi, 1973;

c. *Zhal lung* edited by Inaba Shōju in *Chibetto-go koten bunpōgaku, zōhokan.* Hōzōkan, Kyoto 1986 (1st ed. 1954);

d. *Zhal lung* edited by Sarat Chandra Das in *An Introduction to the Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1983 (1st ed. 1915).

Basing myself on the ZHAL, published by the Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, I compared it with three other versions. From among four different versions of the Tibetan text, the first two are close to the one published by the Tibetan Cultural Printing Press. The text of *Zhal lung* published by Das is in many places blurred, there are many missing or extra words by comparison with other commentaries. Comparative notes are given in the footnotes to the transliteration below (the compared texts are indicated by abbreviations).

While translating ZHAL, I have compared its explanations with nine different grammar commentaries, ancient and modern. They are as follows:

1. *Smra sgo mtshon cha* by Paṇḍita Smṛtijñānakīrti (early eleventh century)[6],

2. *Mkhas pa'i kha rgyan*[7] and

---

[5] In my view this print resembles a reproduction of a block print rather than a reproduction from a manuscript.

[6] Cf. Verhagen 1994:47 n. 4; 141.

[7] More about the author of this text will be said later in the appendix, including the translation of *Mkhas pa'i kha rgyan*.

3. *Yi ge'i sbyor ba* by Sakya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251 /1252),

4. *Bod kyi skad kyi gsung rab la 'jug tshul sum cu pa'i rnam 'grel* by Zha lu lo tsa ba Chos skyong bzang po (1441-1527)[8],

5. *Bya ka ra na'i Rtags kyi 'jug pa rnam par gsal ba'i legs bshad* by Zha lu lo tsa ba Chos skyong bzang po,

6. *Mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan mu tig 'phreng mdzes* by Si tu gtsug lag Chos kyi snang ba (var. Chos kyi 'byung gnas) (1699?-1774),

7. *Ngo mtshar 'phrul gyi lde mig* by Ser tog Blo bzang tshul khrims rgya mtsho (1845-1915),

8. *Rin chen bang mdzod* by Blo bzang rgya mtsho (1928-1997),

9. *Thon mi'i zhal lung* by Tshe tan zhabs drung (?-1985?).

The differences in the explanation of *Sum cu pa* (SCP) and *Rtags kyi 'jug pa* (TKJ), which I have discerned between ZHAL and the other commentaries, are given in the footnotes to the translation with an English translation. The texts inside square brackets [ ] in translation and the footnotes are added by me. They are clarifications or remarks. To compare the English translation with the Tibetan text easily, one may check or compare the English translation and Tibetan transliteration by verse numbers. To get a general overview of ZHAL more easily I have prepared a table of outlines (*sa bcad*) of both SCP and TKJ. The outlines of SCP are presented here by dividing them into three groups: the first, SCP, general classification of letters; the second, the way of affixing particles; the third, conclusion with instruction. The outlines of TKJ are divided into four groups: the first, prefix gender markers; the second, suffix gender markers; the third, how suffix modifies the text; the fourth, why the suffixes should be joined.

Moreover, I have compared not only earlier commentaries with ZHAL, I also present two earliest grammar commentaries *Smra sgo mtshon cha* (SSMC) and *Mkhas pa'i kha rgyan* (MKH) in detail in the appendix. Perhaps as a result of the popularity of MPHZ with its de-

---

[8] In the grammar catalogue by Tse tan zhabs drung, Tillemans and Herforth (1989:30) did not give the title of commentary on SCP; I think Zha lu Chos skyong bzang po composed two commentaries on the Tibetan grammar.

tailed explanation of SCP and TKJ, the tradition of studying earlier commentaries is very rare and rather neglected. Thus, those two above-mentioned commentaries are included in this work. Discussing at length the historical background of the author of SSMC, I analyzed his explanation of the selected grammatical particles, which are not used in the present Tibetan language. With a short introduction regarding the authorship of MKH, I translated and transliterated the text and tried to analyze a few points in MKH which are not commonly found in the later Tibetan grammar commentaries. I have included those remarks or opinions for further discussion. Interlinear glosses found in MKH are put as foot--notes in transliteration. According to *Mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan mu tig 'phreng mdzes* (MPHZ) there are descriptions of the particles in SSMC, which cannot be accepted as they are explained.

Grammatical terms are given in the glossary with English translation and Tibetan transliteration according to the Tibetan alphabetical order of the root letter. Translation of the terms such as two different verbal forms in TKJ, action on the subject and the object (*byed tshig* and *bya tshig*), are referred to *Agents and Actions in Classical Tibetan* (Tillemans-Herforth 1989). English grammatical terms which I used here do not hold exactly the same meaning as in the English language.

Note on transliteration

Tibetan transliterations are made here according to the Wylie system which is the best known transliteration system among Tibetologists. The root letter of the first syllable of the Tibetan words in the glossary, abbreviations and the names of the authors in the bibliography are indicated with the capital letter.

2. Classical Tibetan Grammar

It is important to explain briefly the history of classical Tibetan grammar and the authorship of its root texts. Here, I would just touch on the place of grammar in Tibetan literature; in Tibetan scholarship sci-

ence (*rig gnas*) is classified into two main categories: greater science[9] (*rig gnas che ba*) and minor science[10] (*rig gnas chung ba*). Both sciences have five different branches of learning, and the grammar was regarded as one of the greater sciences. It is called the science of grammar (*sgra rig pa*). Generally in Tibetan tradition "learning *sgra*" means to learn Sanskrit grammar not Tibetan grammar. Therefore, whether or not we should include Sanskrit grammar in the science of grammar (*sgra rig pa*) remains an open question! The study of classical Tibetan was treated as an important field of Tibetan studies by great Tibetan teachers and translators for many centuries. It was, and still is, well taught in every Tibetan educational institution as basis of the Tibetan course. Therefore, it is important to know the grammar well if one wants to be regarded as an expert in Tibetan literature. For centuries, countless commentaries were composed by scholars; unfortunately, many valuable commentaries from the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries are no longer available. The remaining major commentaries on classical Tibetan grammar are documented by Tshe tan zhabs drung[11]. Further information was added by Tillemans and Herforth[12]. In their enriched catalogue the text *Sum rtags kyi rnam bshad nor bu ke ta ka'i do shal* was attributed to Dharmabhadra. In fact it was written by Ngag dbang dbyangs can dga' ba. There are many undocumented minor commentaries written by individuals. It is impossible to record all those commentaries. Although we have numerous detailed and brief commentaries on two root texts, the lack of a new systematic Tibetan grammar is obvious. Hence, in my opinion, general systematic grammar commentary is needed to set the rules of modern Tibetan.

---

[9] *sgra rig pa*, *tshad ma rig pa*, *gso ba rig pa*, *bzo rig pa*, *nang don rig pa*, "science of grammar", "science of logic", "science of medicine", "science of art", "science of mind".

[10] *snyan ngag*, *mngon brjod*, *sdeb sbyor*, *zlos gar*, *skar rtsis* – 'poetry', 'synonyms', 'prosody', 'drama', 'astrology'.

[11] Tshe tan zhabs drung, 1989:190-195: *Sum rtags kyi 'grel ba gsar rnying grags chen 'ga' zhig / /.* "Some old and new famous commentaries on the Classical Tibetan grammar".

[12] Tillemans and Herforth, 1989:29-35: "Tshe tan zhabs drung's list of major commentaries on the *Sum cu pa* and *Rtags kyi 'jug pa*."

What we now call Classical Tibetan grammar has two parts, *Sum cu pa* (SCP) and *Rtags kyi 'jug pa* (TKJ). It is said by Tibetan historians that these two texts are all that remains of a total of eight grammar treatises composed by Thon mi Sambhoṭa. More details about the author will be explained later. The name *Sum cu pa* refers to the number of verses (*shlo ka*) in the text, and the name *Rtags kyi 'jug pa* refers to the meaning explained by the text. SCP describes the numbers of vowels, consonants, prefix letters, suffix letters, and functions of the cases and particles in Tibetan language. The essence of the SCP is a presentation of seven cases, their functions, dependent and independent particles as well as the functions and purpose of suffix letters. The last point is strongly stressed by the author at the end of the SCP under the heading *gdams ngag brjod pas mjug bsdu ba*, 'concluding with the giving instruction'. A particle which depends on the preceding suffix letter when inserted is called a dependent particle, and a particle which does not depend on the preceding suffix letter is called an independent particle. Dependent particles are inserted according to the same gender group. The method of joining cases and particles after a word with the suffix letter and without suffix letter *'a* are the same. The knowledge of SCP enables one to write correctly in Tibetan language.

The second part TKJ explains the gender (*rtags*) classification of letters (*yi ge*) in general, of the gender classification of the prefix letters (*sngon 'jug*), of suffix letters (*rjes 'jug*), and of root letters (*ming gzhi*) and meaning of transitive and intransitive verbs. There are five genders in Tibetan grammar: masculine (*pho*), feminine (*mo*), neutral (*ma ning*), very feminine (*shin tu mo*), and ultimate feminine (*mo gsham*). Five genders are used to classify genders into four different kinds of letter groups: gender classification of letters in general; gender classification of the root letters; gender classification of the prefix letters; and gender classification of the suffix letters. However, the number of different gender letters in each classification is not the same. If a letter is masculine in suffix gender classification, it is not necessarily a masculine letter in the prefix or other gender classification. More importantly, in part two, TKJ explains the four different functions of the five prefix letters and ten suffix letters: to which letter they should be joined, by what let-

ter, and how and for what purpose they should be joined. This is the core
of TKJ. There is also an explanation regarding the formation of the verbs
in three tenses, and by which and how nominal endings should be taken
by the previous word or a suffix letter.

3. The author Thon mi Sambhoṭa

It is traditionally believed by Tibetan historians that Thon mi
Sambhoṭa, a minister of king Srong btsan sgam po (617-650 or 680?),
composed eight different grammatical treatises in the first half of the
seventh century[13]. The date of Thon mi's mission to India and the com-
pletion of two grammar texts is uncertain. In Tibetan annals such as *Bu
ston chos 'byung* (by Bu ston rin chen grub, 1290-1364), *Deb ther dmar
po* (by Tshal pa kun dga' rdo rje, 1309-1364), *Rgyal rab gsal ba'i me
long* (by bSod nams rgyal mtshan, 1312-1375), and *Chos 'byung mkhas
pa'i dga' ston* (by dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba, 1504-1566) we cannot
find information on when he exactly traveled to India and the date of his
return to Tibet. Tse tan zhabs drung assumed that Thon mi started his
mission to India in 633 A.D and returned to Tibet in 640 A.D[14]. If Tse
tan zhabs drung is right, then Thon mi composed Tibetan grammar and
invented Tibetan script after the arrival of the Nepalese princess and be-
fore the Chinese princess Wencheng arrived in Tibet as a bride of king
Srong btsan sgam po. Shakabpa also agrees with this idea[15]. What we
can find in Tibetan annals is to which place Thon mi traveled in India,
from whom he learned Sanskrit grammar and how long he stayed in In-
dia. Although earlier Tibetan historians agree on Thon mi's mission to
India and his invention and composition of Tibetan script and grammar,

---

[13] Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, 1986, I:180.15: *Thon mi rdo rje'i sgra mdo dang / sum
rtags la sogs brda sprod kyi / bstan bcos brgyad kyang mdzad par grags /* "It is said that
Thon mi composed eight grammar treatises including grammar text called Vajra (*Rdo
rje*) grammar treatise and *Sum rtags*".

[14] Tse tan zhabs drung, 1989:8-9.

[15] Shakabpa, 1976, I:147-148.

their explanations regarding his mission and from whom he learned Sanskrit grammar differ significantly. Very often information lacks precision. For example, to what part of India had Thon mi been traveling. It is said by Bsod nams rgyal mtshan and Gtsug lag phreng ba, without giving an exact name of the place, that he traveled to *rgya gar lho phyogs*, 'South India' and *lho phyogs*, 'South'[16]. What do those two scholars mean by 'South India' and 'South'? Do they mean 'South India' in its modern sense? I have never seen a document saying that Thon mi went to the present day 'South India'. If they meant that Thon mi traveled to India, south of Tibet, then it is an obvious syntactical mistake by the two authors. In *Thon mi'i zhal lung* we can find a well analyzed discussion about his teacher and their names. The author of *Thon mi'i zhal lung* assumed that Lha rig pa'i seng ge and Li bi ka ra are the names of a single person[17]. Laufer in his article on the origin of Tibetan writing[18] also examined Thon mi's mission to India and the invention of Tibetan script.

If Thon mi invented Tibetan script based on Indian script and composed Tibetan grammar after learning Sanskrit grammar, then what are the influences of Sanskrit grammar on the Tibetan language? Regarding script, Tibetan historians agree on the general idea of the invention of Tibetan script based on Indian script, but what kind of Indian script he used as the base of Tibetan script is uncertain. We find different ac-

---

[16] Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, fol. 75b-76a: *Thos mi sambhadra zhes pa yid gzhungs pa / dbang po rno ba / yon tan du ma dang ldan pa cig yod pa la / gser mang po bskur nas / rgya gar du yi ge slob du tang ngo / der blon pos rgya gar lho phyogs su phyin te //* "There was a [men] called Thon mi Sambhadra, very reliable, intelligent and having many good qualities. He was sent to India with lots of gold to learn letter (*yi ge*). Then minister [Thon mi] went to South India." Dpa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba, 1986, I:178: *Thon gyi lug ra kha nas thon mi a nu ra ka ta'i bu thon mi sambhodra bya ba'i mi chung blo gsal ba zhig la gser phye bre gang bskur ste tang skad // de yis rgya gar kun myul lho phyogs la phyin //* "It is said so that a small and very intelligent man called Thon mi Sambhodra, a son of Thon mi A nu ra ka ta from Lug ra kha of Thon, was given one *Bre* of powder gold. He wandered all over India and went to South".

[17] Tshe tan zhabs drung, 1989:7-8.

[18] Laufer 1917.

counts by different historians, i.e. Kashmirian script[19], Devanagari
script and the most commonly accepted by Tibetans, the Vardula script,
as the origin of dbu med script, and the Lantsha script as the origin of
dbu can. But Dge 'dun chos 'phel said in his *Deb ther dkar po* that Thon
mi traveled to India during the reign of a Gupta king in which case Thon
mi may have invented the Tibetan script based on the Gupta script. He
also confirmed that the Gupta script which he witnessed in India, written
on copper slate, at first sight looked exactly like Tibetan[20].

What kind of Sanskrit grammar elements Thon mi borrowed in Ti-
betan grammar is explained and analysed by Tibetan and Western schol-
ars. Si tu paṇchen clearly expressed the influence of Sanskrit grammar
on the Tibetan language in his commentary. He said:

> *don thob kyi dbang gis don rjod par byed pa'i skad rigs thams cad la*
> *rnam dbye de rnams med pa mi srid pas mkhan po 'dis bod kyi dkad la'ang*
> *legs sbyar dang bstun nas rnam dbye de rnams kyi 'jug pa gsal bar mdzad*
> *pa yin no //* [21]
>
> "In fact, it is impossible not to have the cases in each and every lan-
> guage which explain meaning. Therefore, teacher (*mkhan po*) has clearly
> explained the functions of cases in the Tibetan language according to San-
> skrit."

A few times Si tu paṇchen referred and compared Tibetan to San-
skrit grammar in his commentary on SCP when explaining cases like
'action toward object', 'second case' and 'including particle',[22] etc.
Dharmabhadra also referred to *Cāndravyākaraṇa* when explaining the
possessive particle[23]. If both scholars refer to Sanskrit grammar regard-

---

[19] Bu ston rin chen grub, 1988, p.182: *Bod kyi skad dang bstun nas gsal byed sum cu
tham pa dang âli bzhir bsdus te gzugs kha che'i yi ge bstun nas lha sa'i sku mkhar ma rur
bcos nas…/* "According to the Tibetan language he [Thon mi] invented thirty conso-
nants and four âlis based on Kashmirian script (*kha che'i yi ge*) at Sku mkhar ma rur". In
modern Tibetan language the word '*kha che*' denotes Musilm rather than Kashmir.

[20] Dge 'dun chos 'phel, 1976:132.12: *de nas (des na) bod yig gang yang dper bcad pa'i
phyi mo de yang gupta'i yi ge 'di yin nam snyam //* "Therefore, it seems that Gupta letter
was the root source of invention of all kinds of Tibetan letters".

[21] Si tu paṇchen, 1987:326-327.

[22] Si tu paṇchen, 1987:30, 61.

[23] Mkhas mchog Dngul chu yab sras, 1986:26.

ing cases and some particles, do they have any references to Sanskrit grammar in TKJ? In Si tu paṇchen's TKJ commentary there is no reference to Sanskrit regarding gender classification and four functions of five prefix letters. But he makes some comparisons between Tibetan cases with Sanskrit while explaining how to draw case endings by suffix letters. There is no reference or comparison at all made by Dharmabhadra in his TKJ commentary. However, modern scholars have shown that the style and structure of Tibetan grammar was modeled on Sanskrit grammar. Hence, we can find many techniques and terms similar to Sanskrit grammar in SCP. Verhagen, one of the prominent scholars of both Sanskrit and Tibetan grammar, said:

> Structure, devices and techniques found in Indic vyākaraṇa strongly influenced grammatical science in Tibet; they often served as models for the description of linguistic phenomena as found in the traditions of indigenous Tibetan grammar[24].

More about the influence of Sanskrit vyākaraṇa in Tibetan grammar can be found in the book *Tibetan Literature*[25].

4. Number of grammar treatises

Of the eight grammar treatises composed by Thon mi six were supposed to have disappeared during the religious persecutions at the beginning of the ninth century; only SCP and TKJ remain. But when we read Dpa'a bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba's history of religion, he gives us an impression that he is not sure about the composition of eight grammar treatises by Thon mi. He says: "It is said that Thon mi composed a *Mdo*

---

[24] Cabezon-Jackson, 1996:423.
[25] Cabezon-Jackson, 1996:422-437 ("Influence of Indic Vyākarana in Tibetan Indigenous Grammar").